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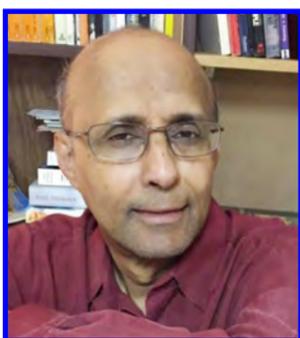
Diaspora authors make shortlist for Guyana Prize for Literature

– Three acclaimed writers from the Guyanese diaspora based in Toronto, Ottawa, and New York have secured spots on the shortlist for the Guyana Prize for Literature. Their 2024 works, grounded in memory, migration, and the making of identity, are recognised in the categories of Non-Fiction, Fiction, and Drama.

Toronto – Three authors with Guyanese roots – Brampton's Ken Puddicombe, Ottawa's Cyril Dabydeen, and New York's Baytoram Ramharack have been named among the finalists for this year's Guyana Prize for Literature, one of the country's most distinguished literary awards. The winners will be announced at an official ceremony on July 4 at the Atlantic Conference Centre, Pegasus Hotel, in Georgetown.

Representing the Non-Fiction shortlist are Ken Puddicombe, for his memoir *Pages From a Notebook: Slices of Life Along the Road to Writing*, and Baytoram Ramharack, for his biographical history *One, One Dutty Build a Village in Guyana: The Story of Hari Prashad and Prashad Nagar*.

In the Fiction category, Cyril Dabydeen is shortlisted for his collection *Forgotten Exiles*, while Puddicombe also appears in



Ken Puddicombe



Baytoram Ramharack



Cyril Dabydeen

the Drama shortlist for his work, *The Last Straw*.

Their collective achievement speaks to the vibrancy of Guyana's literary diaspora and the enduring resonance of its narratives across time zones and national borders.

A Brampton-based writer and publisher, Puddicombe has been recognised in both the Non-Fiction and Drama categories. His shortlisted memoir, *Pages From a Notebook*, offers 20 slices of life drawn from journal entries chronicling his observations from Brampton to the Bahamas, New York to Mumbai, and Guyana to the Chilean fjords.

Reviewing the book, Kennard Ramphal praises Puddicombe's "remarkable facility with language", noting that he "shares a number of his experiences in detail" with "scathing criticism of the Canadian health care system" and "brilliant descriptions of characters".

From the slow rhythm noted in a youth eating fries in Brampton to the poignant image of a homeless girl washing her face in Mumbai, Puddicombe's text merges wit, irony, and social reflection.

Ramphal further notes the diasporic tension of visiting Guyana's Kaieteur Falls only after emigrating: "Like the author, many Guyanese visit this waterfall only after they have left Guyana and return... as tourists."

Puddicombe, who also won the Guyana Prize for Literature-Fiction in 2022, is the founder of *Middleroad Publishers*, furthering Caribbean literary voices from Canada.

Former Ottawa Poet Laureate and part-time professor of creative writing at the University of Ottawa, Cyril Dabydeen continues his literary legacy with *Forgotten Exiles*, a fiction

See Page 10: Diaspora writers

Toronto Caribbean Carnival rises, crowned with becoming

– In Jennifer Hirlehey, Toronto Caribbean Carnival has found not just an Executive Chair, but a steward; not just a professional, but a believer. Her story is one of resolve and renewal, a reminder that the most powerful transformations begin with a moment of stillness, a vision for what could be, and the determination to pursue it with energy, zeal, and unrelenting focus.

By Romeo Kaseram

An LJI Diaspora Special Report

Toronto – Bathed in the twilight of Toronto's skyline, Jennifer Hirlehey stood still. The King and Queen costumes shimmered beneath the floodlights, each jewel catching fire as though lit by a thousand suns within. Behind her, our thriving city murmured. Before her, a procession of Carnival splendour unfolded to enthusiastic, appreciative applause from the engaged audience.

But in that precise moment, Jennifer felt neither the weight of leadership, nor the press of performance. She felt something quieter. Higher. It was a glimpse, like a vision, of what could be.

"I looked at the costume," she later recalled of the epiphany, that moment of intuitive realisation, "the lights dancing across it, and the CN Tower in the background... It was an alone moment. I felt we had elevated the game."

Jennifer was not only speaking metaphorically. In the aloneness of the moment she recognised something profound was unfolding; that what was before her was no longer just a cultural festival. It was a vision fulfilled, a community uplifted, and a city engaged; and this was only just the beginning.



Jennifer Hirlehey

When Jennifer stepped into the leadership of the Toronto Caribbean Carnival, it was via a path carved through determination born of necessity.

She came to Canada from Trinidad and Tobago as an immigrant, more than from the ranks of

the role she left behind as a schoolteacher, but as someone who stood at the head of her class. Here, working at McDonald's, she later navigated through scholarship forms that opened up the path to a professional career in law.

"I faced many challenges," she recalled. "But my dad always instilled in me that I could do anything."

That early foundation of self-confidence aided her in navigating the many unknown landscapes we all encounter as immigrants. For Jennifer, first it was in the courtroom; now she advocates in federal, provincial, and municipal boardrooms.

Her legal career spans over 20 years, with expertise in litigation, labour law, and crisis management. But it is her personal life, especially as the adoptive mother of four children with special needs, that contributes to the depth of empathy, nurturing, and enabling that define her leadership style.

"I believe that I have some skills that I developed as a lawyer, and which I learned from my own practice, and which I gained from having adopted four kids with special needs," she said, adding, "I felt I had skills and talents that could benefit the [TCC]."

When she took on the TCC's leadership role, she stepped into an institution at a crossroads, one that was grappling with financial instability, existential doubts, and facing questions of cultural integrity and modern relevance. But her optimism prevailed; and she saw possibility. Rather

See Page 18: TCC leadership

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Fareed Amin during his visit to the Iwokrama River Lodge and Research Centre

Top leaders strengthen Canada-Guyana relations

The strengthening of Canada-Guyana relations has received a boost with the appointments of two distinguished Canadians to key leadership roles. Lilian Chatterjee, former Canadian High Commissioner to Guyana, has been named Chair of the CGCC, while Fareed Amin, a veteran Canadian public servant, has been appointed Chair of the International Board of Trustees of the IIC. Whether in trade or conservation, their leadership is expected to support the shared goals of inclusive development, innovation, and sustainability across both nations.

...

Toronto – The Canada Guyana Chamber of Commerce (CGCC) last month indicated that Lilian Chatterjee was appointed Chair of its Board of Directors at the Chamber's 2025 Annual General Meeting. A seasoned diplomat and former Canadian High Commissioner to Guyana, Chatterjee brings extensive experience to the role, and a nuanced understanding of Guyana's political and economic landscape.

Also, in Guyana it was announced that CGCC's Managing Director, Fareed Amin, has been appointed the new Chair of the International Board of Trustees of the Iwokrama International Centre (IIC).

According to a release from the CGCC following its AGM, Chatterjee's diplomatic background is expected to "bring added depth" to its mandate of advancing bilateral trade and investment between the Canada and Guyana.

Joining her on the Board are Dr Surendra Persaud - Co-Chair; Winston Kassim - Honorary Co-Chair, Canada; Anand Beharry - Honorary Co-Chair, Guyana; Vishnu Doerga - Secretary; and Suraj Mattai - Treasurer.

It was also indicated that Amin will continue in his role as Managing Director of the CGCC. A former Deputy Minister in the government of Ontario, he is widely respected for his leadership in public administration and non-profit governance.

The release from the CGCC extended congratulations to the newly-appointed Board, and thanked outgoing members for their service.

"The newly constituted Board brings a wealth of experience, leadership, and cross-sector expertise that will further strengthen the Chamber's ability to serve its members and advance the Canada-Guyana commercial partnership," the statement said.

The CGCC reaffirmed its commitment to expanding bilateral economic relations, stating that its focus remains on "promoting trade, investment, innovation, and mutual prosperity between Canada and Guyana".

Established as a member-driven, non-profit organisation, the CGCC serves as a hub for private-sector collaboration and strategic partnerships across both countries.

Meanwhile, Amin also assumed another critical leadership role last month as the new Chair of the IIC, a globally recog-

nised conservation and sustainable development institution headquartered in Guyana.

Amin comes to the role with over three decades of senior public service experience in Canada at both provincial and municipal levels. On June 20 he visited the Iwokrama River Lodge, where he met with staff and toured operational sites, including the IRL and the Iwokrama Mill Site.

He also engaged with the North Rupununi District Development Board, which represents 21 communities in the region, and with the Village Council of Fair View Village, the only community located within the Iwokrama Reserve.

During the visit, Amin expressed appreciation for the work of Iwokrama's staff, and reiterated the importance of Indigenous knowledge in shaping the IIC's operations and programs.

In meetings with staff and community leaders, he "lauded the importance of Iwokrama in global and national conservation efforts, and further emphasised the contributions and great value that Indigenous traditional knowledge has played in the successful development of Iwokrama's operations and programmes".

Amin's public service career in Canada includes leadership positions such as Deputy Minister in the Ontario ministries of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs; Energy and Infrastructure; Municipal Affairs and Housing; Consumer Services; Economic Development and Trade; and Citizenship and Immigration.

He also served as Deputy City Manager of the City of Toronto, and Chief Administrative Officer for the Town of Collingwood.

In his current term, Amin has already begun high-level engagement in support of Iwokrama's mission, including a meeting with the Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Rt Hon Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey. He has pledged to enhance Iwokrama's global visibility and advance its work in conservation, research, and sustainable forest management.

The IIC was established in 1996 under a joint mandate from the government of Guyana and the Commonwealth Secretariat. The Centre manages 371,000 hectares of rainforest under a model that prioritises conservation, ecological balance, and sustainable economic use. Its work draws on partnerships with governments, the private sector, and Indigenous communities.

The IIC's Patron is HRH King Charles III, and the institution operates under the stewardship of an International Board of Trustees supported by approximately 70 permanent staff in Georgetown and at the Iwokrama River Lodge and Research Centre in Kurupukari.

The IIC's mission includes the development of new approaches to ecosystem services and conservation financing, building on earlier work with international partners such as Canopy Capital in the UK.



Lilian Chatterjee



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MPP Cho (centre) participates in a Tai Chi session promoting senior wellness



Seniors perform a gentle yoga demonstration

Scarborough seniors celebrate active living at first-ever community fair

Nearly 1,000 seniors gathered at the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto on June 24 for the first-ever Active Living, Aging Well: Scarborough Seniors Fair, a vibrant celebration of Ontario's Seniors Month. Hosted by MPP Raymond Cho, Ontario's Minister for Seniors and Accessibility, the event brought together over 40 exhibitors, cultural showcases, wellness activities, and community resources to empower older adults in Scarborough to live healthy, active, and connected lives.

...

Scarborough – The first-ever Active Living, Aging Well: Scarborough Seniors Fair was held on June 24 at the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto in Scarborough North. The event brought together nearly 1,000 seniors from across the community for a vibrant and informative celebration of Ontario's Seniors Month.

Hosted by MPP Raymond Cho, who also serves as Ontario's Minister for Seniors and Accessibility, the inaugural event featured over

40 exhibitors and a wide range of resources and activities in Scarborough designed to promote healthy, active aging and foster community connections among older adults.

"I'm proud to celebrate our incredible seniors and community. Seniors truly are the heart of our community – their wisdom, experience, and contributions have shaped a better Ontario," said MPP Cho.

He added, "This event is designed to provide them with vital information and resources to help lead healthy, active, and independent lives. Aligned with this year's Ontario Seniors Month theme, *Fit, Active, Healthy Seniors*, we are encouraging everyone to embrace physical activity and mental wellness as key to aging well."

Presented in partnership with the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto and the Scarborough Business Association, the four-hour event showcased the power of community collaboration in supporting the well-being of seniors and Ontario's continued commitment

to building an age-inclusive province, where seniors can live independently, safely, and with dignity.

Attendees enjoyed Tai Chi, yoga, and line dance demonstrations, free wellness screenings, cultural performances, and explored booths from over 40 exhibitors offering valuable resources and support for older adults. The event also featured a free hotdog lunch and swag bags.

"This event was a testament to the strength of our community," said MPP Cho.

He added, "I was thrilled to see so many seniors engaging with local organisations and local businesses that offer the tools and support they need to live active, healthy lives. Our seniors deserve every opportunity to stay connected and thrive."

Alan Lam, Chairman of the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto, declared, "We were truly honoured to support this important initiative at our Centre, as the new recipient Ontario's annual Seniors Active Living Centre grant."

He further noted, "It was inspiring to see our Multi-Purpose Hall filled with energy and connection. As a celebration of Seniors Month, the fair not only honoured older adults but also empowered them with resources to live vibrantly and independently. It also showcased our own Active Living Centre for Seniors – a welcoming space for wellness, learning, and connection. Events like this show the power of community coming together to uplift and support one another."

President of the Scarborough Business Association, Ryan Somer, stated, "The Scarborough Business Association is proud to be part of this fair as a community partner, especially as we celebrate Seniors Month."

Somer added, "This event not only showcases some incredible local businesses serving our seniors, but also highlights the power of community connection. Supporting and engaging our senior population strengthens families and contributes to a more inclusive and resilient local economy."



Joined by MPP Aris Babikian, MPP for Scarborough-Agincourt (left), MPP Cho presents recognition certificates to the CCC of Greater Toronto



The Scarborough fair drew close to 1,000 seniors and over 40 organisations

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Editorial

Our digital vigilance

When the Trojans wheeled a magnificent wooden horse into their city, they unwittingly welcomed disaster disguised as victory. Today, our digital spaces face a similar peril with deepfakes, which are meticulously fabricated media infiltrating our trust under a convincing cloak of authenticity. Just as the Trojans' misplaced faith had tragic consequences, so too can the careless embrace of these manipulative media content fracture our trust.

Deepfakes employ artificial intelligence to manipulate audio and visual media, creating astonishingly realistic yet entirely false portrayals. Originally an esoteric technology, deepfakes now proliferate across social media, challenging our ability to discern fact from fiction.

Their rise parallels the warning issued by technology writer and journalist, Mark Lyndersay. Writing recently in the *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday*, Lyndersay warns us that deepfakes are rapidly becoming tools for misinformation, and are capable of destabilising societies by spreading lies cloaked in authenticity.

The recent social media blunder made by actor and singer Suchitra Krishnamoorthi vividly illustrates Lyndersay's concerns. In a moment of impulsivity, she shared a false claim that Vishwaskumar Ramesh, the sole survivor of the tragic Air India crash, had fabricated his story.

The deepfake video that she amplified claiming Ramesh had been arrested had monetised his genuine trauma to garner clicks and likes; it was devoid of ethics or empathy. Her unthinking sharing stirred public outrage.

The *Press Trust of India*, and other media, quickly debunked the misinformation. Krishnamoorthi's subsequent apology, "Seems to be false news circulated for God knows what reason", reflected her apparent confusion.

But apologies cannot fully mend the emotional, and other societal damage caused when misinformation is amplified by respectable, public figures. This incident underscores a troubling reality: when dissemination of deepfakes is unchecked, it transforms personal, traumatic, and life-changing tragedies into public spectacle.

Krishnamoorthi's error should not merely serve as fodder for social media critique; rather, it must become a catalyst to enable broader public awareness.

Deepfakes thrive on immediacy, emotion, and impulsivity, precisely the factors that fired up the engine in Krishnamoorthi's case. It is critical that we recognise these vulnerabilities, and especially so for our young adults navigating online spaces. Education about digital literacy must be prioritised, equipping us to scrutinise the source, question emotionally charged content, and detect subtle anomalies that betray falsified media, as Lyndersay tells us.

Critics argue that hyper-vigilance risks censorship or undermines free expression. Yet, promoting critical verification does not suppress voices; it protects genuine discourse from contamination by deliberate, manipulative falsehoods. Democracies flourish through informed debate, not through unrestrained misinformation masquerading as free speech.

There are practical ways for us to guard against deepfakes. Verify startling news through reputable sources; look for inconsistencies in speech or visuals; and approach sensational claims with healthy skepticism.

When public figures falter, as Krishnamoorthi did, it is a sharp reminder that no one is immune to deception. Our vigilance as a community thus becomes essential to preserving truth in public discourse.

