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CHRISTMAS 2025



Being not naughty but nice has paid off for our happy and relieved young lady (right) in the Russell Lutchman photo at left, taken at the UniTnT children's Christmas party; in photo at centre, Santa visited the ICGAA's annual Christmas celebration (See Page 17); and in Hinano Beekhoo's photo on the right, Santa (and his bag of toys) is brilliantly intercepted by Davenport's MP Julie Dzerowicz (See page 16); all photos taken at Christmas events celebrated last weekend

Carnival spirit brings music, warmth to Blue Mountain

— Caribbean Winterfest returned to Blue Mountain from December 5 to 7 with sold-out events, blending Carnival music, costumes, workshops, and winter tourism in Ontario's premier alpine village. Festival leaders and provincial and municipal officials highlighted cultural heritage, diversity, emancipation history, and Toronto Caribbean Carnival's expanding regional impact.

By Romeo Kaseram
An LJI Community Report

Blue Mountain brought the Canadian snow and the Toronto Caribbean Carnival (TCC) brought the heat when Winterfest returned from December 5 to 7 with sold-out Caribbean cultural programming at one of Ontario's busiest winter destinations.

Caribbean Winterfest took over Blue Mountain Village for three days as the TCC delivered live performances, children's workshops, costume displays, drumming circles, dance activities, and a major evening fête.

The event, produced by the TCC's Festival Management Committee (FMC), was staged for the second consecutive year as part of the Carnival's expanding regional programming beyond Toronto.

Against winter lights and falling snow, Caribbean music, steelpan, calypso, and soca performances filled The Blue Mountain Village. Families participated in costume-making sessions and cultural workshops, while visitors explored a holiday marketplace offering seasonal and Caribbean-inspired items.

Evening events included the sold-out DeFrost Party at Rusty's @ Blue at the



MPP Charmaine Williams (left to right), TCC's Jennifer Hirlehey, MPP Brian Saunderson, and MPP David Smith at Winterfest 2025; at left, dressed for the cold weather, Ossie Gurley and the Truth's saxophonist, is totally warmed up and in the zone. Photos by Russell Lutchman

Blue Mountain Ski Resort. There were also heart-warming performances by Anika Berry, Maestre and Friends Live Parang Band, and Ossie Gurley and the Truth, with music from Dr Jay de Soca Prince, DJ Menace, and Greenz Connection.

Winterfest forms part of the FMC's mission to bring the rhythm, artistry, and spirit of Carnival into new communities across Ontario. It is also aligned with the broader strategy of extending Carnival's presence beyond Toronto's summer peak into regional tourism

See Page 14: Caribbean Winterfest



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By Romeo Kaseram
An LJI Community Report

Boxing will be the tool used to engage youth in the program, but organisers emphasise that mentorship, direction, and sup-

Mississauga Lions celebrates community volunteer

The Mississauga Monarch Lions' Humanitarian Award recognises the positive impact of an individual's exemplary philanthropic service, visionary guidance, and inspirational leadership to community life.



Parents or guardians who would like more information or who wish to register a young person for the program may contact PC Anthony Hanna of Toronto Police 23 Division's Neighbourhood Community Officer Team #2 by email at 11930@tps.ca or by phone at [647-221-3674](tel:647-221-3674).



A full-body photograph of a couple standing together. The man on the left is wearing a grey pinstripe double-breasted suit with a white shirt and a dark tie. He has a full dark beard and is looking towards the camera. The woman on the right is wearing a white off-the-shoulder dress with long sleeves and has long, dark, wavy hair. She is also looking towards the camera. They are standing in front of a white draped backdrop.

The families of Arshad Rahman and Aleeah Nagir announced the happy engagement of the couple on November 29. Surrounded by love, culture, and tradition, the excited couple is preparing for the next chapter that will unfold in their young lives. Their families extend the sincerest wish and blessings for the very best as they embark on their future union, and on their life's journey ahead.



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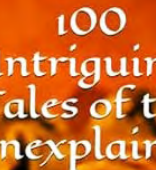
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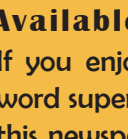
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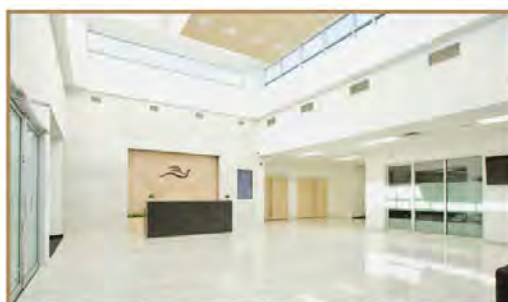
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HAND holds Hindu Heritage Month event

— The Hindu Affinity Network of Durham (HAND) brought students, educators, community leaders, and elected officials together at Pickering High School on November 29 for its second annual Hindu Heritage Month celebration, an event rooted in inclusive education, cultural recognition, and student voice within the Durham District School Board.

The Hindu Affinity Network of Durham held its second annual Hindu Heritage Month event on November 29 at Pickering High School in Ajax. The goals and objectives of HAND are to formalise and celebrate inclusive learning experiences relating to history, heritage, culture, and Way of Life including Hindu traditions.

This extends both to Hindu students attending DDSB and in partnership with others, both in DDSB schools and in the community in Durham Region. This collaborative approach highlights excellence, and gives voice to Hindu students throughout the DDSB as supported by educators and senior leaders of the Board.

The annual celebration of HAND stemmed from the recognition of Hindu Heritage Month, initially acknowledged in Ontario and subsequently across Canada.

This celebration was led by Community Co-Chair Cecil Ramnauth and DDSB Co-Chair Sabrina Brijmohan, and supported by educators and community leaders. HAND was formally established by the Durham District School Board (DDSB) in early 2023 as part of their anti-oppression strategy lead by Sean McCormack.

The anti-oppression strategy is designed to foster belonging for Hindu students by integrating classroom education and celebrating the rich diversity of the Hindu Way of Life. This educational approach includes a variety of Hindu traditions and festivals such as Diwali, traditional attire, worship practices, music, song and dance, as well as instruments such as the sitar.

It also features elements of fashion, cuisine, face painting, and henna, providing students with a comprehensive cultural appreciation and experience.

The event was carefully organised and executed by Brijmohan and Ramnauth, with volunteer coordination led by local Educators

and the team of Mukesh Mishra. Attendees included elected representatives from all three levels of government, DDSB Trustee Donna Edwards, senior DDSB leadership including Director Camille Williams-Taylor and Anti-Oppression Lead Sean McCormack.

The ceremony began with remarks from Director Camille Williams-Taylor, followed by the symbolic lighting of diya by students and DDSB's senior leadership. Current and former educators, along with DDSB senior leaders, were invited on stage to engage in the Guru Vandana ritual, a Hindu tradition honouring teachers with tikka, mala, and artie to express gratitude with humility and love.

The event showcased a lively array of student performances from all grade levels, featuring talents from schools across the Region.

Notably, a 12-year-old sitar player, Tanya Hariharan from Terry Fox Public School in Pickering, performed Canada's National Anthem.

The venue was styled to simulate a bazaar setting, with vendor stalls offering cultural wear, adornments, educational literature, complimentary finger food and chai tea, and a photo booth highlighting heritage games such as cricket and chess that evoked the values of culture and tradition.

The event featured speeches from DDSB Trustee Donna Edwards, DDSB Director Camille Williams-Taylor, MPP Rob Cerjanec, MP Juanita Nathan, Pickering Mayor Kevin Ashe, and Ajax Regional Councillor Marilyn Crawford. MPP Peter Bethlenfalvy and MP Jennifer McKelvie sent greetings.

Each speaker provided valuable insights and strong support for the celebration, emphasising the importance of HAND in sharing and educating young minds, and its role in promoting educational outcomes for students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

HAND later expressed its sincere gratitude to Pickering High School for hosting the celebration. Special thanks were extended to all volunteers, performers, community supporters, and the generous sponsors namely Ajax Crematorium and Visitation Centre, Hindu Forum Canada, and Shiv Bansal Team Century 21, whose unshakable support and contributions remain vital to the ongoing success and development of HAND.



Group leaders at HAND's celebration of Hindu Heritage Month in Durham (above); in photos, guests, educators, and students at the November 29 event



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Editorial

A time for goodwill

These are the years when our world feels dimmer. Yet across Mississauga, Brampton, Scarborough, and neighbourhoods throughout our GTA, Christmas lights are being lit again, small constellations of hope dotting unsettled horizons. Their glow reminds us that illumination is not only ornamental but guidance, especially in our time marked by turbulence and darkness. These lights offer a quiet instruction: hold steady, draw close, and let hope do its essential work.

The year 2025 continued on a now-familiar and fatiguing pattern of uncertainty. Climate change pressed harder on vulnerable regions, and was notable in Hurricane Melissa's traumatic impact on Jamaica. Significant and simultaneous episodes of warfare continued across the globe, bringing horrific and destabilising consequences for nations and populations already gravely impacted.

Our Caribbean, too, has felt the shearing winds. Rising anxieties over emerging militarisation in the region have revived colonial fears of power, provocation, and possession. Caricom nations are warning that peace, tourism, and trade that sustain our homelands are at risk.

Globally, the crises that shadowed last Christmas are still with us. The Israel-Hamas war persists; Russia's assault on Ukraine now enters its fifth year. Each conflict represents different shades of darkness: political, moral, and spiritual, reminding us the age of reason still falters before the primal impulses of conquest, extraction, and revenge.

Into this atmosphere comes our cherished Christmas season with its message of renewal, resilience, goodwill, and shared humanity.

For our Caribbean diaspora in Canada, Christmas is the season that anchors memory and belonging, a time when we welcome family indoors from the wintry cold to gather in our homes fragrant with tradition and good cooking. This season affirms who we are as a community, not in spite of difficulty, but because difficulty shaped our path.

Yet as we prepare for celebration, we must acknowledge the broader darkness that also enters through our front doors; that the external turbulences are mirrored by our interior ones: envy, anger, apathy, injustice. But Christmas asks us to illuminate both realms with its healing light.

The lights we turn on in our windows and trees are also reminders, not decorations. They light the path toward kindness, generosity, and reconciliation; toward restoring balance in a world that is increasingly pulled toward rifts and fracture. They remind us that compassion is a deliberate offering, and should not be just a seasonal flourish.

Some may dismiss these virtues as gentle sentiment, soft in a world dominated by hard power, acquisition, and appropriation. But history teaches us that moral imagination often lights the path toward meaningful change; that empires throughout time have also fallen through the awakening illumination of conscience, in the persistent belief that leaders can choose compassion and generosity, rather than war, domination, despair, and extraction.

For our community here in the GTA, Christmas remains an invitation to reflect on how its messages of hope and religious faith have carried our generations through uncertainty; today, these messages still offer clarity and a way forward. When its light is cast at our feet, it reveals pathways for community building, bridging divides, and extending a steady hand toward those navigating darkness.

In the coming festive season, and in the New Year, these virtues are not optional; they are essential. As conflicts burn in pockets of the world, and climate pressures intensify hardship in our homelands, sincerity and hope survive as resilient seeds germinating within the detritus of despair. Christmas reminds us that even small gestures of goodwill can steady a neighbour, strengthen a family, or repair fragile communal bonds.

Celebrating Christmas does not mean we turn away from the world's heaviness; instead, we confront it with a radiance that refuses to diminish. It is to look past the noise of warfare and the cold reach of geopolitics toward those small constellations of lights in our homes that have always guided us with hope, faith, and an unwavering commitment to a more peaceful world.

Views expressed are not necessarily those of this publication.
Letters to be published will be edited where necessary.
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Caribbean Christmas warms us during Canadian winters

As temperatures drop, snowfall becomes expected. Here in Canada, these are signals that we are inching closer to the Christmas season.

The cold and darkness outdoors are countered by vibrant holiday traditions. However, the warmth of Caribbean culture augments the joyfulness of the season.

Christmas with Caribbean culture is the best because it blends deep tradition, infectious joy, and a powerful sense of community into a celebration that feels truly alive.

Despite cold weather and quiet reflection, Caribbean culture and traditions transform the season into a vibrant, multi-sensory experience where music, food, family, and faith come together in unforgettable ways.

Music is a defining feature that elevates Christmas in Caribbean culture. Traditional carols mix seamlessly with calypso, parang, soca, reggae, and dancehall, giving the season a unique rhythm.

On islands like Trinidad and Tobago, parang music fills the air, blending Latin influences with Caribbean storytelling. Parang is central to the holidays because it captures the spirit of Christmas through music, community, and tradition.

Originating in Trinidad and Tobago, parang blends Spanish, African, and Indigenous influences, reflecting the region's diverse heritage.

During the holiday season, parang music brings people together as groups travel from house to house singing, playing instruments, and spreading joy.

The lively rhythms and storytelling lyrics celebrate faith, togetherness, and gratitude. Parang keeps cultural history alive while creating a festive atmosphere that makes Christmas in the Caribbean warm, joyful, and deeply meaningful.

These songs are not just background noise; they are central to the celebration, bringing people together to sing, dance, and relive memories year after year. The music makes Christmas feel joyful rather than solemn, energetic rather than restrained.