Ultimately, deepfakes represent more than technological trickery; they symbolise a profound moral and ethical challenge. The erosion of trust, exploitation of trauma, and polarisation of societies are grave threats in our digital age.

Like the Trojan horse, deepfakes conceal danger beneath their deceptive surface, awaiting entry into our collective consciousness. Our defense against this digital infiltration hinges upon education, caution, and responsibility.

Krishnamoorthi's error was unfortunate; however, it was also instructive – let it remind us, as Lyndersay has correctly discerned, that vigilance must now be a constant companion in our online interactions.

Mamdani's NY win signals shift in wind of urban politics

Yes were on the Democratic primary for the mayoral election in New York City. And for many who were unaware of the election, they soon became aware because of the drastic result.

The fierce and aggressive battle pitted competing visions of the Democratic Party against one another. And on election night, New York progressives emerged victorious.

It was a surprising result for many, as the establishment and more moderate candidate, Andrew Cuomo, failed to maintain his front-runner status as his name recognition could not fend off the demand for change.

Cuomo was the former governor of the State of New York, and a member of one of the US' most well-known and powerful political families. In a primary race that was set to be his, Cuomo was unsuccessful, falling behind Zohran Mamdani, a new shining political star.

Mamdani sparked intrigue in a race that was supposed to be over before it began, but the determination and cleverness of his campaign demonstrated that campaigns do matter.

He is a 33-year-old Muslim and self-declared Democratic socialist. Born in Kampala in Uganda to a family of Indian ancestry, he moved to New York at age seven. His push for progressive policies was the catalyst that propelled him to the top.

He served as a member of the New York State Assembly from the 36th district, based in Queens, since 2021. Now he is poised to be the next mayor of one of the world's most recognisable cities. If New Yorkers choose Mamdani at the general election, he would be the first South Asian and first Muslim mayor.

But how did an unknown state assemblyman overtake one of the most recognisable politicians in the State? It was the need for change and a promise of addressing the affordability crisis that has plagued the city.

Mamdani's campaign proposed a hyper-progressive campaign platform to address the major issues facing New Yorkers. His campaign was defined by his promises for free bus trips, rent freezes, tripling the production of rent, stabilised housing, and the development of a chain of city-owned grocery stores to bring down the prices of basics.

His campaign aligned with the politics of high-profile 'Democratic socialist', Vermont senator and former presidential candidate Bernie Sanders, and popular Congressional representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, also known as AOC.

For many in the socialist wing of the Democratic Party, they viewed Mamdani's win as a defining moment for their movement, believing that this is the way forward for their party. However, Mamdani's win is a phenomenon reserved for large, diverse cities.

Toronto's recent mayoral by-election in 2023 elected Olivia



Ryan Singh

Chow, a long-time socialist politician. Chow's name reputation helped to garner votes, but like Mamdani, extreme progressive policies captured the attention of voters at that time.

In recent decades, socialist and progressive candidates have made significant inroads in the political landscape of major urban centres. Candidates identifying with, or aligned closely to (democratic) socialism have found electoral success, particularly in mayoral races. While not universal, this trend points to deep-rooted social, economic, and political dynamics unique to large cities.

Large cities are often marked by stark economic disparities. While they serve as hubs of finance, innovation, and culture, they also harbour significant levels of poverty, homelessness, and housing insecurity.

Socialist candidates tend to centre their campaigns on redistributive policies, tenant protections, public housing investment, and robust social services – issues that resonate with the working-class and marginalised populations disproportionately affected by urban inequality.

Urban populations are generally younger, more racially and ethnically diverse, and more politically engaged than their suburban or rural counterparts. These demographics tend to support progressive values on healthcare, education, labour rights, and climate action - cornerstones of socialist platforms.

Many large cities have strong labour unions, community-based organisations, and activist networks. These groups often play a pivotal role in mobilising voters, endorsing candidates, and amplifying messages that align with socialist values.

This was especially true in Toronto's by-election, where the socialist activist organisation, Progress Toronto, provided a significant boost to Chow's campaign.

Socialist candidates frequently rise in popularity during or in the aftermath of major crises – economic downturns, public health emergencies, police violence, or climate-related disasters.

These events lay bare systemic failings and boost calls for transformative change. Voters in cities hit hardest by such crises are more likely to seek bold, left-wing alternatives to status quo politics.

While not all cities elect socialist mayors, the growing urban support for socialist candidates is a reflection of the unique challenges and political dynamics of large metropolitan areas. These candidates often speak directly to the lived realities of urban residents, offering policy platforms rooted in equity, justice, and public good.

Mamdani's victory in the New York Democratic primary was historic in many ways, and has provided a blueprint for candidates in other municipal elections; however, his election victory was more of a rarity than a constant in an ever-changing political landscape.

Flavours of learning in mango mischief and morals in molasses

It came to pass my early youth took a remarkable turn from my furtive plundering of Ma's kitchen for generous handfuls of salt and hot peppers, clandestine seasonings that made purloined, green mangoes even more palatable.

Then came that early emergence of responsibility, which really was me being driven by conscience into performing acts of restitution after my kitchen depredations. Suddenly, I was elevated from being a "harden little boy" into a trusted emissary.

However, this newfound status came at a price, which interrupted and annoyed me greatly from my cherished mischief. Such was its curtailment that now I was being interrupted mid-leap across branch to branch on the mango tree; or forced to take an unplanned detour from evading pursuing Jack Spaniards whose nest I had disturbed.

Soon, Ma was regularly dispatching me on a "message", which were errands to the nearby shop. Now back then, going on a "message" meant being entrusted with urgent adult business. Usually, it was a chore adults avoided, notably the dusty half-kilometre trek to the junction, to arrive at the crossroad where beasts of burden had the right of way, heaving carts stacked with cut sugar canes to the nearby factory.

Ma pressed pennies into my sweaty palm, locking up each finger like a vault. I recalled one coin being heavy and round, weighted like a manhole cover with the crowned head of empire.

It was amid these errands where my innocence began its subtle fraying at the edges. Navigating across the roadway, stepping over the fallen sugar canes crushed under the carts' wheels, somehow the transaction in the shop always felt uneven. Perhaps it was Ma's warnings, filled with nuanced caution, to be vigilant that my innocence was not exploited by the shopkeeper.

"Make sure the salt not yellow with dog pee!" she yelled at my receding back. Or that the saltfish "come from the tail section; not by the head, where it only have one set of bone!"

Each instruction, though seemingly practical, carried a whispered message: commerce required vigilance; and that one must guard against deception.

Of course, I understood the correlation between the growing frequency of my errands and my surreptitious filching of sea-

sonings, pepper and salt being particularly purloined. Though I sometimes replaced what was unused, the burgeoning mango season kept calling for more and more salt and hot peppers.

And so did Ma's calls to me. I recall her short-sighted gaze scanning the trees, or locating my blurred frame as I frantically retreated from buzzing squadrons of wasps.

Her kitchen was in chaos; the pots were rabid, foaming at the mouth; wet firewood cursed malevolently inside her *chulha*. And there, above her head within easy reach was the spice shelf, warped by years of heat, and to her incredulous eyes, the jar containing less than a handful of precious salt.

Such was the fallout from my covert, repetitive extractions. Ma's voice was hoarse with woodsmoke, frustration, and astonishment: "Father looking over this land! How come we run out of salt again? It can't be the ants carting it away."

Had she inspected my kitchen forays closely, she would have uncovered unpalatable grains of truth: salt disappearing not by a march of ants, but rather secreted away in my pants.

But Ma's quotidian reality did not permit such surveillance, not with the majority of her time and labour consumed by the fields, where she spent hours stacking sugar canes onto carts.

Had she reached into my pocket, she would have discovered a tightly coiled spiral of paper thick with stolen salt mingled with crushed pepper, a seasoning born of mischief, subtle piracy, and fruitful pursuits.

Yet, as I undertook these errands, my conscience, previously dormant beneath layers of innocence and boyish delight, gradually awakened. The pennies felt heavier in my palm, despite Ma rewarding me for my effort.

"Take a cent and buy a sweetie," she said as encouragement for me to stay on the narrow path. I chose the candied, gooey sweetness of coconut glued with molasses. But after the first bite it all cloyed, hints of the scorched sugar merging with the fermented rot of the crushed sugar canes as I crossed the road.

Maybe, Ma knew these errands served a deeper purpose; that more than restitution for my piracy, they were subtle introductions to the hidden costs of survival, lessons taught via salt and sugar, which saw my innocence slipping away, grain by grain.



Romeo Kaseram

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

Steelpan linkage unites T&T and Toronto

Toronto – The rhythm of summer reaches its crescendo on August 1 as *Toronto Panorama – Keepin’ Pan Alive* returns to Lamport Stadium with unprecedented energy, elegance, and international collaboration. This year, the Ontario Steelpan Association (OSA) is proud to announce an historic first: the official participation of Pan Trinbago, the World Governing Body for Steelpan, in Toronto’s iconic celebration of Caribbean culture and music.

With its roots deeply embedded in Trinidad and Tobago, the birthplace of the steelpan, this year’s *Panorama* promises to be a ground-breaking showcase of artistry, unity, and cultural excellence. The partnership marks a significant milestone in the global journey of the steelpan movement.

“It is with immense pride that Pan Trinbago, The World Governing Body for Steelpan, marks its first official participation in 2025 Toronto’s *Panorama* – an historic moment not only for our organisation, but for the global steelpan community,” said Beverley Ramsey-Moore, President of Pan Trinbago Inc.

“As the internationally recognised Mecca of Steelpan, we are honoured to lend our expertise to the OSA in support of excellence, integrity, and sustainability in steelpan culture. This partnership stands as a powerful testament to our shared vision for steelpan’s global growth. From Trinidad and Tobago to Toronto, we echo the legacy, the brilliance, and the unity of the steelpan movement across generations and nations. One instrument, one mission, one worldwide family of steelpan.”

The 2025 edition of *Toronto Panorama* will not only spotlight the exhilarating performances of some of Canada’s top steelbands, but

will do so in an upscale new format designed to elevate both audience and performer experience. The event will shine a special spotlight on youth participation, recognising the importance of nurturing the next generation of pannists, tuners, arrangers, and cultural ambassadors.

In support of this vision, children 12 and under will be admitted free with a paying adult; also, discounted tickets will be available for youth ages 13-17.

“This is more than just an event – it’s a movement,” said Terrence Wilson, President of OSA. “Our official partnership with Pan Trinbago marks a transformative moment for *Panorama* and the steelpan artform in Canada. With a re-imagined look, elevated production value and a strong emphasis on youth engagement and cultural legacy, we are setting a bold new standard – one that will establish *Toronto Panorama* as the crown jewel of the Carnival season.”

Toronto Panorama – Keepin’ Pan Alive 2025 is expected to draw thousands of patrons, artists, students and cultural stakeholders from across the GTA, the Caribbean diaspora, and beyond. It will serve not only as the premier showcase of steelpan music in Canada, but as a beacon of cultural pride and innovation on the global stage.

This unforgettable night of rhythm, culture, and Caribbean soul cannot be missed! **Tickets at TicketGateway**, with limited physical tickets at the door. Gates open August 1 at 5:30 p.m.

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Time for govt of TT to officially honour Adrian Cola Rienzi

Dear Editor,

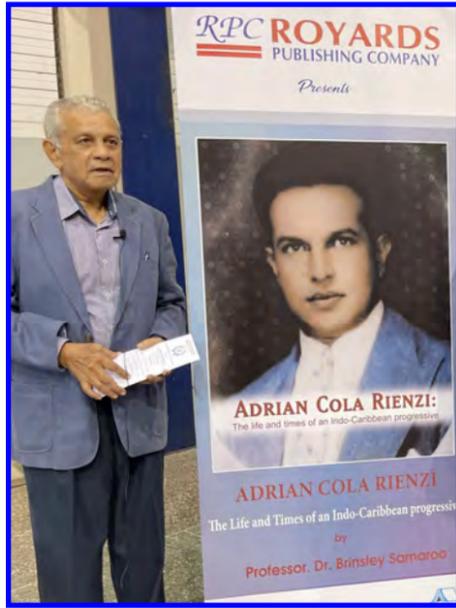
Trinidad and Tobago's late historian Dr Brinsley Samaroo did extensive research on the life of Adrian Cola Rienzi (formerly Krishna Deonarine) and presented his findings in *Adrian Cola Rienzi: The Life and Times of an Indo-Caribbean Progressive*, which was launched at Naparima College in May, 2022.

Samaroo outlined Rienzi's outstanding role in the 1930s in the advocacy for workers' rights and welfare, especially in the oil and sugar industries, his free defence of workers before the courts of the land, his collaboration with and support for Tubal Uriah Butler, his instrumental role in the early years of the trade union movement, and his service as the first president-general of both the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union and the All Trinidad Sugar Workers' Union in 1937.

Rienzi was credited with leading the initial attempt to build solidarity between Afro-Trinidadian and Indo-Trinidadian workers. He was also involved in the politics of the period, proposing self-government and universal suffrage, and forming a political party as a vehicle to propagate his views.

In his June 19 column in the *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday*, university lecturer and historian Dr Jerome Teelucksingh recounted the outstanding contribution made by Rienzi in the leadership of the trade union movement, and the advocacy for political advancement.

There is no doubt that Rienzi was a towering figure in the nascent trade union movement and provided sterling leadership. Yet the name of this 'Godfather of Trade Unionism' is hardly



The late Dr Samaroo at the book launch recognised by the post-colonial state.

The Sugar Workers' Trade Union building at McBean, Couva, carries his name, but this is a non-governmental building. The San Fernando City Corporation attached his name to a half-kilometre of roadway on the outskirts of San Fernando, which also carries the name of an obscure city councillor. Even Rienzi's name was misspelt. However, other major highways in the East and South are named after persons who made minor contributions to national development.

Trinidad and Tobago's current government has the opportunity to correct this slight to the memory of Rienzi. A recommendation is to add his name to the Butler Highway to be known thereafter as the Butler-Rienzi Highway. Or place a bust in a prominent location in San Fernando, with suitable notation.

Trevor Sudama, Trinidad and Tobago, via email.

Freedom of speech must respect faith

Dear Editor,

The charge against the musician using the name Baby Skello has caused several letter writers and commentators to come to his defence under the guise of freedom of expression. Unfortunately, these individuals with mostly Christian names do not feel the hurt, pain, and anger of the majority in the Hindu community.

And worse, many of the Hindu leaders who would write long letters in the press feuding over the date on which *Diwali* or *Phagwah* should be celebrated, now seem to have lost their appetite for writing. In my view, freedom of speech is indeed a hallmark of democracy. However, even in advanced democracies freedom of speech has limitations.

Guyana is a multiracial, multicultural society. Religion is an integral part of a peoples' culture and their identity. Insulting a people's religion is not simply a matter of free speech. It can cause great harm as we have seen in many European countries such as France and Holland, where death and destruction resulted from perceived insult to a particular religion.

Even more than a decade after author Salman Rushdie's perceived insult of Islam, he was viciously slashed several times by an attacker, nearly died, and left permanently blinded in one eye. In Guyana where race, religion, and politics are intertwined, freedom of speech has to be tempered with reality.

As I reflect on this matter, I am reminded of the Guyanese expression, "Monkey does know which tree limb fuh climb on". Hinduism is a

religion of peace so it is easy to dump on, and Hindus in Guyana are generally pacifists. The vulgarity in that song is unbelievable. To the many defenders of the singer who see this matter as his right to freedom of expression, I say remove the words "Mother Laxmi" in the song and replace with "Virgin Mary" and let it go viral. I believe the reaction not only in Guyana but across the Caribbean, the US, and Canada

would be incendiary.

For the uninformed who believe that Hinduism is all rituals, religious holidays, and idol worship, I encourage you to listen to the great American 'Queen of All Media', the incomparable Oprah Winfrey, in her YouTube video, *Why I Chose Hinduism Over Thousands of Other Religions*.



Oprah Winfrey

In her presentation, this outstanding African-American notes "[Hinduism] gave me a relationship with the divine... The Vedas, the Upanishads, the epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata (Hindu Holy books), were not written for one time or one tribe. They were born from the observation of human nature, the cycles of life, the mysteries of the Cosmos..."

A further YouTube video is worth bringing to readers attention. It is titled, *Africans doing Aarti, Bhajan and Chanting Mantra*. It shows Indigenous (yes African) Ghanaians performing *Aarti* in homage to none other than Mother Lakshmi.