Food is perhaps the most beloved part of Caribbean Christmas. Each nation has its own specialties, but all share the idea that Christmas is a time for abundance and sharing.

From sorrel and ginger beer to black cake soaked in rum, from ham, rice and peas, and pastelles to pepperpot and curried



Ryan Singh

dishes, Caribbean Christmas foods are rich, bold, and deeply tied to history.

Pepperpot is a traditional Caribbean dish with deep historical and cultural importance, especially in Guyana. It originated from Indigenous Amerindian cooking, using *cassareep*, a sauce made from cassava, to preserve meat.

Over time, African, European, and Caribbean influences shaped the dish, making it a symbol of cultural blending.

Pepperpot is most commonly prepared at Christmas, where it represents family, continuity, and heritage.

Often cooked slowly and reheated over several days, it brings households together. Pepperpot preserves history on the plate, connecting generations through shared tradition and celebration.

Many recipes are passed down through generations, turning cooking into an act of love and cultural preservation. Meals are long, loud, and full of storytelling, reinforcing bonds among family members, young and old.

Caribbean Christmas also stands out because of its balance between celebration and meaning. Church services, midnight Mass, and nativity plays remain important, reflecting strong Christian roots.

At the same time, the season emphasises gratitude, generosity, and unity.

People make a special effort to give back, visit relatives, and include those who might otherwise feel alone. This blend of faith and festivity gives Caribbean Christmas both heart and soul.

Ultimately, Christmas with Caribbean culture is the best because it feels real. It is a reflection of warmer temperatures and spirit, rich in culture, and centred on human connection.

It reminds people that Christmas is not about perfection or excess, but about joy, togetherness, and celebrating life itself.

The most valuable aspect of the holidays is spending time with family and friends. Caribbean culture is built on our closeness with each other, and this is highlighted during the holidays.

Coming together isn't just a ritual, but it's a commonality we share and cherish. The holidays give reason to indulge in our culture and celebrate time together.

Curtains, cricket, and Christmas collide with confinement

Every December, long before festive music drifted across hibiscus fences, through Demerara windows accompanied by the scent of black cake and pots bubbling with pepperpot, I faced my own private Christmas purgatory: new curtain-making season.

Now during the Christmas school vacation classmates on my street did not need a visa stamped on their passport to freedom. For them it was unlimited entry for fishing by the river, chasing vexed wasps off cashew trees, or hurling down a bouncer on the asphalt on our street that was a chalk-lined cricket pitch.

For me, it meant spending my days under house arrest, peering through the bars of the burglar proof of our windows like a convict while my mother, balanced on a wobbling wicker chair, tape-measure in hand, called out numbers for her new curtains like a jail warden doing a head count.

"Mark this down," she commanded from her perch, her toes imprinted on the wicker groaning under her weight: "Curtain by the radiogram: 48-36."

But I was inattentive, already halfway outside on the roadway in spirit. Through the fancy-bricks I could hear the magistrates standing at the wicket passing cricket sentences: "Umpire!"; then a ferocious "Not out!" hanging on the dry December wind.

Each shout arrived like a well-aimed delivery, comprehensively beating my imaginary bat as it torpedoed by to slam into the dustbin that was the wicket, reminding me what I was missing.

Inside, the chair's one uneven leg trembled like a witness under oath. Whenever I leaned even slightly over, hoping to glimpse a falling wicket, the chair bucked, and my mother lurched forward, dropping the tape and slapping her hand heavily against the wall to desperately keep her balance.

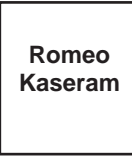
"But what happen at all to this harden child!?" she barked, regaining her wind that returned authority to her sails.

"All I'm asking you to do is hold the chair. You want me to come down there and show you how?" Her tone was menacing.

Holding the chair steady was not the problem. Holding on to my spirit wanting to soar outside was the real punishment. Outside the bars on the window were sunlight, freedom, and the sweet concussion of a ball hitting a dustbin. Inside was order and measurement, chairs with the wicker on the seat deeply sagging, and always the danger of my mother's short temper.

Now she was calling again, sternly: "Did you mark down length and breadth for the long window by the mango tree?"

I offered a noncommittal, "Uh-huh," the universal hymn of a prevaricating boy caught between guilt and the hope he would not be ensnared. The truth was I never heard a syllable over the celebratory explosion of high-fives after a delivery cannoned



into a dustbin, the street erupting over a fallen wicket.

Sensing my treason, the maternal court read out the charges: "You mean I calling length and breadth, and you not marking down anything other than just numbers?"

In this critical moment of accusation, I deployed the legal mind I was hoping to one day possess. Summoning the gravitas of a lawyer addressing a frowning colonial judge, I declared, "I didn't write it because the length is always the bigger number going across the room and breadth is the smaller number coming down the wall."

She froze with incomprehension, her forehead creased into a topographical map of doubt. Then, since I learned early that prayerfulness pays dividends, she conceded with an embroidered look, her brows tightly knitted with suspicion that communicated the terms of an uneasy truce.

If I was outsmarting her, I would know what o'clock it was, namely, two weeks of no outside play, a sentence that would drag me past Christmas straight into January, mere minutes before the school bell rang to start the new school term.

We resumed our labours; she measured, and I wrote down the numbers. Outside, another dustbin clanged to an accompanying cyclone of boyhood exuberance. The light faded, and mothers who were not engaged in Christmas curtain production called their exultant broods indoors; soon it was evening, its blanket of darkness sealing the first vacation day as a loss.

Eventually I came to understand that curtain-sewing was my seasonal conscription. But not for my old man, a seasoned veteran of Christmas domestic warfare, who with a perpetual wet finger to the wind, read the early signs with flawless instinct.

On curtain-making days, he timed his arrival home with surgical accuracy, always late enough to avoid assignment, early enough to appear supportive. But my mother was a veteran matriarch, knowledgeable in all the techniques of avoidance.

As soon as my old man crossed the gap, he was handed a *cocoyea* broom to sweep up curtain cloth scraps, rogue pins, and driven with determination to locate a misplaced needle lying in ambush where he most liked to sit and fade.

Looking back now, I understand those curtains were more than Christmas dressing. They were an annual rehearsal in my time in a household navigating its own inheritances in discipline, duty, and that gently oppressive choreography of colonial order handed down as legacy from one generation to the next.

And there I was, a boy leaning against the iron bars on the window, caught between two worlds: the measured, domestic order within, and the wild, chalk-lined freedom of a roadway rewritten with a cricketing script during a Christmas time that I still revisit today, but remain happy, and relieved, it has passed.



Dr Rosh Khan (left) with Jerry Karamat



Lilian Chatterjee (left) with Mani Singh



Rosalinda Rasul (left) with guests at the forum

Toronto forum showcases Guyana’s drive for diaspora engagement

— The December 6 Guyana Diaspora Forum Canada Edition convened business leaders, policymakers, and diaspora professionals in Toronto to examine Guyana’s rapid economic expansion and the growing role of diaspora investment, skills, and partnership in shaping the country’s development agenda toward 2030 and beyond.

By Romeo Kaseram
An LJ Community Report

Toronto – The Guyana Diaspora Forum Canada Edition was held in Toronto on December 6 as part of a global initiative aimed at strengthening diaspora engagement and forging long-term strategic partnerships to support Guyana’s national development.

Organised by ACE Consulting Group in collaboration with ExxonMobil Guyana, the forum brought together policymakers, diaspora professionals, private-sector leaders, and development partners for discussions centred on unlocking Guyana’s full potential through inclusive national development. It was held at the Woodbine Banquet and Convention Hall in Etobicoke.

The Guyana Diaspora Forum Series forms part of a long-term global effort to mobilise Guyanese talent, capital, and expertise in support of Guyana’s development agenda leading up to 2050. Along with the Canada Edition, fora have also been held in Washington, D.C., New York, and Florida.

At the inaugural gathering in Washington, D.C. in July, Dr Rosh Khan, President of ACE Consulting Group, issued a call to action for diaspora members to embrace their role as strategic stakeholders in Guyana’s next chapter.

“Guyana’s future will also be shaped by people who are will-

ing to bridge continents and contribute where it matters most. Our diaspora holds the skills, insight, and global context to help Guyana rise. They are our strategic partners. This forum is a call to action to co-create a Guyana where opportunity reaches every region, and where every citizen, whether at home or abroad, has a role to play,” Khan told the gathering.

Khan delivered a similar message in Toronto. Reflecting afterwards on the Etobicoke engagement, he underscored the level of participation and interest demonstrated by the Guyanese Canadian community, stating, “What an engagement! The full-house attendance, the quality of the questions during the discussions, and the depth of interaction during networking all pointed to a strong and growing interest within the diaspora to do more with, and for, Guyana.”

He added, “Most encouraging was the clear signal from attendees that there is real appetite not just to observe Guyana’s transformation, but to actively invest, participate, and contribute to its next phase of growth.”

Held under the theme, *Unlocking New Investments for 2020*, attendance at the event saw Guyanese Canadian leaders from business, civil society, religious organisations, education, healthcare, management, banking, and industry and commerce.

Guyana’s Honorary Consul in Toronto, Mani Singh, officially declared the forum open. In his opening remarks, Honorary Consul Singh provided contextual background while highlighting Guyana’s unprecedented rise as the fastest-growing economy in the world, and its global per capita positioning alongside the highest oil-producing nations.

“Guyana has transcended that old adage that says that the English-speaking South American nation, located on the

northern shoulder of South America, is the ‘Talk of the Town’... ‘We are now the Talk of the World’... Guyana’s development is beyond the potential stage because there are so many opportunities that diaspora Guyanese can tap into, and not just stand on the platform and watch as the train goes by,” Singh remarked.

Singh pointed to emerging opportunities in healthcare, education, agriculture, infrastructure, real estate, social services, aviation, supply chain management, and other sectors, noting that 2026 is positioning itself to be another year of exponential economic growth for Guyana.

The forum was moderated by Wazim Mowla, Senior Advisor to ACE Consulting Group, and featured a panel comprising Lorna Carlson, Socio-Economic Manager at ExxonMobil; Gerald Gouveia Jr., Chairman of the Private Sector Commission (Guyana); Lilian Chatterjee, Chair of the Canada-Guyana Chamber of Commerce and former Canadian High Commissioner to Guyana; and Rosalinda Rasul, Head of the Diaspora Affairs Unit of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Guyana.

With the panel reflecting a cross-section of professionals, like its other global engagements, the forum sought to bring together key private-sector and government officials, alongside ExxonMobil, to highlight the wide range of investment and professional opportunities now emerging in Guyana.

It also sought to leverage existing connections among Guyanese in the diaspora here Canada by linking them more directly to opportunities in Guyana. It is an outreach that comes at a time when Guyana’s rapid economic expansion has exposed shortages in technical, managerial, and emerging specialised skills across several sectors.



Khan speaks as the panel looks on



Attendees attentive to the panel discussion



A section of the audience at the diaspora forum

Transformative year of service as Consulate strengthens diaspora’s ties

A Christmas and New Year’s Message from
Guyana’s Honorary Consul Mani Singh

As we gather in the joy and warmth of the festive season, I take this opportunity to reflect on a remarkable year in the life of our Guyanese Canadian community. The year 2025 stands out as a landmark moment for our diaspora, a time of deepened outreach, strengthened partnerships, and meaningful togetherness across cultural, civic, religious, and humanitarian spaces.

It has been my honour to represent the Government and people of Guyana at numerous gatherings throughout the year. From large-scale community events to intimate cultural observances, every engagement reaffirmed the resilience, unity, and generosity that define our diaspora.

Recently, our annual Christmas Open House welcomed nearly 200 guests, offering not only celebration and fellowship, but also the chance for families and leaders to seek guidance on the Consulate’s expanding consular services.

This year saw the successful roll-out of Guyana’s new biometric passport system, one that offers safer, enhanced five- and ten-year passports, alongside our improved services for visas, certificates, and overseas birth registration. The demand for these services has been unprecedented and reflects renewed connections between Guyanese abroad and the homeland.

Our community also continued to shine across many spheres. At the *Guyana Diaspora Forum and Panel Discussion*,



Honorary Consul Singh (third left, front row) with Consulate staff

held under the theme *Unlocking New Investments for 2030*, we gathered business leaders, civil society, academia, and global partners to explore Guyana’s exponential economic rise.

It was a privilege for me to share the message that Guyana is no longer simply “The talk of the town”, but truly, “The talk of the world”, with opportunities emerging across healthcare, education, agriculture, real estate, and technology.

Equally inspiring were the religious, cultural, and philanthropic gatherings that showcased our diversity, and our shared commitment to service. Whether at the Jamaat Al Muminoon Annual Fundraising Dinner, the CIOG-Canada humanitarian event, Vishnu Mandir’s 45th Grand Diwali Gala, or the celebration of Amerindian Heritage Month, our community stood

united in supporting vulnerable Guyanese, preserving cultural heritage, uplifting one another, and building our diasporic presence.