Unlike Baby Skello, they are singing *Jai Lakshmi Mata*, meaning, "Glory to you oh Mother Lakshmi, Goddess of wealth, prosperity and abundance".

Harry Hergash, Toronto, via email.

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US scrutiny continues to focus on Guyana's gold smuggling

Second Part: Smuggling in Guyana

Guyana's decades-old gold smuggling problem has come under increased scrutiny by the US government. Plagued by corrupt practices, the problem has never been seriously addressed by both the past and current Guyanese administration, despite an abundance of evidence that gold smuggling had reached crisis proportions.

Evidently, commitments to deal with smuggling were hampered by execution risks, wherein corrupt government officials have been deliberately supporting smuggling activities, thereby circumventing official efforts to curb the problem.

Sanctions imposed by the US government last year on one of Guyana's wealthiest families for smuggling gold served as a warning that it was intent on stepping in where the Guyana government has failed to do so.

In this case, the father-son duo, Nazar Mohamed and Azruddin Mohamed, and their affiliated company, Mohamed's Enterprises, were sanctioned by the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) for failing to declare some ten thousand kilograms of gold, and evading more than (US) \$50 million in taxes between 2019 and 2023.

The US investigation alleged that Mohamed's Enterprise bribed customs officials to falsify import and export documents, as well as to facilitate illicit gold shipments. Also alleged was it paid bribes to Guyanese government officials to ensure the undisrupted flow of inbound and outbound personnel that move currency and other items on behalf of the Azruddins and Mohamed's Enterprise.

Additionally, Mohamed's Enterprise is alleged to have paid bribes to corrupt Guyanese government officials to facilitate the award of government contracts. One such official, Mae Thomas, was the Permanent Secretary to Guyana's Minister of Home Affairs from October 2020 through August 2023. She was also sanctioned, along with the Mohameds.

More recently, the US announced in June that it is actively probing a gold smuggling operation that threads through Colombia, Venezuela, and Guyana. It stated that in recent years, Brazilian police have busted two alleged smuggling schemes that funneled millions of dollars worth of Venezuelan gold across the border into the Pakaraima and out of South America to the US, Asia, and the Middle East.

Local officials have said they suspect that Venezuelan-sanctioned gold is being mixed with gold mined in Guyana, and then passed off as local production and sold to markets in the US, Canada, the Middle East, and elsewhere.

Guyana has since pledged to crack down on gold smuggled across the border from neighbouring Venezuela at the urging of the US government. President Dr Irfaan Ali said in late June that the government is dedicating "enormous resources" to thwart the smuggling, which has long been a problem. He said authorities have increased border patrols, and improved monitoring in mining regions.

According to Ali, the US Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs has initiated ongoing efforts to enhance law enforcement and security cooperation between Washington and Georgetown, and countries in the Caribbean, through the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in March of this year when US Secretary of State Marco Rubio visited the region.

Meanwhile, the US Embassy in Guyana has suspended the visas of several miners suspected of smuggling Venezuelan gold overseas.

Gold is Guyana's second most important export after oil, generating nearly \$1 billion last year. Some 434,000 ounces of gold were produced in 2024, up from 432,000 ounces the previous year, according to the Ministry of Natural Resources.

In 2019, the sector produced, 634,905 troy ounces of gold, below its peak year in 2016, when production was 710,706 ounces,

almost four times greater than production of 182,216 ounces in 2006. Since then, production has steadily declined to 432,034 ounces in 2023.

It is estimated that actual gold production is even significantly higher, with as much as 60 percent of all production going unreported. A significant portion of such production is believed to be illegally funnelled through the country's porous borders and supports a range of illegal activities, including money laundering, tax evasion, and the drug trade.

Historical evidence of arrests indicate that small-scale smugglers are typically arrested, but large-scale operators tend to evade arrests, apparently because of corruption among government officials who are complicit with the smugglers.

According to Guyana's 2017 National Risk Assessment (NRA) report, a major gold smuggling racket was unearthed through the

US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), which provided Guyana's authorities with a list of persons who had taken gold to the JFK Airport, New York, and declaring it there. It is not known whether any action was taken on the list of persons identified.

According to the report, "The smuggling was made possible because Customs and other Gold Board documents were recycled along with seals. Hundreds of millions of dollars of profits were being made but little for Guyana."

Perhaps the most scathing criticisms of the failure to curb smuggling come from the Guyana Gold and Diamond Miners Association (GGDMA), which in a release last year stated that illegal mining, illegal shops, and the unregulated trading of gold within the interior, are the "pillars" upon which the illicit gold smuggling enterprises survive.

The GGDMA inferred that the government's regulatory agency, the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC), as well as public servants associated with the industry, are also to blame for gold smuggling. It stated that lax enforcement by GGMC has allowed illegal activities to flourish, noting that over the years, it has turned "a blind eye" to repeat offenders, merely slapping them on the wrist, which in turn has fostered a culture of "unabashed lawlessness".

According to the release, these illegal operators openly disregard the orders of GGMC officers and brazenly make violent threats against anyone trying to stand in their way.

"An illegal operation is shut down one day but by the very next day they return to contravening the orders of the GGMC as if nothing had ever happened. Equipment is seized from repeat offenders and within days the said equipment is returned to them. There is no real serious consequence for their actions," stated the release.

The GGDMA complained that every year for the past ten years it has been calling on the GGMC to step up its enforcement against illegal activities in the gold sector, but to no avail. It stated that in the past, there were a number of areas in the interior that were gazetted to permit trade to take place; however, this has degenerated into persons simply setting up itinerant trading posts, also known as 'land-



Dwarka Lakhan



Irfaan Ali



Guyana gold

ings, at will.

This, the release explained, has resulted in a "multitude of landings" throughout the interior, too numerous to be properly regulated, where illegal gold buyers set up shop and buy directly from unethical miners, who are willing to sell their production for higher prices, free of any paper trail, thus avoiding the paying of any royalties or taxes.

The GGDMA said: "We have repeatedly called for the reduction of the vast number of these hubs and for the ones that remain to be properly regularised, but to date no meaningful action has been taken. If the avenues through which illegal miners and illegal buyers are connecting is significantly reduced, then there would undoubtedly be an increase in gold declarations."

The release also asserted that "a blind eye" is turned by certain individuals appointed by the state to safeguard its interest in these areas to facilitate illegal mining for which they are no

doubt handsomely rewarded, which prompts the following questions: "How much gold is produced in these areas that goes undeclared? How many illegal operations in these areas are being funded by smugglers?"

The claim was also made that many miners have made repeated appeals to the GGMC about illegal activities, but very little gets done. And miners who report often find themselves targeted by the officers, and have such, resorted to joining the "stay quiet gang".

Final Part on Gold Smuggling Continues in the Next Edition.

...

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

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At the Manitoba Indian Arrival Day celebration were (left to right) Honorary Consul for Trinidad and Tobago, Kris Ramchandrar; Janet Naidu; and one of the event's organisers, Derek Dabee

Manitoba celebration marks Indian Arrival Day

Winnipeg – More than 150 members of the Caribbean community in Manitoba gathered on June 13 at the Caribbean Community Cultural Centre to commemorate Indian Arrival Day, honouring the historical journey and enduring legacy of Indian Indentured labourers who arrived in the Caribbean beginning in 1838.

The 2025 event was organised by the Winnipeg Indian Arrival Celebration Committee in partnership with Caribbean Canadian Heart Health Education and the University of Winnipeg. The gathering paid tribute to the Indentured labourers who emigrated from India to Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, Jamaica, and other Caribbean nations, many of whom later migrated to Canada and other countries to become our thriving diaspora.

Among the guests were Kris Ramchandrar, Honorary Consul for Trinidad and Tobago; Derek Dabee, a member of the committee that organised the event; Dr Sandra Sukhan, Honorary Consul for Guyana; and Dr Emma Alexander, Associate

Professor in University of Winnipeg's History department.

A highlight of the evening was the keynote address delivered by poet Janet Naidu. In her remarks, Naidu underscored the significance of remembering the passage and struggles of Indian Indentured labourers. She told the gathering it was important to remember the journey of Indentured labourers and their struggles, and now their survival as a diaspora.

She also read a selection of poems from her latest collection, *River Crossing*, which explores themes of migration, suffering, resilience, and survival. Among the poems read were *Annapurani Patie*, *Meeting Near the Well Pipe*, *Buckets*, and *Windows of My World*.

With her reading, Naidu evoked the narrative of her grandmother, Annapurani, who at the age of 20 left Madras (now Chennai) aboard the *SS Ganges* in 1915 for what was then British Guiana. Through this personal lens, Naidu's poetry bridged past and present, anchoring memory and cultural survival within the unfolding history of our diaspora.

Diaspora writers on shortlist

From Page 1

collection shortlisted in this year's Fiction category. Born in Guyana and living in Canada since 1970, Dabydeen's latest work reflects on migration, exile, and cultural entanglement through 16 stories shifting between Guyana's coast and Canada's Lake Superior wilderness.

The *Guyana Chronicle* has commended the book's "nuanced portrayal of characters navigating life between the cultural landscapes of Guyana and Canada". It also lauds Dabydeen's ability to "capture the essence of his characters' lives with language that reflects both the Guyanese dialect and Canadian idioms, creating a unique rhythm and kaleidoscopic quality".

Dabydeen's past accolades include nominations for the *IMPAC Dublin Literary Award* and service as a juror for *Canada's Governor General's Award for Poetry* and the *Neustadt International Prize for Literature*.

As George Elliott Clarke once remarked, Dabydeen's writing is "astute in politics and artful in poetics," capturing the subtleties of identity, belonging, and the emotional contours of migration.

In *One, One Dutty Build a Village in Guyana*, Ramharack documents the life and vision of Hari Prashad (1898-1987), an Indo-Guyanese entrepreneur and post-Indentureship figure who founded Prashad Nagar, a prominent residential neighbourhood in Georgetown.

The book, shortlisted in the Non-Fiction category, is both biography and historical reconstruction.

Writing in *Stabroek News*, Dr Kumar Mahabir describes the book as portraying "a uniquely organised yet slowly changing community struggling to maintain an architectural balance between its original historical design and a push-back against the incursion of modern technology".

Prashad's story traces his journey from selling firewood to purchasing 76 acres of land from the Bookers conglomerate in 1958-1959 to build what would become a symbol of Indo-Guyanese perseverance.

Rooted in the values of the *Ramayana*, and informed by his brief migration to India in 1952-1953, Prashad named streets after family members and Indian cities, establishing a visible affirmation of cultural pride, Mahabir notes.

The text also offers a sweeping account of post-Indenture transformation, capturing how memory, religion, urban planning, and cultural identity converged to shape modern Guyanese society.

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Matriarch Latchmin (above, left) with son Dhaman. Photos by Ramesh Ramkalawan



Golf with a vision: New Guyana eye clinic to be named after Latchmin Kissoon

Milton – Under clear skies and lifted by generous hearts, the annual Latchmin Kissoon Golf Classic once again brought together seasoned players, charitable donors, and faithful supporters to the fore in a fund-raising event that prove to be visionary, emotionally resonant, and financially impactful.

This year's tournament, held on June 25, swung beyond its usual success, raising over \$75,000 in support of affordable healthcare in Guyana. Dr Budhendranauth Doobay, spiritual leader of Vishnu Mandir and founder of Global Care Outreach, announced that this year's proceeds will support the establishment of a new Eye Care Clinic in Guyana, one that will be named in honour of Latchmin Kissoon.

The Kissoon family golf tournament was revived in March 2022 in the name of the revered Kissoon matriarch during celebration of her 85th birthday. Since then, the event has teed off annually in support of life-saving dialysis, and has now turned its gaze to vision care initiatives in Guyana.

"It was a beautiful sunny day," said lead organiser Dhaman Kissoon, adding, "The annual Latchmin Kissoon Golf Classic by all accounts was a huge success. It was held on June 25 at the Granite Ridge Golf Club, and was completely sold out with 20 additional golfers playing on the adjoining course."

Following a full day of exhilarating golf, players and guests then enjoyed a celebratory dinner, the day's energy culminating with another successful drive toward an uplifting, charitable outcome.

The tournament, true to its founding mission, once again delivered a high-impact scorecard. Yet again this year, a single donor contributed \$25,000, the individual generosity adding significant topspin in the tournament's drive to fulfilling its fund-raising scorecard.

"By all accounts the tournament netted more than \$75,000," Kissoon confirmed.

He added, "Dr Budhendranauth Doobay announced that the proceeds will go to the new Eye Care clinic in Guyana. He further announced that the clinic will be named after Latchmin Kissoon. It was in her honour the tournament was held."

The driving force behind the tournament, Dhaman credited his mother's enduring spirit and the community's continued support for the event's growing success.

"Again this year Mom thanked everyone for contributing to making a difference for such a worthy cause," said Kissoon, declaring, "She was touched by the generosity."

As is traditional, the Kissoon matriarch addressed the gather-

ing without notes, thanking the golfers and supporters for their unwavering participation. Her presence and gratitude stood out as sources of inspiration and drive.

Dhaman also highlighted the lasting and resonating influence of Dr Doobay's commitment to the tournament.

"Yet again he attended the event for the entire day," Kissoon noted, describing the good doctor's presence as one that was inspirational and motivating for the many participants.

The tournament's festive atmosphere was complemented by playful and entertaining activities throughout the day. Once again the Little Library hosted the putting contest, raising more than \$2,500, Dhaman noted. Also, multiple competition holes dotted the course, offering snacks and spirited engagement.

As Dhaman noted, the cadre of golfers, many of whom return year after year, again praised the tournament for its seamless organisation and warm community spirit.

Feedback from this year's participants also suggested that the tournament has not only found its rhythm, but has become a staple on the summer charity calendar. Many of its participants are now faithful "club members", and have already marked their scorecards for next year's tournament, which is set for June 24.



Devotees celebrate milestone birthdays of two beloved mandir pillars

Scarborough – Devotees gathered at the Shiva Shankar Bhawan Mandir in Scarborough on June 22 to honour two revered members of the community with a devotional celebration marking their milestone birthdays. The special event, hosted by members of the Prakash Ramayan Goal and Shiva Shankar Bhawan Mandir, celebrated the 90th birthday of Jewan Persaud, and the 70th birthday of Haimraj.

Held within the sacred space of the mandir, the ceremony reflected deep affection and spiritual reverence for both honourees. Jewan Persaud turned 90 on June 19, while Haimraj marked his 70th birthday on June 23. The event served as a tribute to their lifelong devotion and meaningful contributions to the mandir and to our broader community.

Persaud, a respected elder, is celebrated for his artistry in *taan*, *chowtal*, and *Ramayan* singing. His musical talents have long uplifted worshippers and brought depth to the cultural and religious life of the community. Meanwhile, Haimraj, Vice President of Shiva Shankar Bhawan, is recognised for his melodious *kirtans* and renditions of movie songs, enriching the mandir's gatherings with his voice and leadership.

The celebratory gathering featured devotional offerings by the Shiva Shankar Bhawan Kirtan Group, who performed a selection of *bhajans*. Members of the Prakash Ramayan Goal also sang *Ramayan chaupais* in honour of the celebrants. Pandit Dilip conducted the *puja*, delivering what was described as a "heartfelt and uplifting ceremony" that honoured the spirit and devotion of both men.

In a statement issued by Shaw Jaundoo, Chair of Shiva Shankar Bhawan, heartfelt birthday wishes were extended to the honourees. Jaundoo extended greetings, writing "Happy Birthday! To a truly captivating 90-year-old I have ever known."

He added, "Jewan is an outstanding member of the community, he is a very talented *taan* singer, versed in *chowtal* and *Ramayan* singing. Haimraj, also a talented singer known for his beautiful *kirtans* and movie songs, serves as the Vice President of Shiva Shankar Bhawan. Their contributions to the temple and the community are equally remarkable."

Reflecting on Jewan's legacy, Jaundoo added, "[The] life that you are living and the one you have will forever be a great thing for us. We know we can't fill your shoes in a thousand lifetimes, but we pray to God to bless you, and we will be constantly reminded of your good deeds in our lives."