This year also brought moments of solemn reflection, including the passing of respected diaspora stalwart Brother Gordon Winter. His lifelong service to Guyana and to all Guyanese-Canadians, irrespective of race, religion, or political affiliation, reminded us of the power of humility, patriotism, and love for Guyana and our community abroad.

Our spirit of regional solidarity was equally strong. The diaspora-led relief effort for Jamaica following Hurricane Melissa reflected the compassion that binds us across Caricom. I was proud to share that Guyana extended its support to our Jamaican brothers and sisters in their time of need, demonstrating that our nation’s growth is matched by its generosity.

As we look toward 2026, we do so with optimism and purpose. The Guyana Consulate anticipates an even greater surge in requests for services as Guyana continues its record-breaking economic and infrastructural transformation. We welcome this renewed engagement and remain committed to serving every member of our diaspora with efficiency, respect, and warmth.

On behalf of His Excellency President Dr Mohamed Irfaan Ali, the Government and people of Guyana, and the dedicated staff of the Consulate General, I extend my warmest wishes to you and your loved ones for a Merry Christmas and a Happy, Prosperous New Year. May the season bring peace, joy, and renewed togetherness to all.

Alliances shape a nation's destiny, but demand tough trade-offs

Dear Editor,

History is filled with examples of nations that rose to prominence not by isolation but through carefully crafted alliances that reshaped their destiny. Strategic partnerships, whether military, economic or political, have long served as stepping stones for national advancement.

Yet behind every treaty and handshake lay a series of sacrifices, compromises, and difficult decisions that leaders believed were necessary for their people's long-term prosperity.

Today, as Trinidad and Tobago deepens its alignment with US' policies towards Venezuela, we are seeing the same pattern: opportunity, risk and sacrifice interwoven in pursuit of national interest.

One notable example is the alliance formed during World War II among the US, Britain, and the Soviet Union. The "Grand Alliance" was, by ideology, an unnatural partnership. Capitalism stood beside communism; democracy worked alongside authoritarianism. Each nation sacrificed long-held political reservations in pursuit of a common objective: defeating Nazi Germany.

For Churchill and Roosevelt, aligning with Stalin meant facing criticism at home and temporarily tolerating a regime that contradicted their values. For Stalin, accepting Western aid meant exposing Soviet vulnerabilities and granting the Allies influence over his war strategy. Yet, despite the uneasy nature of the partnership, the alliance changed the course of the world and paved the way for post-war reconstruction.

The European Union also stands as a modern testament to the benefits and burdens of strategic alliances. Member states surrendered elements of national control, ranging from trade policy to monetary sovereignty, in exchange for collective stability and economic opportunity.

The sacrifice of certain independent powers was the price for access to a vast single market, shared security protocols, and a unified diplomatic presence. For smaller European states, this trade-off was transformative, granting them influence they

could never have achieved alone.

Closer to our time, the economic rise of Singapore offers another compelling lesson. At independence, the small island nation forged strategic alliances with larger economies, welcoming foreign investment, and aligning its policies with global trade networks. This required significant internal adjustments: tight fiscal discipline, adherence to international standards, and a willingness to open its domestic markets.

But the sacrifices paid off, turning Singapore into one of the world's most competitive economies.



Kamla Persad-Bissessar

Applying that lens to Trinidad and Tobago's contemporary stance helps explain the logic behind the government's choices and the difficult trade-offs involved.

Trinidad and Tobago has long had a working relationship with the US, through agreements like the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI), bilateral investment deals, information sharing, and maritime security cooperation. But now, with regional instability swirling around Venezuela, drug trafficking, alleged narco-terrorism, and political chaos, Trinidad and Tobago's leadership perceives greater value in deepening that alliance.

That alignment has come with clear sacrifices. First, Trinidad and Tobago risks its diplomatic standing with Venezuela. By supporting US security operations, Trinidad and Tobago has invited condemnation from Caracas. Energy deals once under negotiation with Venezuela, including off-shore natural gas cooperation, have been suspended or revoked because of these tensions. That means Trinidad and Tobago may forgo potential future gains from Venezuelan resources, or must find new energy partners and strategies.

Second, there is a domestic cost. A close security alliance with the US has made some citizens uneasy: foreign naval presence, involvement in drug-war operations, and taking sides in a regional power struggle all carry risks. For a small Caribbean democracy like Trinidad and Tobago, that delicate balancing act, between sovereignty and security, between regional bonds

and international alignment, will strain internal unity and provoke public debate.

Third, Trinidad and Tobago must manage its relationship with the broader Caribbean community. Many neighbouring states view US-Venezuela tensions warily; by siding with Washington, Trinidad and Tobago may isolate itself within regional diplomatic circles.

Yet from the perspective of the government, these sacrifices are weighed against real threats: illicit trafficking, maritime insecurity, and potential spillover of Venezuelan instability into Trinidad and Tobago's shores. The decision to lean towards the US is portrayed not as subservience but as pragmatism, a protective measure for national security and stability.

Much like those earlier nations whose alliances changed their destinies, Trinidad and Tobago hopes this strategic alignment will position it for a safer and more prosperous future. In a rapidly shifting world, there are no easy choices. But for Trinidad and Tobago, choosing alliance over isolation may be a position worth taking, and Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar must be commended for taking this bold stand.

Ricardo Jimenez, Trinidad and Tobago, via email.

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Strong expansion as oil and gas fuel growth in Guyana’s economy

Booyed by a booming oil industry and healthy growth in the non-oil sectors, Guyana’s economy continued to surge ahead in 2025.

However, despite the economic boom, undercurrents of dissatisfaction prevailed among certain segments of the population, largely due to factors such as the uneven distribution of the country’s new-found oil wealth, allegations of corruption and nepotism, and the increasing cost of living.

To be fair, the government implemented a wide range of measures as part of its ongoing efforts to increase disposable incomes and improving the standard of living of the population during the year.

Among these initiatives are a one-off cash grant of GY \$100,000 to every citizen 18 years and older as of the January 1, 2024; an increase in the minimum monthly wage for public sector workers from \$75,000 to \$100,000 by the end of 2025; a \$10 billion injection into the National Insurance Scheme; free education at the University of Guyana; an annual \$50,000 Because We Care cash grants for all students; a universal healthcare voucher of \$10,000 for all children to cover essential medical tests; among other initiatives.

The highlight of the year was the PPP/ Civic’s victory in the September 1 general elections, during which the ruling party retained power by securing a majority 36 of the 65 contested seats. However, a major political surprise was the performance of the three-month old party, We Invest in Nationhood (WIN), led by US-sanctioned Azruddin Mohamed. WIN secured 16 seats to become the major Opposition, displacing the long-time rival People’s National Congress Reform (PNCR).

However, in November, Azruddin Mohamed, who has rapidly risen to national prominence, was arrested along with his father Nazar Mohamed, following a US extradition request. The arrests triggered political tension, and accusations from Mohamed that the government was using State power to persecute Opposition figures. To date, WIN has not been recognised as the official Opposition, pending the outcome of Azruddin’s extradition case.

Meantime, the stake behind much of the political and economic activity remained the country’s offshore oil wealth, closely tied to a long-standing territorial disagreement with Venezuela over the resource-rich region of Essequibo. This dispute continued to shape foreign relations, defense decisions, and nationalistic rhetoric.

During the first half of the year Venezuela ramped up its claim to the Essequibo region, but activities slowed under an international show of support for Guyana, and more recently threats by the US to arrest Venezuela’s leader, Nicholas Maduro, along with potential military action.

On the economic front, the economy continued to fire on all cylinders, fuelled by continued expansion of the oil and gas sector and robust performance of the non-oil economy.

At the end of the first half, it is estimated that the overall economy grew by 7.5 percent, and the non-oil economy by 13.8 percent. As a result, it is now forecasted that real GDP growth for the overall economy in 2025 will be 15.2 percent, up from 10.6 percent, while the non-oil economy will grow by 13.9 percent, marginally up from the original forecast of 13.8 percent.

Inflation for the 12-month period ending June 30 was 4.2 percent, and is expected to fall to 3.1 percent for the whole of 2025. This is in spite of rising food prices, which climbed by eight percent in the first half of this year. The rise in food prices was largely offset by the sharp decline in fuel prices, with gasoline, diesel, and kerosene falling by 20.9 percent, 32.8 percent, and 34 percent, respectively.



Dwarka Lakhan

At a sectoral level, the agriculture, fishing, and forestry sector expanded by an estimated nine percent in the first half of the year.

Within this sector, sugar production expanded by 136.7 percent in the first half, a somewhat deceiving rate of growth given that production was only 15,954 tonnes, compared to 6,739 tonnes during the same period last year.

While sugar production remains historically low, employment in industry rose, with 470 new workers hired in the first half, bringing total employment at Guysuco to 8,362 persons as of June. Value-added production is also advancing, with Guysuco producing 2,686 tonnes of Demerara Gold packaged sugar, and expanding output of Albion Gems branded products.

Although the sugar industry continues to struggle, the half year report noted that, “The Government remained firmly committed to investing in the sugar industry with the sum of \$7.8 billion spent during the first half to advance the planned rehabilitation of the five sugar estates and to ensure the smooth operation of the sugar industry for expanded sugar production.”

On a more optimistic note, while the rice industry recorded a 13.9 percent expansion, the other crops subsector gained 7.4 percent, and the livestock subsector 11.7 percent.

According to the Guyana Rice Development Board (GRDB) production of 410,194 tonnes of rice equivalent for the first six months of 2025 is up from 362,030 tonnes in the same period last year. Favourable weather and continued government support, including \$2.2 billion in fertiliser and pesticide assistance, have helped sustain yields at 6.6 tonnes per hectare. The production target for the full year remains 804,000 tonnes, with an overall projected growth of 12.4 percent.

The other crops subsector experienced increased output across nearly all major categories: vegetables (6.9 percent), coconuts (30.3 percent), fruits (10.1 percent), root crops (14.1 percent), and spices (12.8 percent). This expansion has been supported by improved weather conditions, expanded acreage, and the continued spread of shade-house cultivation – with 97 new shade houses constructed so far this year, bringing the total since 2021 to 700.

The livestock subsector expansion was bolstered by higher output across all product lines. Poultry production increased by 12.8 percent. During the first half the government expended some \$867.7 million of the total \$1.7 billion budgeted for the industry, supporting key initiatives such as the installation of new duck hatchers, poultry facilities, and the ongoing construction of a beef abattoir, and a modular pig processing facility.

In the fishing and aquaculture subsector, fish output grew by 16.1 percent, reaching 11,404 tonnes by the end of June 2025. However, overall growth was tempered by a decline in marine shrimp production, which fell by 42.4 percent to 5,520 tonnes, largely due to low fleet activity and poor catch rates. Despite this, the subsector is still projected to grow by 2.1 percent for the year.

The manufacturing sector expanded by 26.8 percent in the first half, driven by strong growth across all subcategories – other manufacturing (30.8 percent), rice manufacturing (12.4 percent), and sugar manufacturing (136.7 percent). This broad-based growth reflects improved output in non-metallic products, plastics, pharmaceuticals, and other processed goods.

In the agro-processing industry the government spent \$456.4 million of the budgeted \$800 million to support the development of the industry, with a drive to expand production of non-traditional crops. According to the report, “the Guyana Marketing Corporation recorded



Guyana’s government is firmly committed to investing in the sugar industry

73 additional products being available in the first half of 2025 that included expanded product lines of wines, soaps and flours and new products that included seasoning, condiments and snacks”.

In the extractive industries sector, the mining and quarrying sector is estimated to have grown by 5.9 percent in the first half of the year, driven by increased output across all subsectors – bauxite, gold, other mining, and oil and gas.

In this sector, the bauxite industry is estimated to have grown by 133.1 percent in the first half of the year, and sector is now projected to grow by 65.9 percent for 2025.

The gold industry grew by an estimated 10.9 percent, with higher declarations from a single large producer and the small- and medium-scale miners. The sector’s growth target for 2025 remains unchanged at 17.2 percent.

The other mining and quarrying industry, which comprises sand, stone, diamonds and manganese, is estimated to have grown by 24.2 percent in the first half, driven by greater activity in the construction sector. This industry is now expected to grow by 21.2 percent in 2025.

The petroleum subsector grew by an estimated 5.5 percent, with 115.7 million barrels of oil produced in the first six months of this year. The industry is now projected to grow by 15.6 percent for the entire year.

The manufacturing sector is estimated to have grown by 26.8 percent in the first half, driven by growth across all subcategories, other manufacturing, rice and sugar. The sector is now projected to grow by 14.9 percent this year.

The services sector is estimated to have expanded by 6.6 percent in the first half of the year, primarily supported by growth in wholesale and retail trade and repairs, administrative

See page 20: Oil-fueled growth

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In photo, AFEY's Co-chairs Superintendent Ron Taverner (third from left) and Dhaman Kissoon (fifth from left), with members of the Rotary Club of Brampton Flower City at the Children's Christmas party

Laughter, celebration as AFEY treats kids with gift-giving, joy

The Woodbine Banquet and Convention Hall came alive with colour, laughter, and unfiltered joy on December 13 as Advocates for Etobicoke Youth (AFEY) hosted its annual Children's Christmas party, a community tradition that once again delivered warmth in generous measure.

Held in partnership with the Rotary Club of Brampton Flower City, the Toronto Police Service, and several other supporting organisations, the event drew a large turnout, transforming the hall into a festive playground of possibility and delight.

Each child was treated to a full meal and a gift-wrapped toy, but the day offered far more than what could be joyfully carried home. The Toronto Raptors mascot brought high-energy excitement, while the balloon lady worked her magic.

Face painting stations stayed busy, a dancing competition

kept the floor buzzing, and the atmosphere remained joyfully charged throughout. The event was also graced by the presence of Ontario's Premier Doug Ford.

An emotional crescendo arrived with Santa himself, whose entrance sent the children into pure, ecstatic uproar. However, amid the laughter and music, there was also a quiet, poignant reminder of why such events matter: one parent shared the gift received would be the only toy for that child this year.

For Co-chairs Superintendent Ron Taverner and lawyer and humanitarian Dhaman Kissoon, the moment captured the heart of the occasion. Also, their happiness with the community's ongoing support was unmistakable, and ultimately, it was written most clearly in the smiles on the children's faces, which spoke volumes long after the music and the dance steps faded.



Kids were treated to lunch at the event



A hug from the Toronto Raptors' mascot



Foregrounded by the food stations, kids at the AFEY Christmas party having a good time



Rotary Club members at the food stations

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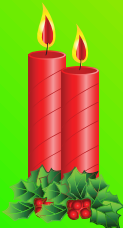
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Mottley named to Forbes’ Powerful Women’s list

Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley has been ranked number 99 on the 2025 Forbes World’s 100 Most Powerful Women list, joining a global cohort of political, business, philanthropic, and cultural leaders whose decisions shape governments, economies, and international policy.

In introducing its 2025 list, *Forbes* observed that “power concentrates where the world is being rebuilt”, noting that this year’s ranking captures women “at the centre, directing capital that determines AI’s trajectory, managing supply chains [that] governments compete to secure, and steady-ing institutions under historic pressure”.

Within this framework, *Forbes* stated that women fea-tured on the list are operating inside “interconnected systems”, where their decisions determine “which countries and corpora-tions maintain strategic advan-tage, and which fall behind”.

Mottley’s inclusion places the Caribbean within this global matrix of influ-ence, where leadership is increasingly mea-sured by impact rather than scale.

Forbes cited Mottley’s sustained internation-al influence, highlighting her assertive voice on climate change, her diplomatic reach, and her central role in guiding Barbados through a major constitutional transition.

According to her *Forbes* profile, Mottley was elected prime minister in 2018, becoming the first woman to hold the office. Since then, the publication notes, she has emerged as a prominent global advocate on climate issues, particularly on behalf of small island develop-ing states.

A key moment referenced by *Forbes* is Mottley’s 2021 address to the United Nations General Assembly, which the publication described as an “impassioned speech” calling for urgent global action on climate change.

That same year, *Forbes* noted, the United Nations Environment Programme honoured

Mottley as a *Champion of the Earth for Policy Leadership*, further reinforcing her interna-tional standing on environmental and climate policy.

In outlining the broader context of glob-al leadership, *Forbes* observed that technol-ogy and climate infrastructure have become “a question of national survival”, particularly for countries facing structural and environmental pressure.

Forbes also pointed to Mottley’s leadership during Barbados’ historic 2021 transition to a parliamentary republic, which formally removed the Queen of England as Head of State.



Mia Mottley

The publication framed this moment as emblematic of leadership exercised at “inflec-tion points that will determine geopolitical order”, situat-ing Barbados’ constitutional transformation within wider global shifts in governance and sovereignty.

Mottley appears on the 2025 list alongside European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, ranked num-ber one; European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde at number two; and Sanae Takaichi, Japan’s first female prime minister, at number three.

Now in its 22nd year, the *Forbes* ranking evaluates influence using four criteria: eco-nomic resources, media presence, measurable global impact, and breadth of reach. The 2025 list includes 100 women from 17 countries who collectively wield an estimated \$37 trillion in economic power and influence more than one billion people worldwide, according to *Forbes*.

Forbes also noted that Mottley’s leadership journey began decades before her lead role as Barbados’ prime minister. Her first ministe-rial appointment came in 1994 as Minister of Education, Youth Affairs and Culture, mark-ing the start of a political career that would later elevate her to regional and international prominence.



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FROM RENTING TO OWNING: TURNING THE WAITING GAME INTO A SUCCESSFUL STRATEGY

Recently, a young couple sat across from me, both looking frustrated. They had been renting a small condo in Mississauga for nearly five years, and although they had good jobs and a decent income, the dream of owning their own home still felt just out of reach.

Their story is one I hear often these days. Across Canada, home prices are falling, and mortgage rates, both fixed and variable, are beginning to ease. The market has cooled, giving buyers more negotiating power. Still, many first-time buyers are staying on the sidelines, uncertain if now is the right time to buy.

In my book, *The Road to Homeownership: A Canadian Blueprint*, I emphasise the importance of preparation. Homeownership is not just a financial milestone: it is a mindset shift. It requires discipline, patience, and a strategic approach.

If you are currently renting, this could be a good opportunity to establish a solid financial footing and save for your down payment. Think of it as practice before the big game. In Canada, the minimum down payment varies depending on the price of your home.

- **Five percent** for homes valued up to \$500,000
- **Ten percent** on the amount over \$500,000 (up to \$1.5 million)
- **20 percent** for homes valued over \$1.5 million

If your down payment is less than 20 percent, you'll need mortgage loan insurance, which is an extra cost that protects the lender, not you. That is why many buyers aim to save enough to reach the 20 percent threshold.

Here are four innovative ways to save for your down payment:

1. **Open a First Home Savings Account (FHSA).** The FHSA is one of the top tools available to Canadians today. You can contribute up to \$8,000 annually, with tax deductions similar to an RRSP and tax-free withdrawals like a TFSA. Over time, it can grow into a significant part of your down payment.
2. **Tap into your RRSP with the Home Buyers’ Plan (HBP).** If you’ve been contributing to an RRSP, you can withdraw up to \$60,000 (or \$120,000 for couples) tax-free for your first home – as long as you repay it over 15 years.
3. **Automate Your Savings.** Arrange an automatic transfer to move money into a separate “home fund” with each payday. Treat it as a bill you pay yourself. Over time, it becomes natural — and your savings grow quietly in the background.
4. **Redirect Windfalls and Extras.** A tax refund, bonus, or even a side gig can be directly added to your future home savings. It is much easier to save from unexpected gains than to cut from your regular budget.

The government has also eased some regulations. Starting December 15, 2024, first-time buyers with insured mortgages can choose a 30-year amortisation, which reduces their monthly payments. If you are buying in Ontario, you might also qualify for up to \$4,000 back through the Land Transfer Tax Rebate, along with a \$1,500 First-Time Home Buyers’ Tax Credit to help cover closing costs.

The market remains unpredictable. Prices could fall further, or they might stabilise and rise again. No one knows for certain. What is clear is this: being prepared gives you control.

Use this time to reduce debt, improve your credit, and grow your savings. Get pre-approved for a mortgage so you know what you can comfortably afford. Visit open houses, research neighbourhoods, and continue learning.

The couple I mentioned earlier decided to take action. They opened an FHSA, automated their savings, and created a plan to pay off their car loan within six months.

Owning a home might seem far off, but it is nearer than you believe, especially if you see this waiting time as part of your journey, not a setback.

Take small, steady steps. Learn the system. Use the tools available to you. And most importantly, believe it is possible, because it is. Your dream home is not out of reach. You are simply preparing to claim it.

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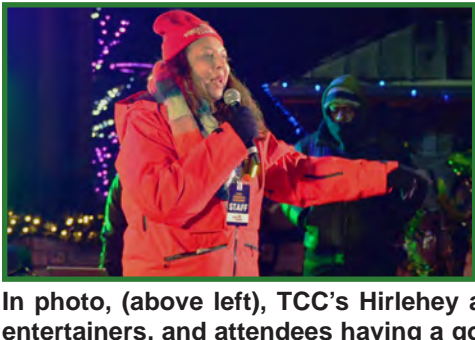
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In photo, (above left), TCC's Hirlehey addresses the crowd; in photos, officials, entertainers, and attendees having a good time. Photos by Russell Lutchman

Caribbean Winterfest brings Carnival rhythms to Blue Mountain snow

From Page 1

corridors. The FMC situates *Winterfest* as an opportunity to integrate Caribbean cultural expression into Canadian seasonal life and economies, while strengthening year-round engagement for deeper cross-community participation.

The Carnival began as a gift to Canada during the 1967 Canadian Centennial and has since commemorated Caribbean culture for over half a century. Rooted in emancipation traditions, its programming reflects unity, pride, and the expressive power of music, dance, and costume. As North America's largest celebration of Caribbean culture, the Carnival contributes significantly to Canada's cultural and social landscape.

Winterfest continues this legacy by bringing Carnival traditions into new environments and seasons, fostering cultural connection while expanding the festival's regional reach.

In her opening address at the sold-out venue, Jennifer Hirlehey, Executive Chair of the TCC, expressed appreciation for the event's return to Blue Mountain, and acknowledged the support of municipal and provincial partners.

"We are so proud to be here at the Blue Mountain for a second year," Hirlehey said. She emphasised the collaborative support behind *Winterfest*, noting, "We could not do this, however, without the help of a three-level federal commission of the city. We have here representatives from the city and from the province."

Underscoring the Carnival's national impact, Hirlehey said, "Last year, the Toronto Caribbean Carnival contributed half a billion dollars of economic impact to Canada. Half a billion dollars! That is more than most major corporations. Two hundred million dollars in tax revenue."

She added, "I believe that all levels of government are now recognising the enormous impact and contribution that the Caribbean people have on our country!"

In attendance at the event was Charmaine Williams, MPP for Brampton Centre and Ontario's Minister for Women, Social, and Economic Opportunities. In her address, she brought a moment of reflection to the festivities by acknowledging the significance of December 6.

"I just want to take a sobering minute to acknowledge that today is December 6. It is the 36th anniversary of the École Polytechnique, the murder of 14 women who were murdered because they were put in an engineering university course," she said, adding, "It's a sobering moment to realise how important it

is as women to have the freedom to be and do what they believe in our world."

Williams then linked her reflection to the celebratory atmosphere of Carnival, its empowerment, and the enabling of creativity and agency.

"When you go and participate in Toronto Carnival, you see women bringing up themselves, dressing in these beautiful costumes, and living in the way that they want to," she said, adding, "This is one of the reasons why Toronto Carnival is so important for all of us from the Caribbean to come out and celebrate our culture, our heritage, and our freedom."

Williams also thanked Blue Mountain staff "for opening this place to make it possible for us to celebrate our warm cultural heritage on a cold, cold Toronto day." She added, "As Caribbean people, it doesn't matter what the weather is, we're going to have a nice time."

Also addressing the gathering was MPP David Smith of Scarborough Centre, who emphasised the expanding reach of Carnival across Ontario. Smith is Parliamentary Assistant to the Ministry of Energy and Mines.

"One of the things about that is that Toronto is spreading all across Ontario, and we're here today to celebrate this moment and hoping that we can see all of you next summer for our Carnival," he said.

Brian Saunderson, MPP for Simcoe-Grey, welcomed visitors to his home riding and highlighted the winter-to-Carnival contrast that characterised the event, saying, "Only in Simcoe County can you start off the day wearing a Santa hat in a Santa Claus parade, and then end up in a Caribbean Festival..." he said, adding, "We're getting the snow, and we're bringing the heat!"

Saunderson also congratulated organisers on the sold-out event, saying, "This is the second year, and they've already sold out," he said.

Also, he noted the value of tourism for the region, declaring, "It's wonderful to see the diversity. This is a growing area of tourism, a huge part of our portfolio out there."

During his delivery, Toronto Councillor Michael Thompson spoke to the lineage and history, framing *Winterfest* in the historical and cultural context of emancipation.

"Much respect to you and the team here and the board for coming up with this fascinating idea that we can actually have a Caribbean Carnival at Blue Mountain in Collingwood," he

said, declaring, "How is that for forward thought and forward thinking?"

He added, "This is about transformation and the changing of place and changing of opportunity and bringing about a transformation of change. What we are doing here today is celebrating, and in fact we should always be celebrating. But celebrating for a purpose."

He emphasised the roots of Carnival's pageantry, saying, "We're celebrating freedom. We're celebrating emancipation," he said, adding "All of these amazing costumes and all of these pageantry and colours that you see here has come from a more deprived and brave state of ...human conditions - that in fact Black people found themselves in with respect to slavery."

Thompson added that communities have "emancipated ourselves and we have acculturised ourselves from that scourge of humanity", linking the evolution of Carnival to ongoing efforts to "build a better human society and a human race".

Addressing future generations, Thompson said, "We want to make sure that they understand that in bringing the warm to the cold, the cold to the warm, we gather as humanity, we gather as people, so that we can rise together."