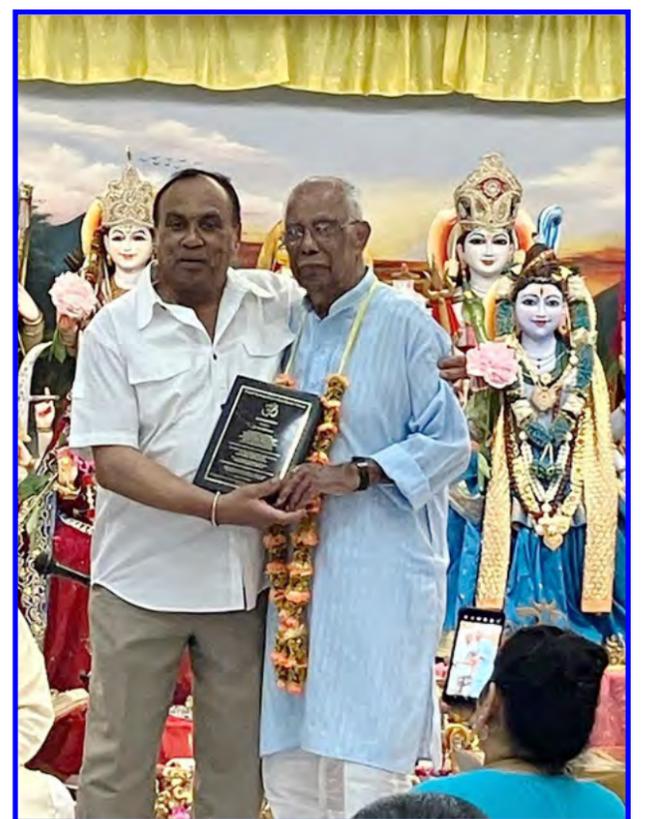
The tone of the gathering was celebratory and inspirational, one that was filled with joy, reverence, and reflection.

"Turning 90 is a blessing that, unfortunately, not everyone gets to see," Jaundoo wrote, adding "Every moment with you is so special, and we will always cherish our time spent together."

In his closing remarks, Jaundoo underscored the value of life and the beauty of its imperfections, stating, "Yet, it remains a precious gift that should be cherished, appreciated, and lived to the fullest. Embrace the unpredictability and imperfections, for it is in these moments that the true beauty of life often unfolds."

He concluded with a message of deep respect and affection, stating, "Happy 90 birthday to [a] loving and generous member of our community. Your love and friendship remain timeless, and your presence is a gift, as extraordinary as the 90 incredible years you have lived."

"May your birthday be filled with many happy memories, endless joy and health with many more wonderful days ahead. May your birthday bring you sweet memories and all the beautiful things you deserve," he stated.



Vishnu Harnam (left) leader of Prakash Ramayan Goal presents a celebratory plaque to Jewan Persaud on the occasion of his 90th birthday



Jennifer Geerlings-Simons



Chandrikapersad Santokhi

Certified results see Suriname set for change

– With the results certified and coalitions formed, Suriname now awaits the decisive votes to select its next president. As negotiations unfold and the prospect of the country's first female president looms, Suriname stands at the intersection of political transformation and economic awakening, with its path being shaped by fragile alliances, evolving democratic mechanisms, and the vast promise of untapped oil wealth.

...

Paramaribo – Suriname has entered a new political chapter following the official certification of its May 25 general election results, with Independent Electoral Bureau (OKB) chairman Sheik Samseerali-Alibaks declaring the elections valid despite procedural concerns. The decision sets the stage for an historic contest to form a new government and elect the country's next president – potentially its first female head of State.

Held for the first time under proportional representation, the 2025 parliamentary elections have reshaped Suriname's political landscape, requiring coalition-building to meet the two-thirds majority (34 seats) necessary in the 51-seat National Assembly for appointing a new president.

Although the OKB flagged numerous administrative and procedural errors during the elections, Samseerali-Alibaks confirmed that "these were not of nature to have affected the outcome of the elections". All objections and protest letters from political parties, individuals, and civil society groups were reviewed and resolved, he added.

Despite documented irregularities and disregarded objections from the OKB, all bureau members signed the official report certifying the results as binding. This move legally affirms the composition of the National Assembly and opens the door to executive appointments.

With the vote officially validated, attention turned swiftly to coalition negotiations. The National Democratic Party (NDP), led by chairperson and presidential nominee Jennifer Geerlings-Simons, emerged with 18 seats. It has since forged a six-party alliance, bringing together minority parties including the Alternative 2020 Party (A20), Brotherhood and Unity in Politics (BEP), General Liberation and Development Party (ABOP), National Party of Suriname (NPS), and Pertjajah Luhur Party (PL).

These five partners, some of whom previously supported outgoing President Chandrikapersad Santokhi's administration, cited policy exclusion as the reason for shifting allegiance.

The coalition now holds 34 seats, meeting the minimum required to form a government and elect the president and vice president in parliament.

Vice-chairman of the NDP, Ashwin Adhin, reaffirmed Geerlings-Simons' nomination: "I had indicated that the majority of votes determines the candidate. She has the most votes, so a man is a man, a word is a word."

If elected, Geerlings-Simons would become Suriname's first female president. At the signing of the coalition agreement, she emphasised

unity and governance reform over power division.

"There has not yet been any discussion about ministerial positions, but about how the governance of the country can be improved. On that basis, we have reached an agreement and decided to sign the letter of intent," she stated.

The coalition has also nominated Gregory Rusland of the NPS as its vice-presidential candidate.

Meanwhile, the Progressive Reform Party (VHP), led by outgoing President Santokhi and holding 17 seats, will become the sole opposition party.

However, while conceding the certified outcome, the VHP signalled its intention to explore legal options to nominate candidates for the National Assembly chairpersonship and for the presidency itself, noting that under the law, any group of seven MPs may nominate a presidential candidate.

Santokhi stated: "At some point, you will have to use the result as a basis. That is the official mandate of the people to the political parties. Then you see what it is, how big it is, and on that basis, you work out options for cooperation."

Still addressing his base, Santokhi encouraged perseverance, declaring, "The future offers new opportunities to make a difference. Let us put our shoulders to the wheel and continue to build a stronger and more prosperous Suriname together."

A special parliamentary session to elect the chairperson was scheduled for June 30. Following that, parliament is expected to convene on July 8 to elect the president and vice president. Should two rounds of parliamentary voting fail to produce a result, the process will move to the United People's Assembly, which is a broader electoral college comprising over 900 representatives from the National Assembly, regional councils, and district councils, and where a simple majority will suffice.

The implications of this election extend far beyond political positioning. The incoming administration will inherit oversight of the GranMorgu oil development in Block 58, a (US) \$12.2 billion offshore venture led by TotalEnergies. Production is expected to commence in 2028, with the potential to dramatically shift Suriname's economic trajectory.

While Santokhi's administration was credited with restoring fiscal order through an IMF-backed program and investment reforms, austerity sparked public backlash. The NDP and its partners have instead emphasised social equity, pledging broader oil revenue distribution and stricter control over foreign corporate contracts.

Commenting on the evolving politics in Paramaribo, *Bloomberg News* observed earlier, "This general election is assessed as a critical juncture, not merely a transfer of power, but impacting which developmental path Suriname will choose going forward."

Analysts have cautioned that unless managed prudently, Suriname risks falling into a "resource curse", which is the scenario where over-reliance on oil revenues undermines long-term growth and sustainability.



Ask Jay...

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BACKYARD GOLD: HOW HOMEOWNERS IN ONTARIO TRANSFORM VACANT YARDS INTO VALUABLE GARDEN SUITES

Many homeowners are transforming unused backyards into fully legal, self-contained laneway or garden suites to address housing shortages, rising costs, and changing family needs. Whether you want to accommodate aging parents, support adult children, or create rental income, secondary suites offer a practical and profitable solution. Here's everything you need to know to build and execute it correctly.

What are laneway suites and garden suites?

Laneway suites are distinct living units located at the back of a residential property that faces a public laneway. Garden suites are similar but are designed for properties without laneway access. Both are fully separate homes, each with a kitchen, bathroom, and individual entrance. While these suites cannot be sold separately, they can be rented out or used for extended family living.

Why Build One? The Benefits Add Up

Laneway and garden suites are strategic options:

- **Rental Income:** Offset your mortgage or create retirement income.
- **Multigenerational Living:** Stay close to loved ones while preserving independence.
- **Increased Property Value:** Homes with secondary suites typically sell for a higher price.
- **Contributing to the Community:** Help address Ontario's housing supply issue.

In Toronto, homeowners who built a \$400,000 laneway suite saw a resale value increase of up to \$500,000 compared to similar properties without one.

What the law permits

Under Ontario's More Homes Built Faster Act, you can now construct up to three residential units on most lots – often without development charges. However, you still need to follow local zoning bylaws, which may include:

- **Emergency Access:** An unobstructed path at least 0.9 metre wide leading to the main road.
- **Tree Protection:** Mature trees may determine where or if you proceed with construction.
- **Height and Size Restrictions:** Generally up to 6 m tall and approximately 800 to 1,000 sq. ft.

Toronto, Ottawa, Hamilton, and other municipalities have simplified their processes, making them easier for builders to access. However, it is important to check with your local planning office before beginning.

Considering a Secondary Suite?

Building a secondary suite requires several steps:

1. **Verify zoning and eligibility.** Confirm that your lot qualifies. Review laneway access, emergency routes, lot size, tree protection regulations, and heritage designation.
2. **Obtain a current survey:** A land survey is essential. It establishes your property boundaries, structures, and grading.
3. **Put your team together.** You will need: A designer or architect adhering to the Ontario Building Code; a structural engineer, if needed; a contractor experienced in laneway and garden construction.
4. **Arrange financing.** Most suites generally cost between \$300,000 and \$500,000 to build. Options include: Refinancing your mortgage; securing a construction loan; Ontario's Secondary Suite Loan: You can borrow up to \$80,000 at two percent interest for a period of 15 years.
5. **Submit for permits.** Once your drawings are finished, submit them for city approval. Expect the permitting process to take three to four months.
6. **Commence construction.** Construction usually takes six to eight months.
7. **Final inspections.** You must pass municipal inspections before renting or occupying the unit. Plan utility hookups and consider metering requirements early on.

Prefab homes tend to be more affordable.

Prefab homes are becoming more popular. The units are 80 percent complete and can be assembled in just a few weeks. You save on labour costs and reduce waste because they are factory-built. Your pricing is more predictable compared to building from scratch. Prefabs are eco-friendly and consist of detached dwellings on residential lots. Fewer inspections are needed because they are prebuilt, which helps save time when applying for a permit.

If you create a garden or laneway suite, you might qualify for a GST/HST new housing rebate if its appraised value is less than \$450,000.

Laneway and garden suites go beyond being just housing trends – they offer homeowners a versatile, future-oriented solution. They provide flexibility, financial stability, and even the chance to age in place while renting out their primary residence. However, careful planning, consulting the right professionals, and staying updated on changing regulations are crucial for success.

Your backyard holds more potential than you may realise. With the right vision and support, it can become your most significant investment.

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The Indelible Red Stain
By Dr Mohan Ragbeer

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

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



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IMO's President Omar Farouk (left) receives the award from Acting Consul General Grace Joseph
Top award for IMO leader

– Omar Farouk, President of the International Muslims Organisation, was recently honoured with the Guyana High Commissioner's Award for Excellence, recognition for his decades of community service and leadership within the Guyanese diaspora in Canada. Presented in Toronto, the award celebrates a legacy of faith, compassion, and commitment to uplifting others.

Toronto — In a warm and dignified ceremony at the Guyana Consulate in Toronto, Omar Farouk, President of the International Muslims Organisation (IMO), was presented with the Guyana High Commissioner's Award for Excellence, honouring his decades of service and his unwavering commitment to community upliftment.

Presented by Acting Consul General Grace Joseph, the award was given on behalf of Guyana's High Commissioner to Canada, His Excellency Keith George. Farouk had been unable to attend the formal award ceremony in Ottawa during Guyana's 59th Independence celebrations; he received the honour in Toronto late last month.

The award, which recognises outstanding members of the Guyanese diaspora, carries significant weight, not only as a national honour but as a deeply personal moment for Farouk. In his remarks following the presentation, he described the award as "a heartfelt recognition from the very nation that shaped one's roots and identity".

In accepting the award, Farouk also expressed gratitude with the humility that has long characterised his leadership.

"Recognition in any form is meaningful, but when it comes from the official representatives of one's homeland... it carries a special and heartfelt significance," he declared.

The moment was made all the more poignant by the symbolism of the award itself, in which the map of Guyana is a major component of the design, a reminder to recipients of their shared heritage and "continuing responsibilities", Farouk noted.

The award also offered an opportunity for reflection on a broader collective achievement. Farouk extended congratulations to his fellow honourees, describing them as "an outstanding group whose achievements reflect the strength, resilience, and diversity of the Guyanese diaspora in Canada".

His remarks highlighted the far-reaching contributions of Guyanese-Canadians "across all sectors – academics, business, the arts, and civic life", and noted the quiet but foundational role that faith-based institutions have played in nurturing these values. The IMO mosque, under his leadership, has long served as both a spiritual beacon and a community anchor.

Established as one of the earliest Muslim institutions in the GTA, the IMO mosque provides more than sacred ground for prayer and unity. As Farouk shared, it also welcomes "individuals from all backgrounds", and meets "both spiritual and social needs", functioning as a flourishing site for compassion, solidarity, and charity.

Throughout his remarks, Farouk returned often to the principle of service, not as a means to acclaim, but as a grounded, ethical calling.

"Service has never been about recognition," he said, adding, "It has been about meeting people where they are, addressing shared challenges, and building a sense of belonging."

That ethic, he continued, has shaped the mosque's response to broader national and provincial issues such as housing and equity, where the goal remains "to uplift, support, and unify".

Farouk also acknowledged Canada's role in providing space for diaspora communities to thrive, and the significance of this recognition coming from Guyana's diplomatic mission: a meeting point among past and present, identity, and belonging.

He closed with words of gratitude for the High Commission in Ottawa, and the Guyana Consulate in Toronto, and in particular for Acting Consul General Joseph, whose participation in the presentation underscored the importance of celebrating diaspora leadership where it lives and works.



Honorary Consul Mani Singh (centre with painting), TPS officers, Consulate staff, and guests
TPS bowls over Guyana Consulate to reclaim cricket crown

Toronto – It was a day where the only thing more impressive than the cricket was that there were no boundaries to the camaraderie. On June 14, in celebration of Guyana's 59th Independence Anniversary, the Toronto Police Service (TPS) Cricket Team and the Toronto Consulate Cricket Team squared off in a high-spirited match that saw the TPS team emerge victorious, regaining the coveted trophy they had relinquished the previous year.

Hosted at the Toronto Police Cricket Ground in Scarborough, the match captured the essence of cultural pride, friendly competition, and community unity.

The day's significance was underscored by the presence of senior members of the TPS, including Chief Superintendent Joe Matthew, who represented Police Chief Myron Demkiw. He was joined by TPS Inspector Richard Harris of 42 Division, and Toronto Police Association Director Andrew Nantan, among other high-ranking officials.

On the visiting side, Honorary Consul Mani Singh, accompanied by members of the Toronto Consulate staff, was warmly welcomed by TPS representatives, proving that diplomatic ties can be forged not just in embassies, but also on well-tended cricket pitches.

Beyond the stumps and scores, the day offered heartfelt gestures and colourful celebrations. Police Officer Raj Singh, President of the TPS Cricket Club, was credited with initiating and executing this second annual match between the Toronto Consulate and TPS teams. His contribution helped ensure the continuation of what is quickly becoming a cherished sporting tradition.

The event also showcased artistic talent, with a memorable gift from Singh's daughter, Priya Singh of Priya's Designs. She presented the Consulate with a vibrant painting featuring Guyana's national flora and fauna, including the Canje Pheasant, Spider Monkey, and the colourful Macaw.

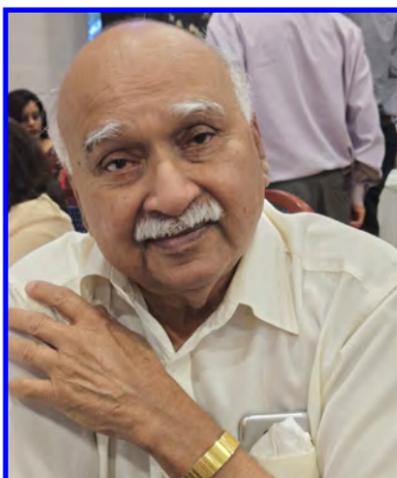
While the match ended in a victory for the TPS team, which reclaimed the trophy that had slipped through their hands last year, the contest was played in the spirit of goodwill and with arresting cricketing skills from both sides.