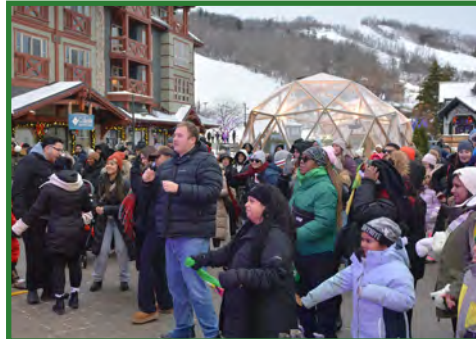
He concluded by affirming shared values: "We all respect one another. We all celebrate one another," he said, declaring, "God bless Canada, and God bless us all for what we do on a daily basis to make sure that we live in the best country, the best place in the world."

Riffing off Thompson's philosophical reach Hirlehey concluded with an exposition of the TCC's guiding values.

"Councillor Thompson touched on something about the diversity of our country," she said, declaring, "The Toronto Caribbean Carnival is committed to promoting diversity of every single race. In Trinidad and Tobago we have a saying... 'Every single race has an equal place'. And I think in Canada that really is what we embody."

She affirmed that inclusivity remains core to the TCC's work, stating, "We want to make sure that every person, every race, every kind of people, you are welcome at the Toronto Caribbean Carnival," Hirlehey said.

"That is the mantra that we have. We are here to promote ethno-cultural understanding. Understanding between races and people. And that is why we are so successful at what we do. Because we are the place where the world is welcome," she concluded.



Down Liberty Street: Reflections on our diaspora's dreams, aspirations

By Dhanpaul Narine

This is our 15th edition of Down Liberty Avenue and it comes at a most significant time. Over the years, Liberty Avenue has reflected the dreams and aspirations of the migrant. The strip has seen its fair share of emotions, from euphoria to downright depression, from the emergence of business to the changing signs of storefronts that signal better days ahead.

There was the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic year when everything was shut down and Liberty Avenue became a ghost town. The *New York Times* reported that the Queens community was the “epicentre of the epicentre”. When this was translated into mortality rates, it was found that the Indo-Caribbean community had some of the highest numbers.

The lack of information as to the seriousness of Covid-19, the refusal by workers to stay at home, and population density, were the main factors. In addition, it took a long time for vaccination and the need for social distancing to be understood.

Then as Covid-19 receded, the community needed a jolt, a figurative shot in the arm to propel it to another level. It happened when a certain Avenue was renamed on May 29, 2021.

On a cold, rainy, and windy day, the faithful gathered in Liberty Avenue. Bill de Blasio, Mayor of New York City was about to make his entry that would create history. The Speaker of the City Council had introduced a co-naming legislation that would see the sign *Little Guyana Avenue* installed at Lefferts Boulevard and Liberty Avenue.

The Speaker was successful in naming *Punjab Avenue*, and *Gurdwara Street*, to recognise the contributions of the Sikh community. The calls to co-name Liberty Avenue started a long time ago and intensified with the roles of various community leaders. A sizeable crowd gathered to witness the unveiling, and there were signs that said *Little Guyana Avenue* as a build-up to the main event.

The cultural program was ably chaired by District Leader Richard David and Annetta Seecharan from *Chhaya*. The Guyana government's Foreign Secretary Robert Persaud was also present. Mayor Bill de Blasio captured the historic event well. He said that the Guyanese community was making a tremendous contribution to New York City.

He added, “I want to say, ‘I see you, I respect you. I appreciate you.’ Guyana has not only done so much for New York City but represents such possibilities—people of different faiths, ethnicities coming together as one.”

Guyanese immigration into the Queens area has continued on a consistent basis since the 1970s. According to the latest Census, Guyanese make up the second largest foreign-born population of immigrants in Queens. New York City has more Guyanese immigrants than anywhere else, and Queens and Brooklyn have the largest numbers.

They show that there are more Guyanese abroad than in Guyana, and this presents one of the anomalies in population movements. As Mayor di Blasio reminded his audience, the business acumen of Guyanese is universally recognised. Whenever he needed something to be fixed, he would call a Guyanese, he said.

He singled out the Sybils group of companies as a beacon in the community. But one must not forget J and B West Indian Grocery, which was the first to establish itself on Liberty Avenue. It is still going strong in the community.

The unveiling of the sign was a euphoric moment. Many had waited long for this event, and for them it signaled a dream that came to reality. The immigrants from Guyana had left their mark on a piece of New York real estate.

The weather was kinder on August 20, 2023. This was the day when another name change occurred on Liberty Avenue. It was the co-naming of 131 Street as *Trinidad and Tobago Street*. The proceedings were hosted by Speaker of the New York City Council,



Trinidad and Tobago Street in NY

Adrienne Adams.

“New York's Trinbagonian community has contributed immensely to the cultural and economic landscape of our neighborhoods,” she said.

The bill to designate the street-naming was initiated by District Leader Richard David, and prominent Trinidadians Vijay Ramjattan, Anoop Dhanpat, and Rose Deonarine, among others.

Consul General for Trinidad and Tobago to New York, J. Andrea Laveau, added that the street naming was “a powerful reminder to the contribution of Trinidad and Tobago nationals to community life in Queens”. The event was completed with steel pans and *Moko Jumbies*.

The contributions of the Surinamese community must not be ignored. Its members play an important role in New York, particularly in Queens, where Surinamese can be found in business, education and culture, among other occupations. It would be fitting if a street can be named *Little Suriname*.

This year change came in an unexpected way for this writer. He was invited to Guyana, and was on a plane to observe the country's national elections, which was held on September 1.

Voting in Guyana has always been intriguing, upsetting, and a time of national calamity. The act of going to the polls and casting a ballot was not always straightforward. The run-up to an election could hardly be described as smooth.

In the old days, street-corner campaigning under gas lamps, and long microphones stuck to cars, became the hallmark of politicking. It was when Dr Cheddi Jagan and Forbes Burnham ruled the roost and Guyanese had to choose between the two. It was when ballot boxes went missing, and there was no proper accounting for the votes, and the final results took over a week to be declared.

By that time, the country hardly took notice and life went on as normal, until the next election cycle, and more uncertainties. The question for this writer was, “How about if one was on the inside and could observe the mechanics of the elections?” As was pointed out, this writer was chosen to be an observer and was responsible for 23 polling stations on the East Coast of Demerara, which is in Region Four.

There were certain characteristics that became clear at the outset. The staff was well trained by the Guyana Elections Commission. They knew what to do, and did it professionally. They were courteous and polite, and knew many of the voters in the area, which made for a smooth voting experience.

But given Guyana's history of voting, could the elections be rigged? It would appear from the protocols in place that it was extremely difficult, if not impossible, to rig the 2025 elections.

Here is why: The voter's list is pinned at the polling station for public inspection. The list may say that 160 persons were supposed to vote at that polling station. Each voter will present his or her ID card to the polling clerk, and the name and ID number will be stated loudly by the clerk so it could be cross-checked



Moko Jumbies at the street naming

by the presiding officer and the polling agents. The latter were there to represent the various political parties. The voter then proceeded to vote in privacy if there were no objections.

The polls closed at 6:00 p.m., and then the real work began. Tally sheets were handed out and the ballot box opened to see who voted for which party. After about an hour into the counting, it should become clear as to which party was in front.

But this is not as straight forward as it seems. The ballots and tally sheets are supposed to match with the voter's list. What if the numbers do not match? The presiding officer, and his or her staff, would be required to check every ballot against the list and tally sheets to find out what went wrong.

In a good number of cases, it may be a missing number, or a spoiled ballot. Once everyone is satisfied that the numbers are correct, the Statement of Polls are completed and sealed envelopes are produced. The ballots, tally sheets, and Statement of Polls are sealed sepa-

ately and placed in a box that is also sealed and addressed to GECOM.

If GECOM should find a mistake in the calculations, the polling site is required to reconvene and go over the entire procedure again. This would cause a delay in the declaration of the results, as the calculations would now be into the second day.

Could the elections be rigged? No system is foolproof. But for the elections to be rigged the following would have to happen: the voter's list would have to be padded, the sealed boxes will have to be taken to a designated place and unsealed. Messing with the numbers would not be easy. The system would be out of sync. It would take days to manipulate the statistics and with the deadlines of GECOM, and an expectant public, the rigging would be there for all to see.

Politics in the Caribbean is unpredictable. One time, a political party is riding high, and another time in the dumps. In recent months, two Caribbean governments went to the polls and found themselves in the Opposition.

The PNM in Trinidad and Tobago was beaten by the UNC, led by Kamla Persad-Bissessar. And perhaps the most shocking of all was the defeat Ralph Gonsalves in St Vincent and the Grenadines, who lost power after 25 years as Prime Minister.

He was replaced by Dr Godwin Friday. Clearly, home court advantage did not favour Trinidad and Tobago's former prime minister, Keith Rowley, or SVG's Ralph Gonsalves.

A political party is judged by its performance, but in this age of social media that performance, or lack of it, can be up on a media page in seconds, with commentary and pictures. The reality is that only a few governments in the Caribbean know how to work social media to its advantage, and Guyana is not one of them.

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Ben Buchanan (l-r), MP Julie Dzerowicz, Ricardo Viveiros, and Major Ethan McBride; in photos, residents enjoying the party. Photos by Hinano Beekhoo



Community spirit shines as Davenport residents celebrate service and culture

— Nearly 500 residents gathered at a holiday celebration hosted by Davenport MP Julie Dzerowicz, where community, culture, and volunteerism took centre stage. The event also honoured three local changemakers with King Charles III Coronation medals for their service and impact.

Davenport MP Julie Dzerowicz brought together close to 500 residents for a holiday party that celebrated community spirit, cultural diversity, and volunteer service, highlighted by a visit from Santa and the presentation of King Charles III Coronation medals to three outstanding individuals.

The holiday gathering reflected the diversity of Davenport, with Dzerowicz drawing attention to the range and quality of food shared during the celebration. She expressed gratitude to Tre Mari Bakery and to the Sikh community for the “incredible samosas”, underscoring how food often serves as a bridge across cultures.

“This is what I love about Davenport: so many cultures, so many flavours, all coming together,” Dzerowicz said.

Beyond the festive atmosphere, the event also became an occasion to formally recognise community service.

Dzerowicz honoured individuals in her community, who are “doing something quite special – something that reminds us why gatherings like this matter so deeply”.

Three individuals were presented with King Charles III Coronation medals, a Canadian honour established in May 2023 to mark the coronation of His Majesty King Charles III as King of Canada.

Across the country, 30,000 medals are being awarded to individuals who have made significant contributions to Canada, to a province, a region, or to their community.

One of the recipients was Benjamin

Buchanan, whom Dzerowicz described as “a towering figure in the Canadian music industry”. Buchanan has been recognised with four Juno Awards and multiple Grammy nominations, reflecting a career that has contributed significantly to Canada’s cultural landscape.

The second medal was awarded to Major Ethan McBride, who has served as an Army Reservist in the Canadian Armed Forces for 16 years. He was recognised not only for his military service, but also for being a passionate advocate for mentorship, diversity, and youth development.

Ricardo Viveiros was also honoured for his extensive community involvement. Viveiros was recognised for, among his other charitable contributions, being a community volunteer who has “given his time to coaching youth soccer teams, sponsoring local events, and ensuring that children in our community have opportunities to participate – whether that is a school trip, or a sports league”.

In acknowledging the three recipients, Dzerowicz emphasised the collective value of service, and the often-unseen support systems behind it.

“To Ben, Major McBride, and Ricardo – thank you for all that you do. Thanks for reminding us that service to others is what binds us together as a community. And thank you to your families, who support you and share you with the rest of us,” she said.

Dzerowicz also situated the recognition within a broader understanding of leadership, referencing remarks by Prime Minister Mark Carney.

“As Prime Minister Carney reminds us, true leadership isn’t about power; it is about responsibility. Each of you has accepted that responsibility, and Davenport is stronger because of it,” she said.





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ICCGA’s members, family make holiday magic

Holiday magic filled the Agincourt Recreational Centre as the Indo-Caribbean Golden Age Association (ICGAA) hosted its 33rd Annual Christmas Celebration on December 14, bringing together seniors and their families for a joyful afternoon of music, fellowship, and festive cheer.

A highlight of the celebration was the launch of ICGAA’s first-ever live band, *Naya Roshni* (New Light), led by ICGAA Program Director Angie Pitamber. The band and its members were formally introduced by ICGAA Chair Leila Daljit, who expressed her delight and pride in seeing the formation of this new musical initiative.

Their inaugural program featured outstanding musical entertainment by Bash Nandalall, who delighted members with melodious Indian oldies. Guest musicians Roger Aodan and Ganga Persaud joined Naya Roshni in performing a lively mix of Christmas jingles and favourite songs cherished by our seniors.

Festivities also included dancing, photo opportunities with Santa Claus (ably rendered

by Jagdish Harry Paul) and his helper (Yeshoda Harry Paul), and a spirited New Year’s countdown, all adding to the warmth and excitement of the day.

Members were treated to a delicious and nutritious meal and dessert, generously sponsored by Sat Purushuttam, Linda Purushuttam, and Family of Island Junction Restaurant, Scarborough.