Though outplayed this year, the Toronto Consulate Team has already signalled its plan to return with lights flashing in 2026.

In its *Facebook* post, the Guyana Consulate expressed "profound gratitude" to Officer Singh for his leadership, as well as to Shiv Persaud, the Guyana Consulate's Sports Coordinator, for his support in organising the event.



Shiva Mandir and Cultural Organisation held its Father's Day fund-raiser last month. The sold-out event saw attendees gathering for delicious food and lots of fun. The mandir has extended its heartfelt gratitude to everyone who attended the event. In photos, fathers and families having a good time. Photos by Hinano Beekho





Imdadul holds annual picnic

By Sayem Khan
Special to Indo-Caribbean World

Toronto – Summer is finally here and warm weather means embracing nature while attending unlimited communal celebrations! On June 15, members of the Imdadul Islamic Jamaat came together to attend the Annual Picnic at the Park at the G. Ross Lord Park. It was a complimentary event which included a wide range of fun games, delicious foods, roaming around the corners of the picturesque G. Ross Lord Park, and having a pleasant time with the family!

This year the picnic event was extra-special as the day also marked the celebration of Father's Day. In addition, the time spent was also a sacred one since it was also an *Eid-ul-Adha* reunion, with the holy event celebrated just over a week before.

It was a fun family event attended by approximately 500 members in total. The Toronto Police Mounted Unit, Special Events Unit, also attended the event and added an extra layer of fun for the young participants.

Among the games were the Sack Race, the Three-legged race, the Egg Toss, and many others. Each of the games was quite competitive and all participants excelled. Of course, the most engaging and dynamic event was the Tug-of-War. Winners in all the events received prized gifts.

In attendance was Honorary Consul Mani Singh from the Consulate General of Guyana in Toronto, who presented Imdadul's Brother Osman, Brother Zaf, and Brother Rahman with commemorative Guyana flag ceremonial pins. The presentation was in recognition of the contribution of the Imdadul Senior Management in advancing Canada-Guyana shared values.

Brother Osman thanked all the volunteers for their contributions in making the event a memorable and successful community one, which all the guests thoroughly enjoyed.

The wrapping up of yet another successful Imdadul event has aligned with the end of the Islamic Year of 1446. Now, community members are looking forward to the new year of 1447, and with this, many unique programs at the Imdadul Centre, starting with the much-looked-to Singles Event on July 13.

In photos, Imdadul members having a day of fun at their annual picnic and Father's Day celebration



A century in the making as multiracial SA cricket team triumphs at Lord's

By Dhanpaul Narine

The South African government would do well to declare a national holiday and have a parade to celebrate a famous cricket victory. South Africa finally shook off the albatross that had burdened its cricket for years. It is no secret that the team couldn't cross the finish line after reaching the finals in a number of ICC events. But this was put to rest on June 14 at Lord's, as South Africa defied the odds, and beat Australia in the finals of the World Test Championship.

The overflow of emotions at Lord's tells a story beyond the dry statistics of the scoreboards. It says that the founding fathers of the game had it right when they said that Test cricket is the ultimate test. It is a test of strategy, character, and will. It is a test of perseverance, fitness, and sportsmanship. In the different shortened variations of the game – T10, T20, ODI, there is nothing to rival the finesse and artistry of Test cricket.

There were calls in its formative stages for more excitement in Test cricket. Many touring teams failed to win a series in the host countries, and there were even suggestions for schedules to be revised.

England and Australia played a Test for the first time in 1877. South Africa played its first Test match in 1889 and England won both matches. These were the three nations that played at the time with all white teams. One of the most famous victories for West Indies came in 1950 when it beat England at Lord's.

By 1960, Test cricket worldwide was in the doldrums. The strong teams: Australia, England, and South Africa, continued to dominate. But the fans wanted to see something different.

Donald Bradman called on the West Indies and Australia to produce something exciting. The result was the first Tied Test at Brisbane. The 1960-1961 series in Australia saw some of the most exciting cricket in memory, and Frank Worrell and his team walked off as cricket gladiators.

The other cricketing countries India, Pakistan, and New Zealand were catching up quickly. One of the greatest challenges to Test cricket occurred during apartheid in South Africa. The 1969-1970 Australian tour to South Africa has been described as "one of the greatest in the history of cricket".

South Africa won that series 4-0 with many players becoming household names, including Barry Richards, Mike Procter, Graeme and Peter Pollock, and Captain Ali Bacher. As it



Nelson Mandela

turned out, this was the last official tour to South Africa. Ali Bacher arranged a number of rebel tours that included players from the West Indies, but the world did not recognise them.

The D'Oliveira affair led to the cancellation of the English tour to South Africa in 1969 and placed apartheid in the headlines. Two years earlier, Peter Le Roux, Minister for the Interior, made South Africa's position clear. He said, "Our policy is clear. We will not allow mixed teams to play against our white teams here."

Basil D'Oliveira was a coloured cricketer who was born in South Africa, played for England, and was picked by the MCC to represent England in South Africa. This ran counter to apartheid. England cancelled the tour, and this led to South Africa's exclusion from international sport.

In the years that followed there was a campaign to attack apartheid and to continue to exclude South Africa from international sport. In 1977, Commonwealth leaders ratified the Gleneagles Agreement "to discourage contact and competition between their sportsmen and sporting organisations, teams or individuals from South Africa".

The mantra of the critics of apartheid was that there should be multicultural teams, drawn up from the different segments of the society. There was another powerful symbol that reinforced the sports boycott. It was the free Mandela movement.

The campaign to free Nelson Mandela from prison took off globally in the 1980s. The Anti-Apartheid Movement called for sanctions against South Africa. This was wide-ranging from culture to academic, investment, and sports.

Mandela was freed from prison in 1990. He became president of South Africa four years later. The ban on cricket was lifted in 1991,



Temba Bavuma

and in that year, South Africa played an ODI against India.

In 1992, South Africa toured West Indies and played four matches. They were well set to win the Barbados Test before Ambrose and Walsh took charge of the game. Thus began a procession of South African losses in major tournaments.

They lost ten of their 12 knockout matches in both ODI and T20 World Cups. In the 2003 ODI World Cup, South Africa was knocked out of the tournament due to a misinterpretation of the Duckworth-Lewis method.

In 2022, it lost to the Netherlands in the Super 12 stage. Many fans felt that South Africa did not have the courage to cross the finish line; that it would remain the bridegroom.

But South Africa was keen to rid itself of the 'chokers' tag. How long could it go on losing from a winning position? Then came the World Test Championship 2023-2025 cycle. South Africa qualified for a spot at Lord's by beating India. It also played against New Zealand, West Indies, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. It secured a spot at Lord's by defeating Pakistan at Centurion.

But given its reputation, and Australia's dominance, the scribes made South Africa the underdog. Would it lose from a winning position again?

As the events proved, South Africa went on to win at Lord's and to stun its detractors. However, there was more to the victory. In plural societies such as South Africa and the Caribbean, sports play a role beyond the confines of the pavilion. Temba Bavuma, the South African captain, understood this role and he explained it well.

He said, "The victory provides a chance for national unity and celebration. It serves as an inspiration to the country, demonstrating that with passion and a relentless spirit, seemingly impossible goals can be achieved."

In fact, 'doing it for the country' was reinforced by every speaker in the team.

It is rare to find a cricket philosopher in a captain. Sir Frank Worrell, like Temba Bavuma, was the first Black captain of his country. He saw cricket as a tool for national unity, and wanted a strong West Indies team to work for a collective identity. His vision extended beyond cricket, and as a member of the Jamaican Senate, he became a symbol of unity and inspiration.

Sir Frank's legacy was inherited by Sir Garfield Sobers, Rohan Kanhai, Sir Clive Lloyd and Sir Viv Richards, who in their own ways fought against insularity. A captain that inspires is badly lacking in West Indies cricket.

Bavuma, like Sir Frank, may one day enter politics and fight for 'One South Africa'. However, there can be little doubt that South Africa's long march to glory was sealed at Lord's in 2025. Victory came with tremendous euphoria and fanfare, and St John's Wood was transformed into a Little South Africa. A multiracial team celebrating with such unbridled joy would have pleased Mandela greatly.

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Lineage meets legacy in Mohammed's new book *Ever Since We Small*

... Celeste Mohammed's presence on stage in San Fernando last week was more than a book launch; it was a homecoming steeped in legacy, lineage, and literary reclamation. With her latest book, *Ever Since We Small*, she returns to the home ground that shaped her, bearing stories that have long lived in whispers and silences across our Indo-Caribbean generations.

...

When Celeste Mohammed launched her latest book *Ever Since We Small* in her hometown of San Fernando last week, it was more than just the return of a celebrated author. It was a moment of reflection, reverence, and recognition, a literary pilgrimage to the place where her storytelling began. The occasion, marked by the warmth of old friends and the echoes of childhood streets, was also the Caribbean launch of a book years in the making, one that binds fiction with generational truths.

From the town that forged her voice to the ancestral ghosts that shadow its pages, *Ever Since We Small* is not merely a text; it is a gift passed forward, a memory held to the light.

Mohammed has already earned her place in the Caribbean literary firmament. Her 2022 OCM Bocas Prize-winning *Pleasantview* peeled back the layers on contemporary Trinidad, exposing the interwoven politics, domestic anxieties, and social fractures in deceptively calm communities.

But her newest offering, *Ever Since We Small*, moves inward, penetrating further down to the quiet heartbeats of family, heritage, and womanhood.

Published in May 2025 by *Jacaranda Books UK*, *Ever Since We Small* comes to Caribbean readers before its international release, a rare reversal of publishing hierarchy. The launch's alignment with the 180th anniversary of Indian Indentureship in Trinidad and Tobago was not accidental; it was a deliberate act, one that was simultaneously defiant, and full of grace.

"Too often, Caribbean readers have been the last to access stories about their own culture. This time, we were first,"



Celeste Mohammed

Mohammed said in an earlier statement that appeared in the *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday*.

Told through ten interconnected stories, *Ever Since We Small* begins with Jayanti, a young widow in colonial India who chooses to become a *Girmitiya*, an indentured labourer bound by contract for the sugar estates in the Caribbean. Her decision births a legacy shaped by both rupture and resilience, carried forth by her descendants over generations.

From Lall Gopaul, a grandson seduced by status in urban Trinidad, to Shiva, a boy forcibly married in a community that mistakes silence for tradition, each character in Mohammed's mosaic wrestles with the inheritances of trauma, voice, and hope. There are Nadya, Anand, and Abby, great-grandchildren who must reckon with ancestral ghosts while forging new paths of self-definition.

The narrative moves between realism and myth, the sacred and the secular, the living and the dead. It collapses boundaries to show how memory is not linear but lived, often viscerally, across time and blood.

"It's not just fiction; it's drawn from real conversations and observations. The story tries to explore many things that troubled me while growing up," Mohammed revealed.

Mohammed has become known for her deft fusion of Trinidadian *Kriol* and standard English, a lyrical blend that gives cadence to the unspoken and brings intimacy to even the most epic tales.

Critics have called *Ever Since We Small* "lyrical, brave, and evocative", but its emotional weight rests in the specificity of its language and the sharpness of its silences.

"It captures the internal and external battles of belonging, shame, resilience, and the quiet acts of defiance that shape women's lives across time and place," reads the publisher's note.

For Mohammed, womanhood is not simply a subject; instead, it is an atmosphere. One in which domestic spaces hold epic wars, and where the softest acts can be the most subversive. This

book, she said, "is dedicated to my great-grandmothers and to the Indo-Caribbean women whose sacrifices shaped me. Their stories deserve to be heard – first, by us".

There is something poetic and just about bringing a book back to the place that birthed its author. The southern city of San Fernando is not just a setting but at the same time a subtext to all of Mohammed's storytelling.

"San Fernando, particularly my time at St Joseph's Convent, taught me to observe people – the ways we commingle in Trinidad society, the boundaries we erect, the way we dress up pain," she reflected.

It was in these spaces, among uniformed classmates, bustling markets, and sunlit pavements, that Mohammed first learned the tension between what is said and what is withheld. Returning to launch her most personal work was, in her words, deeply meaningful: "This is where I learned that excellence should exist without arrogance."

Ever Since We Small arrives not only as yet another elucidating text from Mohammed, but as an act of cultural reclamation. By anchoring its publication to the legacy of Indian Indentureship, her latest output confronts the afterlife of colonialism, not through policy or protest, but via the personal.

In its pages, readers encounter shame passed down like family heirlooms, gender roles too old to question, and bodies marked by expectations that feel both alien and intimate. Yet they also meet characters who fight, laugh, and find slivers of joy in places that offered only survival.

Mohammed's decision to release the novel in the Caribbean first underscores her larger mission. It is one to centre Caribbean readers in the literary gaze, and to honour those whose stories too often remain untold.

With *Ever Since We Small*, Mohammed offers to us, her readers, a mirror, which upon reflection, we come to understand that even the smallest acts of remembering are forms of resistance. And that sometimes, the truest stories are the ones we carry deep within, waiting for someone brave enough to write them down, someone who can articulate what was once unsayable; and who hears the echoes of our Indentureship, migration, and silence, and treats these not as distant history, but irrevocably etches them into our living inheritances.

Puddicombe slices, dices, and inks his world from Brampton to Mumbai

Pages From a Notebook (2024), Middleroad Publishers:
Puddicombe, Kenneth

A review by Dr Kennard Ramphal

Pages From a Notebook was written by Ken Puddicombe, the author of *Down Independence Boulevard and Other Stories*, which won first place in the *Guyana Competition for Literature-Fiction* in 2022. *Pages From a Notebook* was published by *Middleroad Publishers*, a publishing company owned by the author, and which has published a number of books by well-known authors and poets.

Puddicombe keeps a journal, because he believes that a life worth living is a life worth recording, and *Pages From a Notebook* is aptly named because the excerpts were taken from the entries of the author's journal where he recorded his varied and interesting experiences.

The author mentions "slices of life" at the beginning of his book, and proceeds to share 20 slices of his life. Puddicombe alerts the reader to the fact that each slice "often lacks a coherent plot, conflict, or ending".

Employing his remarkable facility with language, Puddicombe shares a number of his experiences in detail. The setting of the first "slice" is in Brampton, Ontario, where the author becomes aware of a distracted female driver behind him.

"She drove a sport Fiero. It had black stripes along the side and was a bright enamel – white – the same image her face reflected from the liberal coat of powder she was applying when I first noticed her," the author tells the reader.

The woman was obviously eating something gooey and delicious, because she licked her fingers after each mouthful. After she had finished eating, she commenced to put on her make-up, and again the reader is enthralled with Puddicombe's detailed description of the process.

"She pulled down the vanity mirror and reapplied the lipstick smeared from her meal, then with a sweep of a lock of hair from her forehead she started on her eyes. First it was the eyeshadow. Next came the eyeliner. By then we were at the light at Queen and Torbram. She expanded her eyes wide open, pulled at the lashes, first at one side, then on the other, and with care, precision and meticulous timing, she applied the little brush."

This detailed and delightful description is typical of Puddicombe's style, which he maintains throughout *Pages From a Notebook*. He then takes us from Brampton to the Bahamas in *The Bahamian Way*, where the interpersonal social mores are

different from those in Canada: "How yuh doing sugar – I ain't seen you for a long time. She's seen me the day before!"

In *Zipperhead and Harpy*, the author joins the line at the ticket counter at Pearson International Airport, when his attention is captured by a woman, a child, and a man ahead of him. Yet again Puddicombe employs his remarkable power of detailed description in his portrayal of the woman.

"The mound (of her hair) leaned towards the back of her head and added to the crescent shape of her face: a curved forehead, drooping nose, recessed, weak chin. Her thick lips were accentuated with a heavy layer of lip gloss – the colour and texture of mud mixed with ground-crystal. Everything about her features reminded me of a harpy eagle."

Puddicombe then proceeds to paint the man as a fearsome character, but who ends up saying, "Sorry" to the writer as he bumped into him, to the woman whom he side-swiped, and even to the barrier into which he rattled.

The reader is then transported to Guyana, where the economic situation is so dire that people resort to stealing items like burnt-out light bulbs, and where drivers are expected to slip large bills to police officers who stop their cars.

In *Riding the J Train*, Puddicombe describes some of the advertisements, which had replaced the graffiti in the subway in New York: "Say

goodbye to wrinkles. Competent Plastic Surgeon will give you the lift you need." "Torn ear lobes? We can fix them. Quickly. Painlessly. Cheaply." As he reads the numerous advertisements, the writer wonders whether graffiti had become institutionalised.

In the following slice, *On the Boardwalk*, the writer recounts his encounter with a man in a wheelchair as he walks along the Boardwalk planks. When the man approaches the writer and attempts to intimidate him by asking him whether he took a picture of him and demanding to see the camera, the author refuses with "...no trace of amusement or tolerance evident in my voice or demeanor..."

Puddicombe continues to enthrall the reader as he shares his scathing criticism of the Canadian health care system in *Old, Helpless, and in Hospital*; then there are his brilliant descriptions of the characters participating in a financial conference, and his colourful account of the life and mind-set of a Jamaican entrepreneur in *A Man Called Kentish*.

In Brampton, Ontario, we read of the author sitting with a youth in *The Conversation*, and again Puddicombe delights us in

his detailed description of the food the youth was eating.

"His French fries languished in a sea of gravy at the bottom of a paper container and he was attempting the delicate job of spearing them with a miniature plastic fork no fatter than a toothpick. One after the other, he impaled each member of the now sodden portion and placed it delicately in his mouth, took his time to chew, and swallowed with a reverberating gulp."

In the same story, the writer was not surprised when he was totally ignored by his youthful companion when he hooked up with other friends.

The reader is then invited to accompany the author to the *Chilean Fjords*, where there are, "Narrow channels bracketed by towering mountains". Then a visit to Cambodia, the site where "...nearly two million Cambodians had died from execution, disease, exhaustion, or starvation."

The reader then journeys to India in *The Shatabhi Express*, where he fascinates us with the bustling activity on the train station as he awaits his ride: "A pack of stray dogs roam around looking for leftovers. A cow on the track is being chased by a railway employee brandishing a tree branch."

For me, the most powerful slice is the one-page description of the lives of the homeless in *On the Streets of Mumbai*. Here Puddicombe shares a photograph of a young girl washing her face "with peaceful dignity", and wonders whether she is doomed to live the same life of her parents.

In *Queues* the author wonders why the East Indian soldier, who wears a turban, always leaves his queue when it is his turn to board the train and joins another queue.

Puddicombe shares a brief history of the Great Wall of China in *The Great Wall*, and recalls that visitors "...have included 372 state leaders and VIPs, including presidents Nixon and Reagan, Prime Minister Thatcher, and Queen Elizabeth II". He proceeds to share his perceptions on Guyana's famous waterfall in Kaieteur. Like the author, many Guyanese visit this waterfall only after they have left Guyana, and return to the land of their birth as tourists.

As I read Puddicombe's *Pages From a Notebook*, I found myself regretting that I did not keep a journal to record my life experiences, especially those in the Guyana Defence Force, where I spent seven years as an infantry officer.

It was a privilege and a treat to see some events and parts of the world through the lenses of a gifted writer.

Kennard Ramphal is a retired education officer from the Ontario Ministry of Education, and served as the anti-racist consultant in the East York Board of Education. He is the author of seven books, among them the acclaimed Slippery Ochro.



Ken Puddicombe



Government officials and TCC leaders at the June 14 launch (left to right): MP Jean Yip, MP Shaun Chen; TCC's Jennifer Hirlehey and Mischka Crichton; MP Michael Coteau, MP Gary Anandasangaree, and MP Salma Zahid

TCC leadership a masterclass in making our mas'

From Page 1

than seeing the limitations of lemons, Jennifer envisioned a refreshing infusion.

Her voice replete with unwavering conviction, she speaks with subjunctive recall, declaring, "If I could put the right team together, then we could make our Carnival into a jewel, one for our Caribbean people, as well as for all of Canada," she declared.

Jennifer's approach in actualising that enabling vision remains a holistic one. TCC is both a sacred cultural heritage and an under-leveraged economic engine, she maintains.

Her first year in leadership was marked by bold changes. She restructured teams, invited fresh talent, and focused on building trust in our community with both governments and sponsors.

"There was that fear, but also the determination that Carnival would happen," she recalled.

That sharp, downward point suspended by a thread over the organisation became manifest in an episode of solicitude when TCC could not pay its bills. Her recall of the precarity, that razor-edged, hovering tenuousness, brought with it an insight into Jennifer's disarming honesty: "For a moment I felt I had failed them," she confessed.

But borne on the wings of her uplifting professionalism, she regrouped internally, rallying along with her supportive team. And then, the funding came through.

"One of my high points was when we realised that we were going to get the funding. That we were going to pay our bills," she declared, her tone still resonant, suffused with humility, relief, and the triumph of determination overcoming despair.

She led with a clarity of purpose, building a sponsorship strategy that grew TCC's revenues by 100 percent. But Jennifer is not content with following only door-knocking pathways to sustenance.

TCC has developed a 50/50 lottery plan modeled after the Princess Margaret Lottery, an effort to empower our community while generating new and self-sustaining funding.

"Imagine how it would be to give a member of our community \$1 million," she said of the potential in the 50/50 initiative, adding, "There are unique ways for us to raise revenue."

Still, Jennifer is clear as she is unequivocal: commerce must never displace culture.

"Our main priority is protecting the cultural heart of Carnival," she insisted, further declaring, "We recognise our strength with our creativity, our originality, our love for joy."

That commitment is evident in her advocacy for calypso and soca artists, her efforts to foster community self-autonomy, to enhance our creativity, to build on performance platforms that enable youthful, upcoming talent, and to reward initiative.

Today, she and her team are lobbying officials to showcase mas' to the interminable traffic of arrivals and departures inhabiting the moving sidewalks at Pearson International Airport.

"My role is to give a platform to artists," she maintained; and she insisted on holding the creative centre that individualises our community with our inherent 'Caribbeanness,' declaring, "This is not a street parade. This is a costume parade."

At the 2025 TCC launch event last month, themed *Take Me Home*, Jennifer stood before a packed audience. The atmosphere was electric, but her words were grounded in reverence. A week following the launch, she was still soaring from the adulation and community feel-good that had sent her aloft.

"I felt a sense of pride. Pride in my team, our volunteers; pride in our community," she recalled.

Take Me Home is a nod to every immigrant who has ever longed for home, she stated, noting the message was particularly resonant for our Caribbean diaspora.

And she was unequivocal about continuing to elevate our festival's futurity, declaring, "It is absolutely our intention... to make Toronto Caribbean Carnival into an icon of Caribbean excellence throughout the globe."

The 2025 launch featured fireworks, performances, and a

day-long celebration that one veteran later described to her as being "unlike any Carnival opening anywhere in the world".

"Our challenge is to create a beautiful welcoming space that unites Canada," she said. "The world will look at us as a model – that Canada is welcoming to immigrants. The concepts of multiculturalism and Caribbean excellence have to meet."

Of course, Jennifer's determination remains as much in play as she is realistic, navigating the path ahead with candour, forthrightness, and with a steady, ineluctable hand on the helm.

Change is never easy, she summarised, even as she introduced one of her low points.

"When we could not pay our bills in 2024... I felt for a moment that I had failed," she said. But she made difficult decisions, and maintained the coordinates toward calmer seas, purposefully, and without distraction.

"Sometimes you have to do difficult things. I had to say who in this organisation fits the model and its mandate of transformation," she noted.

Yet, the strength she draws on remains communal, she added, further stating, "One of the main lessons is you cannot do it alone; you need a team to transform an organisation," she noted, revealing a leadership style that amplifies, rather than centralises.

At last month's launch, she gave credit where it was due, acknowledging along with her hardworking staff a corollary and external input that was similarly in confluence with her inclusive vision, declaring, "We had petitions, emails, editorials. The community was behind us. That played a role in shaping our success."

TCC's path forward, she suggested, will depend on continuing this collaborative framework, saying, "We now live in a time of global conflict and tension. Our vision is to make TCC a beacon. A symbol of what makes us Canadian."

Beyond the strategy and speeches, Jennifer is a woman deeply rooted in community. She spends her personal time travelling, attending sports' meets with her son, playing cricket, and boating in the Kawartha Lakes. She also works tirelessly to ensure that Carnival Arts are represented in schools, and that racialised children see themselves reflected in Canada's cultural landscape.

"This is the experience of all immigrants," she said, candidly noting the point where we are all in confluence, plugged in and drawing from a similar energy to succeed, and which impels us forward. As she noted, "Leaving our home to come to a country with no idea what you're going to meet – that drive is inbred in me."

And so it is that when Jennifer stated earlier, "We want Carnival to be a showcase. Not just for creativity. For excellence", it was understood that with such a shared energy, our communal purpose to excel and succeed, that this goal will be reached.

And so, to the accompaniment of the pounding rhythms of soca music, and with the sails of the masqueraders' costumes catching a favourable forward wind, we return to that illuminating, sea-change moment at the top of our narrative.

Here Jennifer is standing on the threshold of the stage, in the liminal space that is the entrance between two worlds, one dark, the other lit, where the Kings and Queens are being energised by their handlers before emergence in all their splendour. But now it was more than a red carpet only for Carnival's royalty; it was a crossing for Jennifer too.

In that stillness before the spectacle, here was Jennifer standing not just as Executive Chair of our TCC, but as a witness to her own becoming. Here was a leader being shaped by trials, uplifted by her team and our community, and lit from within by a heartfelt, transcendent vision fueled by a thousand suns.

Just as the masqueraders stepped into the light to reveal their full regalia, Jennifer too stepped into hers, not as performance, but as purpose. And so it is in this shared illumination that the future of our beloved TCC continues its unfolding – relentless, resilient, radiant; and ever becoming.



Councillor Michael Thompson (left) and MPP Charmaine Williams at the 2025 launch



Lovely masqueraders dressed as traditional sailors



An invested young lady prepares for the big stage



Two young ladies promenade in traditional mas' costumes. Photos by Russell Lutchman

Agriculture ministry pledges support as land shifts disrupt 35 farmers' lives

– After heavy rains triggered alarming land shifts in Los Iros, over 20 hectares of farmland now lie damaged, disrupting the livelihoods of dozens of farmers. As government officials assess the scene and calls for relocation grow louder, questions mount over the safety, future, and sustainability of this vital agricultural hub.

Port-of-Spain — Los Iros farmers face mounting losses and safety concerns after significant land slippage affected over 20 hectares of active farmland, prompting on-site assessments from government officials and growing calls for relocation amid ongoing land movement.

Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture Saddam Hosein said the ministry will do what it can to assist farmers following the ongoing land movement in the area that has caused widespread damage to farmland and infrastructure.

Hosein made the statement on June 29 during a tour of Royal Engineer Road, Los Iros, accompanied by La Brea MP Clyde Elder. The visit was intended to assess erosion activity and verify the extent of reported damage.

According to a release from the ministry, approximately 20 hectares of farmland were affected, impacting access for more than 35 farmers, and resulting in crop loss and infrastructural damage.

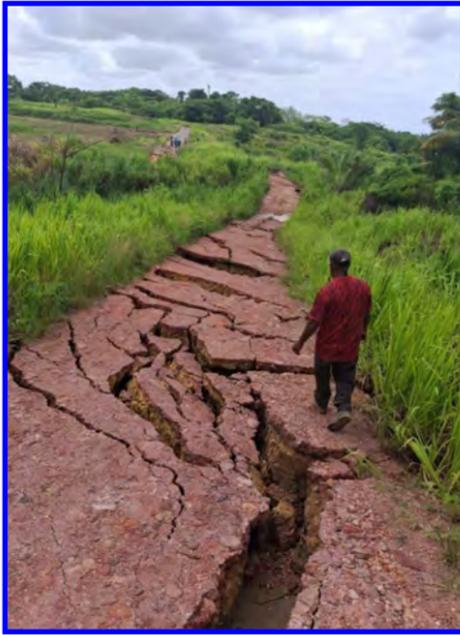
“We are here to ensure that the reports we receive reflect an accurate representation of what is happening on the ground,” said Hosein. He also emphasised the region’s importance, noting, “Los Iros is part of the nation’s food basket.”

Additionally, “We are going to explore what solutions we can offer as a government to ensure that these farmers are properly supported.”

Hosein also referenced the UNC campaign slogan, stating, “When the UNC wins, everybody wins, including the farmers here in Los Iros.”

South Oropouche Riverine Flood Action Group president Edward Moodie, who accompanied the officials on the tour, confirmed that Hosein and Elder surveyed every plot that had been damaged.

“They looked at every plot that has been damaged thus far by the land movement,” Moodie said, adding that the delegation also met with individual farmers to discuss their challenges. He said that access to the farming districts remains a critical concern.



Los Iros has suffered extensive damage to farm lands, as these photos from Anton George’s Facebook page show

“They left to examine an alternative route to reach the farming districts,” he explained.

Moodie concluded, “I think they did an excellent job in terms of finding what they are supposed to do to help the people.”

Meanwhile, councillor for Palo Seco Anton George reported that some affected farmers have expressed interest in relocation due to ongoing safety risks.

On June 27, George posted on Facebook that the land along Royal Engineer Road had shifted “dramatically”, rising “eighteen feet in the air” in some locations. He noted the loss of approximately two kilometres of roadway, which he described as vital to over 50 farms under the Ministry of Agriculture.

George stated on June 30 that “the earth (land) is still moving”. He also posted photos of the extensive damage to the land on his Facebook account.

“After discussions with [the affected farmers] this morning, a lot of them are interested in being relocated,” George said, adding, “I would have spoken to them and more or less convinced them it is really not safe for them to be there. Initially, they wanted to continue doing their farming there, but I told them, ‘Could you imagine if you all were in the field Friday morning and this had happened?’ Somebody may have lost their life. So in my humble opinion, it is not safe for farmers to continue to operate in that area.”

He suggested alternative locations nearby, such as Chattoo Avenue and Anduez Trace, “less than five minutes’ drive”

from the affected area, where displaced farmers could resume operations.

Meanwhile, the University of the West Indies Seismic Research Centre has addressed public concerns about the possibility of seismic activity in the area. In a notice posted to social media on June 30, the Centre confirmed it had received “several requests” inquiring about any recent “event” near Los Iros.

“No activity was recorded on the seismic network,” the centre stated. After reviewing submitted footage, engineering seismologist Dr Ilias Papadopoulos concluded that the incident was likely the result of “mass movement (landslides) caused by the recent heavy rains”.

The Centre emphasised that while the damage resembled the aftermath of the 2018 earthquake that hit the area, it was caused by a different geological process, specifically gravity, following prolonged rainfall saturation.

The Centre explained that landslides can be triggered by earthquakes, but in this instance, the 2018 earthquake’s fault rupture may have left the area vulnerable to future instability.

“The heavy rains, as explained, saturated the material and gravity did the rest,” the Centre said, noting the current damage occurred south of the 2018 earthquake-affected zone.

In response to a social media question about the nature of the phenomenon, the Centre clarified it was land movement over a period of time, which was now being “exacerbated by the heavy rainfall”.

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From raga to rhythm: How Baiju Bawra and Sundar Popo share a melody

– *Baiju Bawra* (1952) is a cinematic symphony exploring music's transformative power, revenge, and tragic love. Resonating across cultures and generations, this Bollywood classic parallels Caribbean chutney legend Sundar Popo's story, highlighting music's capacity to bridge divides, reflect societal tensions, and shape collective identities.

...

By Romeo Kaseram

An LJI Diaspora Feature

The notes rise and fall, weaving their spell, hypnotising listeners as they traverse centuries and continents. Whether in the courts of Mughal India or the vibrant streets of Trinidad and Tobago, music proves to be both balm and battleground, and is capable of healing hearts and igniting revolutions. Vijay Bhatt's *Baiju Bawra* captures this universal truth through its compelling narrative and unforgettable melodies, resonating deeply from India's cinemas into our diaspora, where similar stories of musical legends like Trinidad and Tobago's Sundar Popo continue to reverberate.