With the end of 2025 imminent, President Lalita Sanicharan expressed gratitude to members, volunteers, board members, musicians, and sponsors for their continued support. She also extended warm wishes for a Merry Christmas and a happy, prosperous New Year 2026.

For those who are interested, you can join the Indo-Caribbean Golden Age Association for a series of vibrant cultural and community celebrations at the Agincourt Recreation Centre in Scarborough at Sheppard Avenue, East of Midland Avenue. The group’s next event will be its Family Day/Valentine’s celebration on February 8, 2026.



ICGAA Executive Board and Naya Roshni Band Members, front row, left to right: Johnny Gani, Ronald Rampersaud, Shaw Jaundoo, Barb Nandlall, Leila Daljit, Lalita Sanicharan, Angie Pitamber, Sadhana Shivpaul, Corrina Sookrah, Marilyn Sukhnandan & Leonard Sanicharan; back row, left to right, Ravi, Rohan Rajkumar, Radheeka Davie, and Stephan Pitamber. In photos, members having a good time



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Above, Jessie and Ken Singh at the NEPMCC event; at right, TCCF's Jankie Dolaram with Singh; in photos, officials, guests, and NEPMCC members at the celebratory event. Photos by Russell Lutchman

NEPMCC Humanitarian Award for TCCF

— The Caribbean Children Foundation (TCCF) has been honoured with a Humanitarian Award by the National Ethnic Press and Media Council of Canada, recognising 25 years of life-saving medical advocacy for critically ill Caribbean children and sustained community-driven philanthropy in the region.

By Romeo Kaseram
An LJI Community Report

Toronto – TCCF was awarded a Humanitarian Award by the National Ethnic Press and Media Council of Canada (NEPMCC) at its Annual Dinner held on December 12, in recognition of the organisation's 25 years of humanitarian service to critically ill children from the Caribbean.

In its announcement, Thomas S. Saras, President and CEO, along with the Executive Board of the NEPMCC, said they were pleased to select TCCF as a 2025 Humanitarian Award recipient.

Awards presented by the NEPMCC recognise members from its 800-plus membership for their work in promoting the ethnic media industry, and for keeping communities informed in their native languages. It also grants special awards to community stalwarts, and for 2025, TCCF was honoured for its philanthropic spirit and sustained community involvement.

"We chose the TCCF because of their ongoing efforts for 25 years in bringing critically ill children to Toronto for medical treatment that is too difficult to be done in Guyana and the Caribbean," the NEPMCC said.

The award comes during a milestone year for TCCF, which celebrated its 25th anniversary on October 25, marking a quarter century of humanitarian service focused on providing life-saving medical care to critically ill children from the Caribbean.

Founded in 1999, TCCF has so far supported close to 500 children requiring specialised medical treatment through partnerships with Canadian hospitals, including SickKids, and international organisations such as Gift of Life International (GOLI).

Over the past 25 years, TCCF has worked closely with medical institutions in Canada and abroad to facilitate treatment for children requiring complex procedures, particularly cardiac surgeries. In addition to facilitating overseas treatment, the foundation has supported local training initiatives in the Caribbean aimed at strengthening regional medical capacity.

Through partnerships such as its ongoing collaboration with GOLI, TCCF has also helped establish sustainable paediatric cardiac programs in countries including Guyana and the Dominican Republic, expanding access to critical care within the region itself.

TCCF's longevity and impact have been sustained by consistent support from volunteers, donors, and community mem-

bers. The organisation operates on a model that directs every donation entirely toward medical care, with no administrative deductions.

Vice-President Jankie Dolaram and TCCF's team of volunteers continue to uphold this principle, a structure that has enabled the foundation to maintain transparency, and ensure that community contributions translate directly into treatment for children in urgent need.

TCCF's vision, the organisation notes, continues to align with its founding mission: to provide critically ill Caribbean children with access to the medical care they need to live healthy, fulfilling lives.

President of TCCF, Jay Brijpaul was unable to attend the December 12 ceremony. Instead, the award was accepted by Ken Singh, President of Atlas Cargo. Singh and his wife, Jessie, were recipients of the NEPMCC Humanitarian Award in 2024.

Dolaram was also present to accept the honour.

In his speech on behalf of TCCF, Singh spoke about his long-standing connection with Brijpaul, noting their shared Caribbean roots. As Singh stated, they both came from similar beginnings, "about 3,500 miles away in the Caribbean" in Guyana.

He added, "Jay went on to become one of the most prominent real estate agents in Canada, selling more than 1,250 homes in his first ten years alone." Yet, as impressive as that success is, it is his humanitarian and philanthropic work that truly defines him, Singh declared.

He also told the gathering that for the past 25 years, Brijpaul and his entire team have served as volunteers with TCCF.

"Together, they have helped children across the Caribbean access lifesaving medical treatment they could not otherwise afford, including care for heart disease and cancer. To date, 498 children have been cured, and are now living normal, healthy lives," Singh said.

Reflecting on the significance of the recognition, Singh added, "I think this is excellent and wonderful that the NEPMCC has awarded him this honour; it is this is what helps people to forge ahead."

Following the award ceremony, Brijpaul spoke to *Indo-Caribbean World*, expressing gratitude for NEPMCC's recognition and its broader impact on TCCF's work.

"We are honoured to receive the support, and appreciate the community at large is recognising the work TCCF is doing," Brijpaul said, adding, "A lot of people know about the charity, but not what it does. An award like this makes people turn and look, and we are thankful as more exposure means we get more support to finance our charitable work."

He concluded by saying, "TCCF extends its deepest gratitude to the National Ethnic Press Council of Canada for this award."



Jay Brijpaul





One Love Table held its Pepperpotfest 2025 on December 5 in Etobicoke. The event also included a Christmas Open Market, a raffle and giveaways, and musical performances. Notable among the performances was Mala Harripersad, who paid tribute to the late Bollywood superstar Dharmendra. Also on stage were Deol and Sholay, Emily Moore, Vasanti, Shalini Persaud, and the Trio Dancers. Judges for the Pepperpotfest were Chef Dev, Bombay Lemonade, and Dr Nikki Clarke. Among the eminent guests was the Honorary Consul at the Guyana Consulate in Toronto, Mani Singh, who did the honours of presenting the trophies to the winners. In photos, Pepperpot winners, guests, and the One Love Table team at the fundraiser.



Saturday mornings always started with a late rise out of bed, beginning with a stretch and a smiling yawn of weekend expectations. After an unhurried saunter around the inherited tiny one-bedroom, one-level house, Dave changed Mr Kitty's litter and freshened his food and water. With his cat purring contentedly, he got dressed in anticipation of the usual brunch-style breakfast at the mall's food court.

After he ate and drank coffee, Dave wandered around the outdoor mall to pick up a few needed items.

As usual, he spent long periods in the pet store admiring the exotic creatures on display and reading the tags that described their origins and details of their existence.

On this occasion, a large aquarium along the back wall of the store grabbed Dave's undivided attention. The tank contained a strange-looking, elongated fish with blood-red eyes and a hundred needle-sharp teeth. The creature appeared to be a freaky combination of an eel with the twin heads of a piranha.

Dave chuckled at their occasional short-tempered attempts to nip at each other. Their double tails looked like replicas of their heads, with the eyes and mouths painted on by nature. The ugliness of the weird aquatic life-form was also its beauty, much like the beloved pug in the dog world. The label on the fish tank said that it was found in the remotest part of Africa, where the natives called it *Mauti Ukuhamba*, meaning 'Death Stalker'. Dave was amused by the native's beliefs, which propelled this freak of nature into legendary status. The inference drawn by the strange name compelled him to desire the bizarre creature even more. It would make a great conversation piece.

He smiled at the teen pet store worker's rehearsed attempt to make the sale by presenting a package deal which included the fish, the tank with its stand, and its filters. Dave's smile widened into a grin when the employee sweetened the deal by throwing out a hook, line, and sinker to snare his potential customer and his commission.

He announced a promotional offer of free live fish food for a



The Supernatural Death Stalker

week if Dave bought the setup before the store closed.

"Sure," Dave thought, "For the exorbitant price they're charging, there would be a handsome profit even if they gave a whole year's worth of free fish food."

Putting his skepticism aside, he asked questions to satisfy his curiosity. He was told that the foot-long fish in an extra-large tank catered to the likelihood that *Mauti Ukuhamba* can sometimes grow up to four feet in length with an eight-inch girth. Every additional piece of information about the fish drew Dave deeper into the creature's world. He had already pictured the aquarium against a living room wall. The fish, as if sensing Dave's intentions toward kinship, glided to him and

alternated between rubbing itself on the glass where Dave's palm pressed against it and circling to return and gaze with longing into Dave's eyes, before repeating the actions.

With his mind almost made up, Dave asked the worker to hold the one-of-a-kind oddity for a few minutes. He wanted to leave the store to clear his thoughts by debating the pros and cons of inviting the hideous creature into his home. He did not even know how Mr Kitty would react to another pet invading his personal space.

After having a coffee and pondering his options, Dave returned to the store

for a last assessment of the fish before making a final decision. His heart skipped a beat when he entered the pet store to find a new set of curious onlookers standing around the fish tank, with the teenager enjoying the spotlight from articulating animated responses to their questions. A pang of competitiveness catapulted him to the front of the crowd to give notice to the employee that he was back. A sheepish grin accompanied the teen's admission that Dave was on the verge of making an offer.

Kamil
Ali



Dave sighed with disbelief. A teenager had manipulated him into a compromising situation. He nodded to the crowd with a good-natured smile, causing them to disperse, leaving him exposed to involuntary commitment.

Mr Kitty hissed and ran into hiding when the delivery arrived. The cat remained in hiding long after the pet store employees did their setup and left. Dave decided to leave Mr Kitty alone, thinking that the cat would settle down once he became accustomed to the new addition to the family, whom Dave had named *Mauti*.

When Mr Kitty did not show up a day later, Dave searched every corner of the house, but there was no sign of his cat. He figured that Kitty might have been spooked by the grotesque fish and scampered out of the free-swinging pet door and ran away. Dave searched the neighbourhood, knocking on doors, but no one had seen Mr Kitty.

Dave's worries grew when neighbours knocked on his door, asking if he had seen their pets that vanished without a trace. He eyed *Mauti* with suspicion when the fish almost doubled in size in a short time.

A few days later, a loud splash awoke Dave in the middle of the night. He sprang out of bed and flipped the light switch on in the living room. *Mauti* was resting at the bottom of the aquarium without moving. Dave glanced at his feet and followed a trail of water stains leading to the pet door.

Dave's meticulously kept diary ended on the night he discovered that *Mauti* could escape from the aquarium and waddle on its tail to stalk living prey. The legend of *Mauti Ukuhamba* was alive and well, but too far-fetched for logical thinking. The Death Stalker had adapted well from jungle living to city dwelling.

Investigators found the diary, but Dave had vanished into thin air. They returned the fish to the pet store to continue its journey into the arms of trusting new owners and closed the book on the unsolved case files of the mysterious disappearances.



The lawyerly panel comprising Christeena Lucknauth (left to right), Savana Bhangal, Dhaman Kissoon, Vic Aujla, Sweta Tejpal, and Justice Andrew Falls



A section of the audience at Triveni Mandir that attended The Law & You Conference; inset, Triveni's leader, Panditji Dhanrajh. Photos by Russell Lutchman

Forum examines serious life-altering consequences of impaired driving

— An educational conference in Brampton used a fictional impaired-driving case to demonstrate the real legal, financial, and immigration consequences that can follow a single unwise decision, reinforcing public-safety awareness during one of Ontario's highest-risk seasons for impaired driving.

By Romeo Kaseram
An LJI Community Report

As impaired driving risks increase during the holiday season, a December 13 conference at Triveni Mandir in Brampton presented a fictional case study that traced how one impaired-driving decision escalated into criminal charges, civil liability, family separation, and deportation from Canada.

The conference, hosted by The Law & You Conference in partnership with Triveni Mandir, was structured as a community education initiative examining the legal, financial, personal, and immigration consequences of drinking and driving. The program centred on a fictional but realistic scenario involving "Roger", a 35-year-old permanent resident in Canada.

The scenario, assessed by a panel of legal experts, unfolded as a composite of real-world cases frequently encountered in the Peel region. Its instructional focus was on demonstrating how quickly a social gathering can evolve into a multi-layered legal crisis following impaired driving.

Moderated by lawyer, professor, and humanitarian Dhaman Kissoon, the first section of the conference followed Roger's actions on New Year's Day. After consuming four beers at a family dinner, Roger insisted on driving

despite intervention by his wife, Renee. That decision resulted in a fatal accident driving in icy conditions. In the fictional case, Roger's father-in-law lost his life, while all other passengers sustained severe injuries. The criminal charges presented included *Impaired Driving Causing Death and Bodily Harm* and *Over 80 Causing Death and Bodily Harm*.