Directed by Vijay Bhatt in 1952, *Baiju Bawra* (*Crazy Baiju*) defied industry skepticism about classical music's commercial viability. According to *Wikipedia*, Bhatt's decision to base the film around Indian classical music was initially met with doubt from the film industry due to its presumed "lack of mass appeal".

Composer Naushad infused Bollywood with classical authenticity, employing intricate ragas such as *Puriya Dhanashree*, *Todi*, *Malkauns*, *Darbari*, and *Desi*. Lyricist Shakeel Badayuni, writing in pure Hindi rather than his usual Urdu, elevated the lyrics into poetic reflections of spiritual yearning and profound emotional intensity.

The resulting film not only captivated audiences, but ran for an extraordinary 100 weeks in theatres, a rare feat in Indian cinema history.

Baiju Bawra is notable for transforming classical music into a populist medium, reaching audiences across linguistic, regional, and class divisions. This evolution is particularly significant in a postcolonial context, where reclaiming traditional Indian art forms within popular cinema was cultural assertion. The film's success affirmed that mass entertainment and classical artistry could indeed coexist.

The film's story interweaves myth, history, and emotion, centred on the musical rivalry between Baiju (Bharat Bhushan) and Tansen (Surendra), Emperor Akbar's (Bipin Gupta) court musician and a historical figure from the *Navratna* – the nine jewels of Akbar's court.

Baiju's father, a humble traveling musician, is fatally injured when Tansen's "hangers-on" acting like guards attack minstrels for violating the unspoken law forbidding any singing near the maestro's *haveli*, or mansion. As his father dies, he extracts a promise from his young son Baiju to avenge his death.

Baiju's journey from grieving child to gifted musician is threaded through romance, divine quest, and existential yearning. He is taken in by a compassionate pandit (Manmohan Krishna) and finds companionship in Gauri, the boatman's daughter. Their childhood friendship matures into deep love.

However, Baiju, hypnotised by love, is then drawn back to his father's final wish. After a detour involving the dacoit, the robber queen Roopmati, a dispossessed royal with a vendetta, Baiju's memory of revenge is reignited. The plot crescendos toward the now iconic musical duel against Tansen in Akbar's court.

As *Wikipedia* recounts, the competition's terms are surreal: the victor must melt a marble slab with the sheer power of music. Baiju succeeds, his soul soaked in the pain of losing Gauri, who earlier had sacrificed her life by snakebite so that Baiju might know suffering deep enough to defeat Tansen.

The scene is deeply operatic, yet it is precisely in this theatrical excess where the film's emotional truth is laid bare.

Film blogger and conversational writer Madulika Liddle writes with measured affection and critique about *Baiju Bawra*. "Good music is the outstanding feature of this film," she asserts, adding, "Naushad is at his classical best here, with gems like the superb *Man Tadpat Hari Darshan Ko Aaj*, *Mohe Bhool Gaye Saanwariya*, and *Tu Ganga Ki Mauj Main Jamuna Ka Dhara*."

The latter is, to her, "a delightful bit of picturisation: a distressed and shy Gauri, caught midstream, with the entire village looking on as Baiju serenades her. Sweet!"

Liddle also underscores the symbolic contrast between female characters: "Gauri is a sweet but rather weepy village girl... Roopmati, on the other hand, is a brave, feisty woman who doesn't shy away from fighting – yet is mature and sensitive enough to be an object of sympathy."

Yet, Liddle offers a grounded critique. "The acting is so-so (in some cases, even downright theatrical), and the story, while not boring, tends to wander off on tangents. The melodrama goes over the top every now and then, the wood-and-cardboard sets are unconvincing, and there are anachronisms." One anachronism is in the rifles, notably ahead of its time, that fire repeated shots.



Meena Kumari and Bharat Bhushan in *Baiju Bawra*

However, despite these flaws, she concedes, "If there is one Hindi film I would recommend for a good dose of classical Hindustani music, this would be it." Her perspective provides a valuable blend of nostalgia, appreciation, and realism.

The enduring emotional relevance of *Baiju Bawra* for diasporic audiences, notably in the Caribbean and here in the GTA and elsewhere, can be understood through comparison with Sundar Popo, the late Trinidad and Tobago *chutney* icon.

Last month was the 25th anniversary of Popo's passing, and it was marked by the restaging of a musical tribute play titled *Sundar*, which was performed at the Naparima Bowl in the southern city of San Fernando in Trinidad.

Directed by Victor Edwards, the play chronicles Popo's rise to fame following the release of *Nannie and Nanna*, a song born from a folk tune he heard at a wedding 'farewell', and adapted into a classic *chutney* hit.

As Edwards remarked in the *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday* last month, "There are so many things about that year, 1970 – the year of the Black Power movement – and for an East Indian man from the country to sing a song that was making history and excelling in the era of the revolution, was a fantastic movement."

That Sundar Popo's music emerged amid the Black Power uprisings and later riots by oil and sugar workers in San Fernando echoes the background of *Baiju Bawra* – both artists navigating cultural resistance, social upheaval, and personal pain.

Gauri's death in *Baiju Bawra*, prompted by her belief that only her loss can give Baiju the sorrow he needs to sing from the depths of pain, is paralleled in the narrative arc of Popo's own sacrifices in his battle with diabetes, public scrutiny, and pioneering an entire genre while negotiating the cultural tensions between Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians.

In both narratives, it is the emotional weight of lived experience that propels musical greatness.

In the wake of Popo's cultural contributions, Edwards stated, "Local Indian music would have taken a different tone had Sundar not popularised *chutney*... He changed the cultural landscape, bringing it from behind hidden closed doors and making, not only Trinidad and Tobago, but the Caribbean and the world, recognise how important it is to us."

The same could be said of Naushad's work in *Baiju Bawra*. Without this film, it is difficult to imagine classical music occupying a central place in popular Hindi cinema.

Both Baiju and Popo became symbols; Baiju in fictional form, and Popo in flesh of how music can transcend caste, class, and creed; and also, how they can disrupt hierarchies. They reflect a shared legacy of artists who emerged from modest beginnings to challenge the custodians of musical orthodoxy. In doing so, they democratised art.

When Trinidad and Tobago's Sonny Mann was booed and



Sundar Popo

pelted at the 1995 Soca Monarch competition for singing *Lotela*, it was more than a moment of public rejection; instead, it was a symptom of a deeper discomfort with cultural hybridity and its ascendancy into the mainstream.

Similarly, in *Baiju Bawra*, Baiju loses his father, and suffers for daring to sing in a realm where only Tansen is allowed voice. These parallel experiences of oppression, curtailment, and censure, underscore the risks faced by those who attempt to reorder cultural hierarchies through the medium of song and music.

The emotional power of *Baiju Bawra* continues to enchant viewers today, especially those of us in our Indo-Caribbean communities who grew up watching its tear-streaked plotlines and soaring, uplifting *raga*-based songs.

Its tropes of vengeance, devotion, and transcendence continue to find echoes in diaspora storytelling, whether in plays like *Sundar*, or in everyday conversations about our cultural memory and our artistic heritage.

Today, from beyond the marble courtyards of Akbar's court to the *chutney* and *tassa* renditions in Trinidad and Tobago, *Baiju Bawra*'s story continues to ripple across time. In its deeply melancholic melodies and cathartic crescendos, our diaspora recognises our own longings for justice, for belonging, and for our voices to be heard, not only in song, but also in assertion.

Much like Sundar Popo's *chutney* intervention into Trinidad and Tobago's dominant hierarchy, Baiju's defiant notes still sing across oceans and generations today, reminding us that when narratives of grief and cultural assertion are made manifest in music, it transcends borders and time.

Lyricist, poet, screenwriter Javed Akhtar honoured with Dostoevsky Star

– Renowned Indian lyricist, poet, and screenwriter Javed Akhtar has been honoured with the Dostoevsky Star Award, spotlighting his profound impact on cultural dialogue and literary heritage. His latest recognition is yet another acclaim, among them Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan, acquired by Akhtar in an expansive career spanning cinema, activism, and poetry rooted in seven generations of literary legacy.

Javed Akhtar, one of India's most celebrated and influential writers, was awarded the Dostoevsky Star Award on June 6, honouring his lifetime contributions to literature, cinema, and public discourse. Presented by the Russian House, the award recognises Akhtar's enduring influence on global cultural heritage and intellectual engagement.

A lyricist, screenwriter, poet, and public intellectual, Akhtar's career is woven into the cultural fabric of India. Whether scripting the unforgettable dialogues of *Sholay* and *Deewar*, penning award-winning lyrics, or speaking out on secularism and justice, Akhtar's work carries the weight of conscience and craft.

The Dostoevsky Star Award, presented in recognition of his "remarkable influence on cultural dialogue and literary heritage", was shared on social media by his wife, actor, and activist Shabana Azmi.

She described the honour as "another big moment" in a storied career already garlanded with accolades. Among these are the Padma Shri (1999), Padma Bhushan (2007), and India's second-highest literary honour, the Sahitya Akademi Award, for his Urdu poetry collection *Lava*.

Akhtar's career as a screenwriter began with his legendary partnership with Salim Khan. Together, as the duo Salim-Javed, they revolutionised Hindi cinema in the 1970s, creating the archetype of the 'Angry Young Man'. Films like *Zanjeer*, *Deewar*, *Sholay*, and *Don* not only became box-office blockbusters, but redefined social realism in popular storytelling.

Following their separation in 1981, Akhtar continued to deliver critically acclaimed scripts (*Mr India*, *Betaab*, *Sagar*), while simultaneously turning his creative energies toward lyrics and poetry. His songs, known for their philosophical depth and emotional candour, earned him five National Awards, 16



Akhtar (left) receives the Dostoevsky Star Award last month

Filmfare awards, and the prestigious Richard Dawkins Award in 2020.

Akhtar's roots lie deep within the soil of Urdu literary tradition. He is the son of renowned poet Jan Nisar Akhtar and writer Safia Akhtar. His maternal uncle was Majaz, the iconic progressive poet, while his grandfather Muztar Khairabadi is revered as a pillar of Urdu poetry. This lineage of writers spanning seven generations shapes both the clarity of Akhtar's thought and the elegance of his verse.

He began writing poetry in 1980, with his first collection, *Tarkash*, garnering acclaim across linguistic audiences in Hindi and Urdu. His verses are often piercing but always resonant, and interrogate themes of identity, justice, loss, and hope. Whether in *ghazals*, *nazms*, or lyrics, Akhtar's pen dances between intimacy and indictment.

Akhtar has never shied away from speaking his mind. He is a visible, articulate figure in India's socio-political discourse. His activism spans causes from communal harmony to women's rights, and he has used his public platform to challenge regressive laws, cultural dogma, and censorship.

As president of Muslims for Secular Democracy (MFSD), he has advocated for progressive reforms within the Muslim community, supporting the Uniform Civil Code and opposing triple

talaq, the form of repeated, vocalised divorce in Islam.

Also, his involvement with Citizens for Justice and Peace continues his efforts to keep the Gujarat 2002 riots in public memory, and to push for accountability.

He also played a crucial legislative role during his tenure in the Rajya Sabha, where he was instrumental in passing the Copyright Amendment Bill to ensure royalty rights for lyricists and composers, restoring dignity to creative contributors in India's entertainment industry.

In recent interviews and fora, Akhtar has voiced concern over what he calls the "creative decline" in Hindi cinema. He observes that today's Bollywood often chases spectacle over story, abandoning the rooted narratives that once connected with Indian audiences.

Akhtar contrasts this trend with the rising success of South Indian cinema, which he attributes to its cultural authenticity.

As he noted, "They're speaking to their own people", praising filmmakers from Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala for staying anchored in their lived realities.

In contrast, he argued, many Bollywood creators, who are descendants of migrants to Mumbai, have grown disconnected from their cultural origins, "dreaming in English", and borrowing Hollywood tropes without contextual depth.

Despite this, Akhtar remains optimistic. He cited films like *Udaan* as examples of emotionally grounded cinema, proving that even Mumbai-born creators can tap into genuine narratives when they prioritise truth over trends.

Akhtar's legacy extends beyond his filmography or awards cabinet. His body of work straddles multiple registers: the poetic, the political, and the performative. As both a chronicler and critic of his times, his words have shaped generations of audiences, through cinema, through song, and through public thought.

He has received honorary doctorates, including one from Pondicherry University, and was named among the 50 most powerful Indians by *India Today*.

His activism, poetry, and storytelling continue to inspire young writers and artists to seek meaning not only in art but in action.

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Costly umpiring decisions spark outrage from West Indies cricket experts

– West Indies head coach Daren Sammy has been fined and handed a demerit point following post-match comments criticising third umpire Adrian Holdstock, as mounting frustrations over controversial umpiring decisions marked the fall-out from the opening Test against Australia in Barbados.

...

Barbados — West Indies head coach Daren Sammy has been fined 15 percent of his match fee and received one demerit point for breaching Level 1 of the ICC Code of Conduct during the second day of the first Test against Australia at Kensington Oval.

The penalty followed critical remarks made by Sammy regarding third umpire Adrian Holdstock's handling of several contentious decisions that ultimately affected the outcome of the match.

Sammy, visibly upset by the dismissals of set batters Shai Hope and Roston Chase, questioned the consistency of decision-making during a post-day-two press conference.

"I have noticed, especially with this particular umpire, it is something that for me started in England. It is frustrating. I just ask for consistency in the decision-making," Sammy said, referring to Holdstock.

In accordance with Article 2.7 of the ICC Code, which prohibits public criticism of match officials, Sammy admitted to the offence and accepted the sanction proposed by match referee Javagal Srinath.

The first Test was marred by a string of controversial umpiring decisions that drew criticism not just from Sammy but also from West Indian cricket legends and former administrators.

Two major decisions on day two stood out. First, Chase was adjudged leg-before to Pat Cummins, and despite a spike on the snickometre suggesting a possible edge, Holdstock upheld the on-field umpire's call. Chase was dismissed for 44.

Shortly after, Shai Hope was given out caught behind off Beau Webster, with wicketkeeper Alex Carey claiming a one-handed grab. Replays suggested the ball may have brushed the ground before entering Carey's gloves, but Holdstock again ruled in



Adrian Holdstock



Daren Sammy

Australia's favour. Hope did not contest and walked off the field.

Later in the day, a decision involving Travis Head added fuel to the fire. Hope appeared to take a clean catch off the bowling of Shamar Joseph, but Holdstock ruled that the ball had touched the ground, denying West Indies a key breakthrough.

Both Hope and Chase had looked composed at the crease, with each approaching the half-century mark before their dismissals shifted momentum in Australia's favour. Chase, in particular, was playing a patient innings before his dismissal triggered a batting collapse.

West Indies' inability to capitalise on solid partnerships ultimately led to a substantial deficit, forcing them to chase a daunting target of 300, which proved beyond their reach.

Despite setbacks with the bat, West Indies' bowling showed promise. Commenting on the squad's potential, former West Indies' batter Lawrence Rowe said, "This squad has talent. I was very impressed with the bowling; they performed extremely well."

The sequence of controversial calls was a turning point in the match. Rowe noted that both Hope and Chase were "on 40-odd, and looking set", and believed that either could have gone on to score a century.

"If we had a lead of 70 to 100 runs, things could have been very different," he remarked. Instead, Australia set West Indies a 300-run target – a chase that was "always going to be difficult on that track", according to Rowe.

While criticism focused on umpiring, former Cricket West Indies CEO Bruce Aanensen was also frank about the team's shortcomings.

"By and large, most of them were catches that should be taken in Test cricket," he said, pointing to missed opportunities in the field.

The decisions in this match have reignited concerns about umpiring consistency, particularly in the use of technology. According to *The Sporting News*, Holdstock had the second-highest overturn rate (29.5 percent) by the DRS among 13 evaluated umpires in 2024.

The ICC High Performance Officiating programme assesses umpires on four key areas: on-field and TV umpiring decision-making and management, and high-performance values. Holdstock's actions in this Test are likely to be reviewed under these metrics, especially as repeated complaints from West Indies players and officials point to a perceived pattern of unfavourable rulings.

Sammy expressed his frustrations directly, stating, "We only hope for consistency, that is all we could ask for... It seems we come up on the sharp end of the stick all the time."