As the narrative progressed, the panel illustrated that the consequences extended well beyond criminal prosecution. Roger's marriage dissolved, and civil action was initiated by family members. His automobile insurance coverage of \$1 million was shown to be insufficient given the scale of damages, leaving him personally liable for the excess. The fictional case concluded with Roger's deportation from Canada.

The scenario was designed to reflect outcomes that legal professionals routinely encounter, rather than hypothetical extremes. As the case unfolded, a panel comprising Christeena Lucknauth, Savana Bhangal, Vic Aujla, Sweta Tejpal, and Justice Andrew Falls evaluated Roger's circumstances based on interventions and decisions drawn from their professional experience.

The legal positions presented by the panel reflected real-life possibilities, with each outcome grounded in existing law. Their analysis provided the audience with a practical understanding of how criminal, civil, insurance, and immigration systems can intersect following an impaired-driving incident.

The conference's second segment shifted focus toward education and mentorship, offering aspiring law students the opportunity to engage directly with practicing legal professionals in attendance. This portion of the program emphasised career guidance while

reinforcing the broader educational mandate of the event.

Kissoon later situated the day's discussions within the broader context of the holiday season, noting that impaired driving remains one of Ontario's most persistent public-safety concerns.

"The seasonal RIDE program was ramped up recently by various Police Forces across the country," Kissoon said, noting, "The acronym was first used in 1977: *Reduce Impaired Driving in Etobicoke*. It was so successful that year that the name was changed to *Reduce Impaired Driving Everywhere*."

Kissoon also addressed common misconceptions about RIDE's duration.

"Some are mistaken to think that the RIDE program is only on at the holiday season. That is incorrect, as it is on all year. It is only ramped up during the holiday season," he said.

Additionally, "Every year various court-houses set up special courts to deal with the increased volume of drinking and driving cases from the holiday season."

He concluded with a direct public-safety message: "To all the readers: taxis and Ubers are cheaper in the long run. Do not drink and drive."

By hosting the conference, Triveni Mandir was positioned as a community education hub, extending its role beyond worship and cultural gathering into outreach for the wider public's well-being.

Under the leadership of Pandit Yudhishtir Dhanrajh, the temple served as a venue for examining social and legal challenges that families may face following an impaired-driving charge.

Reflecting on the event, Pandit Dhanrajh highlighted the collaborative effort behind the program.

"[It was very] inspiring to see lawyers of all disciplines, as well as [Justice Andrew Falls] take time out of their incredibly busy schedules to volunteer their time educating the community," he said, adding, "Brampton Triveni Mandir is very grateful for their support and dedication."

Oil-fueled growth powers Guyana's economy

From Page 9

and support services, financial and insurance activities, professional, scientific and technical services, and information and communication. The overall 2025 growth target for services is now 8.6 percent.

The construction sector is estimated to have grown by 29.9 percent in the first half, supported by the government's expanded Public Sector Investment Programme, along with robust private sector investments across several sectors. The sector is now expected to grow by 26.2 percent in 2025.

At a macro level, the overall balance of payments recorded a surplus of US \$10.3 million at the end of the first half of 2025, with the current account recording a surplus of US \$197.9 million.

The merchandise trade balance registered a surplus of US \$3,180.2 million. This mainly reflects the fact that, while crude exports grew by 2.6 percent, less favourable oil prices prevailed. However, non-oil export earnings increased by 12.5 percent to US \$919.7 million, mainly supported by gold and bauxite expanding by US \$147.5 million and US \$31.1 million, respectively.

Total import payments stood at US \$5,894.6 million at the end of the first half of the year, growing by 81.1 percent. Growth was mainly

attributed to the expansion in the imports of capital goods, which rose to US \$3,881.7 million, and accounted for 95.8 percent of the overall increase. A significant portion of this increase can be attributed to the importation of the One Guyana FPSO, which valued US \$2,534.1 million.

While Guyana's economy continues to surge ahead, key risks remain. The heavy importation of capital goods (particularly for oil-related infrastructure) places pressure on external accounts; favourable oil price movement remains uncertain; structural capacity constraints (infrastructure, labour skills) may constrain translating growth into broad-based welfare gains.

At a social level, the population continues to anticipate that the government owes them handouts of cash, leading to continuing dissatisfaction when expectations are not readily met.

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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TT govt confirms US military aircraft cleared for local airport use

— *Trinidad and Tobago's decision to allow US military aircraft to transit its airports for what the government describes as routine logistical activities has triggered sharp political debate, expert commentary, and contrasting assessments of security, sovereignty, regional perception, and potential economic impact.*

Port-of-Spain – The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has granted approval for US military aircraft to transit the country's airports in the coming weeks as part of what officials describe as routine logistical operations linked to longstanding bilateral security cooperation.

The arrangement was disclosed in a statement issued earlier this week by Trinidad and Tobago's Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, which said the approvals form part of "ongoing bilateral security cooperation between the two countries".

The release added, "In keeping with established bilateral cooperation, the ministry has granted approvals for United States military aircraft to transit Trinidad and Tobago's airports in the coming weeks."

According to the ministry, the US advised that "these movements are logistical in nature, facilitating supply replenishment and routine personnel rotations". The ministry further reaffirmed the government's commitment to "sustained cooperation with the United States of America in advancing regional safety, security and stability".

The statement noted that through this partnership Trinidad and Tobago has benefited from joint military training exercises, improved surveillance capabilities, including the installation of an advanced radar system, and collaborative operations that have led to the seizure of millions of dollars' worth of illegal narcotics.

Foreign and Caricom Affairs Minister Sean Sobers said the government maintains close engagement with the US Embassy in Trinidad and Tobago, and remains committed to cooperation in the interest of national and regional security.

"We welcome the continued support of the United States," Sobers stated.

However, the government's decision has drawn criticism from Opposition figures, and raised questions about the implications for national sovereignty, civilian aviation safety, and regional diplomacy.

Former Foreign Affairs Minister Dr Amery Browne expressed concern about the use of Trinidad and Tobago's airports by US military aircraft, arguing that the facilities are intended primarily for civilian operations.

In a statement posted on his *Facebook* page, Browne said the country's airports were "designed and staffed and secured for civilian use, not for use as air bases for military aircraft of various types for an unspecified duration". He further contended that such aircraft carry munitions and explosives that would not be disclosed to the public.

Browne's remarks came a day after the government approved the use of local airports by US military aircraft to conduct what it describes as "logistical activities". The decision has also sparked criticism from the People's National Movement (PNM), which claims the move cements Trinidad and Tobago's status as a "satellite state" of the US.

Browne said the aircraft would be transiting national airspace, flying over residential areas, and landing at local airports. He questioned whether preparations had been made for potential accidents or incidents, and whether residents living near the airports had been informed.

He also asked whether the safety of civilian and cargo aircraft had been adequately considered, and whether emergency and fire facilities at the Crown Point and Piarco airports had been upgraded to manage military-related situations.

"Never before has our country given blanket



Kamla Persad-Bissessar



Sean Sobers



Gary Griffith



Amery Browne

permission for unspecified foreign military aircraft to use the airports and airspace of Trinidad and Tobago in the build-up to a regime-change war. There is nothing routine about this," Browne said.

He added that the decision had nothing to do with the usual cooperation and friendly collaboration Trinidad and Tobago has enjoyed with the US over the years.

"It simply takes Trinidad and Tobago a further step down the path of a satellite state, which has dismissed Caricom and international law and embraced a might-is-right philosophy," Browne said. He further criticised Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar for what he described as a failure to publicly address the issue.

"For six months now, the Prime Minister has refused to address this nation and properly explain what she has done to our neutral foreign policy and our standing in the region and the world," Browne said, adding that instead Persad-Bissessar was relying on *WhatsApp* messages to selected journalists, and media releases.

Browne also noted that the developments

have occurred during a nationwide State of Emergency, which the government has stated is not a crime-fighting measure. He accused Persad-Bissessar of responding to criticism by labelling those who question her decisions as "haters of the American people" and supporters of "cartels".

Concerns have also been voiced by independent experts, including international relations specialist and former honorary senior fellow of the Institute of International Relations at The University of the West Indies, Dr Anthony Gonzales.

Gonzales said that while Persad-Bissessar has repeatedly maintained that Trinidad and Tobago would not be used as a "launching pad" to attack the Venezuelan people, the government's actions may be perceived differently by the administration of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

"They are looking at this and they are saying, well, you know, American planes are landing here, they are refuelling here and all of that. They are looking at that as you are

supporting the Americans and you are assisting the Americans to be able to attack them. That is how they are going to consider that," Gonzales said.

He added, "If you say you don't want here to be used as a launching pad, you have to be pretty strict about that. You have to be very clear with the Americans what they can come and do here and what they shouldn't do," he added.

A contrasting assessment was offered by former director of the Institute of International Relations at the University of the West Indies, Professor Anthony Bryan, who described the Foreign Affairs ministry's announcement as routine.

"This is nothing more than a check on military assets that are within the country of Trinidad and Tobago that belong to the United States. I don't think the Venezuelans would be worried about that. They know that Trinidad and Tobago is an ally of the United States," Bryan said.

He also noted, "This is perfectly normal. Nothing mysterious there, nothing hidden. It's all out in the open, and each side will make the appropriate judgement."

Former National Security Minister Gary Griffith also weighed in, highlighting what he described as potential economic benefits associated with an increased US military presence in the region.

Griffith said the scale of US military deployment would inevitably generate supply and logistical needs that Trinidad and Tobago could leverage.

"If you speak about 10,000 sailors, eventually they have to go on shore leave. If you talk about 1,000 of them at all times coming to Trinidad and Tobago shore, you're speaking about \$500 US being spent. When you keep multiplying that for a year, you could get billions – over a billion odd TT dollars," Griffith said.

He added that there is also an opportunity for local producers to supply goods to US forces operating in the region.

"They also have the possibility that if the Government does this right, they can start assisting the United States by stating that we can supply many of the food items that you require instead of bringing it from North America, take it from Trinidad and Tobago. This can assist our agriculture industry immensely," Griffith said.



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Emotional Sunny Deol recalls Dharmendra at Border 2 teaser launch

— Sunny Deol's return to the public eye at the *Border 2* teaser launch unfolded as a moment of remembrance, patriotism, and cinematic continuity, arriving weeks after the death of his father Dharmendra and unfolding alongside tributes to the veteran actor's enduring legacy.

A few weeks after the death of his father, legendary actor Dharmendra, Sunny Deol made his first public appearance at the teaser launch of his upcoming film *Border 2* in Mumbai on December 16, where emotion, memory, and patriotism converged on stage.

The appearance marked Sunny Deol's first public engagement since Dharmendra passed away on November 24 at the age of 89 in Mumbai. At the event, Sunny Deol became visibly emotional while delivering a dialogue from the highly anticipated war drama, a moment that resonated deeply with those in attendance.

Arriving at the venue in a jeep, Sunny Deol set the tone for the film's martial and patriotic ethos even before stepping onto the stage. As he repeated one of the film's key lines, "Awaaz kahan tak jaani chahiye? Lahore tak. (Your voice should go till Lahore)", the weight of the moment was evident, blending cinematic dialogue with personal grief and loss.

Days earlier, on December 8, Sunny Deol had shared a personal tribute to mark what would have been Dharmendra's 90th birthday. The video, posted on social media, showed the veteran actor in a quiet, reflective moment, surrounded by the calm beauty of the mountains.

"Today is my father's birthday. Papa is always with me, inside me. Love you, Papa. Miss you," read the text accompanying the clip.

The post offered a glimpse into a private moment of remembrance, contrasting with the public nature of the *Border 2* launch, yet together forming a continuum of grief, memory, and homage.

Speaking at the event, Sunny Deol reflected



Sunny Deol with father Dharmendra

on the patriotic themes that anchor *Border 2*, and addressed how such sentiments resonate across generations.

"The country is our mother. The younger generation will have the same feeling. They will protect it, like their fathers and grandfathers did. That energy will remain the same, this country is our home. If anything happens to it, [then] it boils our blood," Sunny said.

His remarks underscored the film's intent to speak not only to nostalgia for the original *Border*, but also to contemporary audiences, framing patriotism as an inherited and enduring emotion rather than a dated cinematic trope.

Border 2 is a sequel to J. P. Dutta's 1997 war epic *Border*, a film that remains one of Indian cinema's most iconic portrayals of military valour. The new installment stars Sunny Deol alongside Varun Dhawan, Ahan Shetty, Diljit Dosanjh, and Sonam Bajwa.

The film is directed by Anurag Singh and produced by Bhushan Kumar, Krishan Kumar, J. P. Dutta, and Nidhi Dutta, and is presented by T-Series and J. P. Films. It is scheduled for theatrical release on January 23.

Parallel to the developments surrounding *Border 2*, another chapter of cinematic remembrance is reportedly underway. The much-

loved 2011 comedy *Yamla Pagla Deewana*, which brought together Dharmendra and his sons Sunny and Bobby Deol, is expected to return to theatres in a planned re-release.

Over the years, the film has earned cult status for its humour, music, and warm family energy, becoming a nostalgic fixture in Bollywood pop culture. According to a report by *Bollywood Hungama*, the re-release is intended as a tribute to Dharmendra's legacy.