Rowe echoed the sentiment, stating: "I believe we got a couple of bad decisions... One of them could have gone on to score a hundred."

Aanensen was critical of both the decisions and the officiating process: "The ICC should definitely look at that... it is not one, it is not two, it is three (questionable decisions)."

On the Head dismissal, he added: "There was no doubt in my mind that Shai Hope's glove was under that ball... Three terrible decisions and Shai Hope and Chase were having a good partnership together and they knocked off both of them with bad decisions."

Australia too reportedly expressed dissatisfaction with one leg-before decision against Chase earlier on Day Two, as they believed the ball had missed the bat and struck the pad first.

Tony Gray says West Indies pacers hold the key to level Test series in Grenada

– Despite a 159-run loss in the series opener, former West Indies quick Tony Gray believes the maroon fast bowlers hold the key to levelling the Test series against Australia when the second match begins in Grenada tomorrow.

...

Former West Indies fast bowler Tony Gray has expressed strong confidence in the regional team's ability to even the three-match Test series against Australia, urging the side to double down on their fast bowling strengths when the second Test gets underway at the National Cricket Stadium in Grenada starting tomorrow to July 7.

Talking to the Trinidad and Tobago media ahead of the match, Gray pointed to the potent performance of West Indies' quicks in the opening Test at Kensington Oval in Barbados, where despite losing by 159 runs, they claimed 19 of the 20 Australian wickets.

Shamar Joseph led the charge with figures of 4/46 and 5/87, while Jayden Seales returned 5/60 in the first innings, supported by Justin Greaves (1/26, 1/55) and Alzarri Joseph (2/65).

"It's about taking them out of their comfort zone," Gray said, noting that Australia's batters often excel against tall pacers who provide bounce and width.

He added, "They're accustomed to facing taller bowlers at home like Mitchell Starc, Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood, and Cameron Green. But when shorter pacers like Kemar Roach,

Shamar Joseph, and even Jayden Seales come at them straight, hitting the stumps or close to the wicket, they struggle."

Gray emphasised that there is a proven "template of success" the West Indies must continue to follow: good lengths and lines, executed with discipline and pitch awareness. He referenced past examples to support his view, including Roach's ten-wicket haul against Australia at Queen's Park Oval in 2012, and Shamar Joseph's breakout 7/68 performance against the Aussies earlier in 2024.

He also pointed to South African pacer Kagiso Rabada's 5/51 in the June 2025 World Test Championship final, which similarly disrupted the Australians.

"In that first Test, those conditions were tailor-made for fast bowlers," Gray said, noting, "It's about the fast bowlers bowling wicket to wicket. That's what took the edge off the Aussie batters. They like width, they like bounce. When you deny that, and you have conditions with lateral and inconsistent movement, they become uncomfortable."

He said the pitch in Barbados demonstrated how effectively inconsistency in bounce could be used to disrupt Australia's batting rhythm, especially when paired with disciplined seam bowling.



Tony Gray

While spin was largely absent from West Indies' arsenal, with Jomel Warrican bowling just eight overs in the match and Roston Chase taking the lone wicket via spin, the conditions clearly favoured seam, a trend Gray hopes will continue in Grenada.

However, Gray cautioned that not all of the West Indies' bowlers should employ the same strategy. He believes Alzarri Joseph's natural bounce and preferred lengths play into the Australians' strengths. "Alzarri doesn't get the volume of wickets because his lengths allow that comfortable bounce," Gray explained, adding that tailoring roles to suit each bowler's strengths is essential.

Gray's sentiments echoed those of current West Indies bowling coach Ravi Rampaul, who has emphasised that understanding and exploiting match conditions is just as vital as playing the opponent.

"When you're playing Test cricket, you're not only playing your opponent – you're playing the conditions," said Gray. "The blueprint is there."

Reflecting on his own playing days, Gray recalled taking 6/50 against Australia in a losing effort at Queen's Park Oval in the early 1990s. While his Test career was hampered by injury and limited to just five appearances, Gray remains one of the Caribbean's sharpest fast-bowling minds.

Bangladesh's home series against India in jeopardy amid govt clearance delay

Bangladesh's much-anticipated home series against India remains in limbo, with Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Aminul Islam confirming that the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) is still awaiting government clearance.

The white-ball series, originally scheduled for August 17 to feature three ODIs and three T20Is, now faces postponement, although Islam remains optimistic about future possibilities.

According to the schedule announced in April, the series was set to begin with the first ODI on August 17 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur. The third and final ODI was slated for Chattogram, which was also scheduled to host the first T20I on August 26. The remaining two T20Is were to be played in Mirpur.

However, amid tense political and security conditions in Bangladesh, the feasibility of hosting India in August appears increasingly unlikely. Both cricket boards are actively exploring

alternative timelines.

While no on-field action has occurred yet, the stakes remain high for both sides. India, a dominant force in white-ball cricket, were expected to field a strong team, while Bangladesh looked to capitalise on home conditions. The series was projected to serve as vital preparation ahead of the upcoming global fixtures for both sides.

Though no tactical decisions have unfolded yet, the discussion around the scheduling underscores the logistical and diplomatic complexities of hosting international series in the current climate. Both boards are reportedly open to flexibility in dates, reflecting a mutual commitment to the bilateral engagement despite external uncertainties.

India and Bangladesh have developed an increasingly competitive cricketing rivalry in recent years, with tightly contested fixtures across formats. The last bilateral series held between the two nations generated significant interest and high viewership.

This series, if held, would continue to deepen cricketing ties and offer crucial exposure to emerging players.

"We're having positive discussions with the BCCI," Islam told media following the BCB's 19th board meeting at Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium, as reported by *Cricbuzz*.

"It's not like (hosting India) in August or September, we are having discussions how we can do the series and if we cannot host it now we will do it at another possible time. They (BCCI) are waiting for some government clearance," he added.

In a separate development from the board meeting, the BCB confirmed plans to include a woman selector in the national women's team selection panel.

"We have decided to include women selectors for the national women's team soon," said Islam.

He further noted the board's intent to expand the men's national selection panel, currently composed of Gazi Ashraf and Abdur Razzak.

Captain of her own destiny, Hayley Matthews anchors a winning legacy

– Hayley Matthews cemented her global dominance at the CWI/WIPA Awards, sweeping top honours for 2024 and solidifying her status as the world's premier Women's T20I all-rounder after a record-shattering year.

West Indies captain Hayley Matthews added more awards to her many other tributes on June 22, taking home both the Women's ODI and T20I Player of the Year awards at the eighth annual Cricket West Indies (CWI) and West Indies Players' Association (WIPA) ceremony held at the Wyndham Grand Barbados.

The honours came on the heels of her recognition by the International Cricket Council (ICC) as the 2023 Women's T20I Cricketer of the Year, capping off a year of phenomenal individual brilliance.

The awards celebrated Matthews' performance across 2023, a calendar year in which she broke records and redefined expectations. Her most dazzling highlight came against world champions Australia, where she smashed 132 runs in a historic 213-run chase in the second T20I at the North Sydney Oval.

That innings followed an unbeaten 99 in the series opener and 79 in the third and final match, bringing her series tally to a staggering 310 runs – the highest in a women's T20I bilateral series.

Matthews' impact in 2023 went beyond the bat. She amassed 700 runs at a strike rate of 132.32, the total making her the first woman ever to reach that milestone in a single calendar year. Her ability to blend classical strokes with innovative shot-making made her a nightmare for bowlers around the globe. Complementing her batting heroics was her mastery with the ball: her off-spin accounted for 19 wickets at an economy rate

Smriti Mandhana makes history with maiden T20I century in Nottingham

– Smriti Mandhana delivered a career-defining performance with her maiden T20I century, leading India to a commanding 97-run win over England, the hosts' heaviest T20I defeat by runs in the series opener at Trent Bridge.

India vice-captain Smriti Mandhana powered her way into cricketing history on July 28 with a sensational 112 off 62 balls, her knock steering India to a dominant 97-run victory over England at Trent Bridge in the first T20 International. The left-hander's innings not only secured her first T20I century, but also made her the first Indian woman to register centuries in all three formats of international cricket.

India posted 210 for 5, its second-highest T20I total, before bowling England out to seal their biggest win over the hosts in T20Is by runs.

Mandhana's knock was a commanding display of precision and power, marked by 15 fours and three sixes. She anchored India's innings from the outset, launching her assault on England's bowlers with a flurry of boundaries, particularly on the off-side. Her century came in 57 balls, eventually culminating in a 112-run blitz that stunned the home side and pushed them into unfamiliar territory.

Harleen Deol complemented Mandhana's charge with a rapid 43 off 23 balls, helping India to their second-highest T20I total. England, chasing 211, faltered under scoreboard pressure and folded, handing India a 97-run win, the largest T20I defeat by runs for the English women's side.

Mandhana's milestone innings placed her in elite company, becoming only the fifth cricketer to score a century in all three formats of women's international cricket, joining Heather Knight, Tammy Beaumont, Laura Wolvaardt, and Beth Mooney. Her previous centuries include 127 vs Australia in a Test (2021),

Harmanpreet Kaur back on the field to keep momentum going in Bristol

India captain Harmanpreet Kaur made her return to the field yesterday in Bristol, leading the team in the second T20 International against England after missing the series opener due to a head injury.

The team management confirmed her inclusion only on match day, following a successful training session the day before. Meanwhile, Smriti Mandhana added a significant achievement to her growing list of accolades, becoming only the second India player to appear in 150 women's T20 Internationals.

Kaur's comeback added a mere single with her visit to the wicket, but moreso, strategic depth to the Indian lineup. However, the narrative of consistency and impact continued with Mandhana, despite her 13 yesterday, who followed up her century in Nottingham with a strong showing as captain.

Mandhana stepped in as captain for the first T20I in Nottingham, delivering a standout performance with her maiden T20I century. The left-hander became the first India woman, and only the fifth cricketer in history, to score a century across



Hayley Matthews (left) receives her award from CWI's President Dr Kishore Shallow

of just 6.84.

Her dual-threat capacity consistently changed the complexion of games, often stepping up in pressure moments to swing momentum in West Indies' favour. It was this all-around excellence that earned her selection in the ICC Women's T20I Team of the Year 2023.

Matthews' leadership and versatility have become corner-

stones of the West Indies women's team. With the bat, she has shown an acute awareness of match situations – anchoring innings when needed, then accelerating with power and precision. Her bowling, marked by strategic flight and guile, repeatedly broke partnerships and restricted run flow in middle overs.

The Australia series was emblematic of her ability to shift momentum: her innings in all three T20Is set the tone and effectively neutralised one of the sport's most dominant teams.

Matthews, now 27, has long been hailed as one of the Caribbean's brightest cricketing stars. Her performances in 2023 marked a turning point not just in her career but for the visibility and ambition of women's cricket in the West Indies.

Her 700-run year is unprecedented, and her consistent match-winning contributions signal the arrival of a generational leader. The ICC honour is particularly significant – placing Matthews at the pinnacle of the international game and casting a spotlight on West Indies women's cricket globally.

Reflecting on the honours, Matthews stated, "It's nice to see all the hard work paying off. It has been a long two or three years to get to this point, it has been really nice to have a good time with the bat and the ball in the last year to help the team as best as I can. I am very grateful for this award and it is something that growing up I saw my role models achieving so to win one myself definitely means a lot."

CWI Director of Cricket Miles Bascombe also praised her performance, stating, "Hayley has been remarkable by any standard and has embodied leadership by example. Beyond her obvious talent, her professionalism and work ethic certainly underpin her performance and should be a source of inspiration to aspiring cricketers in the West Indies and the world over."



Smriti Mandhana

and 106 versus Australia in an ODI (2016).

"I did not think that it would come in the first match, but the finger was towards [Radha Yadav], that 'See, I got it today,'" Mandhana told *Cricbuzz*, referring to an earlier light-hearted exchange that motivated her to reach the landmark.

She added, "Because it's pretty frustrating to get out in the 70s and 80s over the last ten years... I'm happy that I could stay and take the team to the 19th and the 20th over."

Mandhana's performance also propelled her up the ICC T20I rankings for batters, where she climbed to the No 3 spot with a career-high rating of 771 points. She remains the top-ranked batter in the ODI format.

India's bowling unit backed up the batting brilliance with precision and control. Debutant Shree Charani delivered a

standout performance with a four-wicket haul, showcasing her bowling potential on the international stage.

"The way the bowlers bowled and executed the plan, it was just amazing," said Mandhana.

She added, "That makes our job very, very easy... Especially Shree... today the way she actually bowled was amazing, as did all the bowlers."

Mandhana's aggressive approach at the top set the tone early. Her boundary-laden start disrupted England's rhythm, and her ability to rotate strike while punishing loose deliveries maintained momentum throughout. With England unable to contain India's top order, they entered the chase already under pressure.

India's bowling strategy then capitalised on the large total, executing disciplined line-and-length variations to keep England's batters from settling. The debut of Shree Charani added a fresh dynamic, with her confident spell ensuring regular breakthroughs.

Mandhana, stepping in as stand-in captain due to Harmanpreet Kaur's late fitness withdrawal, maintained composure and clarity under pressure.

"As a batter, it doesn't change a lot," she said of the captaincy. "You don't think that you are captaining and you bat differently... I'm really happy that I could contribute today."

Mandhana's century fills a long-anticipated void in her T20I record. Despite several starts in the 70s and 80s over her decade-long career, she had yet to reach triple figures in the shortest format.

Her achievement was foreshadowed by a playful challenge from teammate Radha Yadav. "These girls are really hard on me sometimes," Mandhana told *Cricbuzz*, adding, "[Radha] was telling me, 'It's high time you get a century in T20Is... you are not doing justice to your talent.'"

India captain Harmanpreet Kaur made her return to the field yesterday in Bristol, leading the team in the second T20 International against England after missing the series opener due to a head injury.

The team management confirmed her inclusion only on match day, following a successful training session the day before. Meanwhile, Smriti Mandhana added a significant achievement to her growing list of accolades, becoming only the second India player to appear in 150 women's T20 Internationals.

Kaur's comeback added a mere single with her visit to the wicket, but moreso, strategic depth to the Indian lineup. However, the narrative of consistency and impact continued with Mandhana, despite her 13 yesterday, who followed up her century in Nottingham with a strong showing as captain.

Mandhana stepped in as captain for the first T20I in Nottingham, delivering a standout performance with her maiden T20I century. The left-hander became the first India woman, and only the fifth cricketer in history, to score a century across

all three formats of international cricket. Her leadership and form helped India secure a commanding 97-run win in the series opener.

In Bristol, she reached the milestone of 150 T20I appearances, joining an elite group of just seven cricketers globally to achieve the feat. Kaur was still ahead of the pack with 178 T20Is, the most by any player across both women's and men's formats.

"It's a special occasion for her and the Indian team," said offspinner Sneha Rana, adding, "We are grateful to have her in the team."

Meanwhile, India's decision to bring back Harmanpreet on match day was a tactical boost, especially as the team looks to build on its early lead in the five-match series. Her return also marked a positive sign for team stability, particularly ahead of crucial fixtures to come. Rana confirmed that the signs were promising during the team's practice on Monday, with Kaur participating in full drills before the final call was made.

Rana herself returned to the T20I setup in Nottingham, marking her first appearance since the 2023 T20 World Cup.

Harmanpreet sustained a head injury during a warm-up match against ECB Development XI last week. Though details of the incident remain unclear, she had struck a brisk 28 off 16 balls, including four boundaries, before being dismissed lbw by Sarah Glenn. She subsequently missed the pre-series press conference and sat out the first T20I as a precaution.

India's win in Nottingham set a strong tone for the series, with Mandhana's century positioning her as a central figure both in leadership and performance.

Rana noted the significance of Mandhana's 150th T20I and welcomed her own return to the squad. On Harmanpreet's fitness, Rana added that her training session was encouraging, and that her participation had been evaluated after Monday's nets.

Mandhana, reflecting on her captaincy in the first match, stated she had only learned of her role hours before the toss, though she "had a 50-50 idea", and felt prepared to lead.

With both Kaur and Mandhana setting benchmarks for longevity and excellence, India is looking to continue their momentum into the third T20I at The Oval on July 4. The series continues with matches in Manchester on July 9 and Birmingham on July 12, before shifting to the ODI leg of the tour.



Harmanpreet Kaur

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