A source told *Bollywood Hungama*, "The re-release of *Yamla Pagla Deewana* will serve as a tribute to a man who is unanimously loved and who has left an indelible mark on the world of cinema. The film seems apt for a re-run as it is not very old, still looks fresh and entertaining, and stars Dharmendra along with his two sons, Sunny Deol and Bobby Deol."

Originally planned for a December 19 re-release, the timeline has reportedly shifted. Another source explained, "Earlier, the plan was to re-release *Yamla Pagla Deewana* [on December 19]. But due to the *Dhurandhar* wave, NH Studioz, which holds the rights to the film, has decided to change the plan. *Yamla Pagla Deewana* is now expected to arrive in cinemas on January 1, 2026."

Directed by Samir Karnik, *Yamla Pagla Deewana* takes its name from the classic song *Main Jat Yamla Pagla Deewana* from Dharmendra's *Pratigya*, which was also remixed for the film. The story follows an NRI son searching for his estranged father and brother, leading to a chain of comic misadventures across Banaras and Punjab.

Its potential return to cinemas situates the film not just as entertainment, but as a familial and cultural artefact, one that now carries added emotional resonance with Dharmendra's passing.

Meanwhile, Dharmendra will next be seen in *Ikkis*, a war drama slated for release on December 25. The film also stars Agastya Nanda and Simar Bhatia and marks the veteran actor's final on-screen appearance.

Saif Khan opens up about knife attack

Saif Ali Khan has opened up about surviving a knife attack at his residence earlier this year, describing the incident as frighteningly close to causing permanent paralysis, and reflecting on how it has reinforced his sense of gratitude for life.

Earlier this year, a disturbing incident unfolded at Saif Ali Khan's home when an intruder broke into the residence. The situation escalated after the actor confronted the intruder, resulting in a violent struggle in which Saif sustained multiple injuries, including wounds to his neck and spine. He survived the attack and later made a swift recovery.

Speaking in a recent conversation with *The Hollywood Reporter India*, Saif reflected on how narrowly the incident missed altering his life forever.

"I feel incredibly lucky and blessed to have gotten away with it the way I did, because it was very close," he said, adding, "There was a nick to my spinal cord, and that could have led to paralysis, because I had lost feeling in my leg for a while."

He went on to describe the fear that accompanied the possibility of permanent physical damage, saying, "And that concept of being bedridden forever, or being paralysed, is frightening, and still frightens me."

Saif noted that the incident reinforced a belief he has long held about his life and circumstances.

"I've always kind of been grateful, and I know that every day is a blessing. This might have accentuated it slightly," he said.

Previously, Saif had detailed the events of that night during an appearance on the Twinkle Khanna and Kajol-hosted chat show

Two Much, offering a step-by-step account of how the intrusion unfolded.

"Kareena had been out (the previous night), and I had just finished watching a movie with the boys (his children Taimur and Jeh)," Saif said, recall, "So, we went to sleep quite late, around two in the morning. After Kareena returned, we had a small chat before we turned in."

According to Saif, the situation took a sudden and alarming turn shortly afterward. "Then, the maid came in and she said, 'There's someone in Jeh's room. He has a knife in his hand, and he says he wants money.'"



Saif Khan

Saif described reacting instinctively to the warning.

"I kind of heard that and rolled out of bed. I barged into Jeh's room in the dark and I saw this guy standing over his bed with a knife," he said. Drawing on his training, he attempted to defend himself: "I tried to remember my training and blocked a couple of them."

However, the confrontation quickly became violent.

"But then I felt a thump in my back that was really hard," Saif said. By that point, others in the house had been alerted. "By then, everyone was out of their rooms."

He credited the intervention of a member of the household staff with saving his life. "Gita, our domestic help, aided me in this struggle and pushed the guy off me," Saif said. "She saved my life at that point because he had cut me everywhere."

The incident eventually came under control. "Then we locked him in a room," Saif added, concluding his account of the night.

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Ashes players unite in tribute after Bondi tragedy

— Players from Australia and England will mark the third Ashes Test at Adelaide Oval with tributes to victims of the Bondi Beach shooting, including black armbands, a moment's silence, flags at half-mast and a musical performance, as cricket pauses to acknowledge a national tragedy.

Players from both Australia and England will wear black armbands during the third Ashes Test at Adelaide Oval this week to commemorate the victims of the October 14 shooting at Sydney's Bondi Beach.

The tribute comes after a deadly attack in Sydney's eastern suburbs, where 15 people were killed and many others injured when gunmen opened fire on crowds gathered to mark the first night of Hanukkah, the Jewish holiday.

As part of the commemorations, flags at Adelaide Oval will be flown at half-mast, and a moment's silence will be observed before the *Welcome to Country* and the national anthems on the opening day of the Test. Australian folk singer John Williamson will also perform his song *True Blue* as a tribute to those who lost their lives in the shooting.

Australia captain Pat Cummins, who lives nearby at Bronte Beach, said the events had struck close to home. Speaking after training on October 16, Cummins said he had been "horrified" when he learned of the attacks.

"Like most other Aussies and people round the world, [I was] horrified watching on," Cummins said, adding, "I'd just put the kids to bed and flicked the news on as that was coming through. Me and my wife were watching in disbelief. It does put things into a lot of perspective when you see things like that happen. And for everyone that it has affected, all our hearts go out to everyone. It's a horrible thing to see happen."

Cummins added that the proximity of the attack to his family's daily life made the tragedy even more confronting.

"It's a place that is just around the corner from where we live, and we take the kids there all the time. It hit home pretty hard. I really feel for the Bondi community, and Jewish community in particular. Seeing the scenes over the past couple of days has been pretty powerful as well. We'll wear armbands throughout the Test and commemorate the victims," he stated.

England captain Ben Stokes said his team was left in shock when news of the shootings emerged.

"What happened a couple of days ago was an awful thing

to watch unfold," Stokes said. He added, "We were in our team room and it came up on the news about what was happening. It was silence from everyone in there seeing that happen. It's incredibly sad for Australia, for Sydney and for the world. It does put things into a lot of perspective when you see things like that happen. And for everyone that it has affected, all our hearts go out to everyone. It's a horrible thing to see happen."

Cricket Australia Chief Executive Todd Greenberg said the third Test would provide an opportunity for collective remembrance, describing the match as an occasion that would bring "millions of people together" to acknowledge the victims and those affected.

"This is a tragic time for all Australians and the thoughts of everyone in the cricket world are with the victims of this terrible event, their families, friends and the Jewish community," Greenberg said.

He added that while the significance of sport can feel diminished during moments of national grief, the Test offered a rare chance for reflection.

He continued, "While sport can seem insignificant at times like this, we have the unusual opportunity to bring millions of people together to pay tribute, to console and to contemplate what we want

our nation to be. I'm grateful John has agreed to perform *True Blue*, which has at its essence the ideal of Australians from all backgrounds sharing the same hopes and aspirations."

Greenberg also cited Williamson's recent remarks, noting, "As John said recently, 'I believe in a multicultural society, one where all Australians come together in unity to celebrate our unique multicultural nature and freedoms.'"

He further declared, "We will continue to look at ways cricket can support and honour those who have been affected by the Bondi shootings and thank those who provided assistance during and since this tragedy."

South Australia Premier Peter Malinauskas said the attacks would lead to additional security protocols at Adelaide Oval, with the Test sold out for the first three days.

"Given the events that have occurred [on Sunday] in Sydney, there will be additional protocols put in place at Adelaide Oval," Malinauskas said, adding, "This is done only as a precautionary measure, but it is appropriate that we are at a crescent sense of alertness just at the moment for the time being."



Pat Cummins

West Indies' Akeal Hosein lands an IPL lifeline

— West Indies left-arm spinner Akeal Hosein has landed an IPL lifeline, snapped up by five-time champions Chennai Super Kings ahead of the 2026 season, as franchises reshaped squads during a high-stakes auction.

West Indies left-arm spinner Akeal Hosein will return to the Indian Premier League in 2026 after being bought by Chennai Super Kings (CSK) during the auction on December 16, adding control, experience, and tactical nous to one of the league's most decorated franchises.

The 32-year-old Hosein, currently ranked seventh among T20 International bowlers, was secured for approximately US \$200,000 as CSK continued to fine-tune their roster for the tournament scheduled from March 26 to May 31.

Known for his accuracy and economy, particularly in the powerplay, Hosein has built a reputation as a dependable left-arm orthodox option across global T20 leagues.

While his profile has steadily risen through consistent performances in competitions such as the Pakistan Super League, the International League T20, Australia's Big Bash League, and England's The Hundred, opportunities in the IPL have been limited.

His only previous stint came with Sunrisers Hyderabad during the 2023 season, where he featured briefly.

Internationally, Hosein has been a mainstay for the West Indies in the white-ball formats. He has represented the West Indies in 87 T20 Internationals and 40 One-Day Internationals, offering control through the middle overs and early breakthroughs with the new ball.

In September, his standing within the regional setup was

underscored when he captained an inexperienced West Indies side in a three-match T20 series against Nepal.

CSK's auction strategy also focused on youth development, with the franchise purchasing uncapped Indian players Prashant Veer, 20, and wicketkeeper Kartik Sharma, 19.

The moves reflect a blend of experience and long-term planning as the Chennai outfit looks to remain competitive in a rapidly evolving league.

The Super Kings' 2026 squad features a formidable mix of established stars and emerging talent. Skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad remains central to the side's batting plans, supported by South African prospect Dewald Brevis and New Zealand fast bowler Matt Henry. The roster also includes legendary wicketkeeper-batsman M.S. Dhoni, with Sanju Samson, who was traded to CSK last month.

That trade proved one of the auction's defining moments, with all-rounders Sam Curran and Ravindra Jadeja moving from CSK to the Rajasthan Royals in exchange. The transaction reshaped the balance of both squads, and added another layer of intrigue heading into the new season.

Hosein will be one of several West Indies players featured in the 2026 IPL. Others include Shimron Hetmyer with Rajasthan Royals; Jason Holder

at Gujarat Titans; Sunil Narine and Rovman Powell with Kolkata Knight Riders; Sherfane Rutherford at Mumbai Indians; Romario Shepherd with Royal Challengers Bengaluru; and retired former West Indies white-ball captain Nicholas Pooran, who turns out for Lucknow Super Giants.

Royal Challengers Bengaluru enter the season as defending champions after clinching their maiden IPL title in 2025, setting the benchmark for the rest of the field.



Akeal Hosein



Sri Lanka celebrate a wicket

Young talent headlines Sri Lanka's India tour

— Sri Lanka have unveiled a youthful T20I squad for their five-match series against India, blending teenage promise with seasoned leadership as captain Chamari Athapaththu begins a new phase of preparation for the 2026 T20 World Cup.

Sri Lanka have named a young and forward-looking squad for their forthcoming women's T20I series against India, signalling a deliberate shift towards long-term development as they build towards next year's ICC Women's T20 World Cup in England.

At the heart of the selection is an emphasis on youth in the bowling department, highlighted by the inclusion of 17-year-old ambidextrous spinner Shashini Gimhani, 23-year-old seamer Kawya Kavindi, and 19-year-old pacer Rashmika Sewwandi. The series, spanning five matches across Visakhapatnam and Thiruvananthapuram, will offer these emerging players an opportunity to gain exposure against one of the strongest teams in world cricket.

Gimhani stands out as one of the most intriguing selections. Capable of delivering wrist-spin with either arm, though primarily operating as a left-arm wrist-spinner, the teenager has already shown maturity beyond her years. She earned her place in the squad through consistent performances against Australia Under-19 in September, and has made a promising start at senior international level, claiming six wickets from five T20Is at an economy rate of 5.53.

Kavindi brings a little more top-flight experience, having already featured in ten T20Is, while Sewwandi, though largely untested at this level, continues to be viewed as a long-term prospect within Sri Lanka's pace stocks. Nimasha Madushani, the 26-year-old left-arm spinner, is the only uncapped player in the squad.

While the selectors have opted to refresh the bowling unit, the batting lineup remains largely familiar. Hasini Perera, Vishmi Gunaratne, Harshitha Samarawickrama, Nilakshika de Silva, and Kavisha Dilhari, all of whom played significant roles during Sri Lanka's recent ODI World Cup campaign, form a stable core at the top and middle order. Their presence offers continuity and balance as the team integrates younger bowlers into the setup.

Leadership and experience remain central to the squad's composition. Captain Chamari Athapaththu will once again anchor the side, supported by veteran spinner Inoka Ranaweera, who at 39 continues to provide control and composure in the middle overs. The blend of youth and experience reflects Sri Lanka's intent to remain competitive in the short term while steadily broadening their talent base.

There are notable omissions. Wicketkeeper-batter Anushka Sanjeewani, who has represented Sri Lanka in 86 T20Is, has been left out, along with Udeshika Prabodhani, Sugandika Kumari, and Achini Kulasuriya, all members of the squad that toured New Zealand in March. Kaushini Nuthyangana is expected to assume wicketkeeping duties in Sanjeewani's absence.

Further depth comes from the inclusion of 24-year-old seamer Malki Madara, who has impressed in ODIs this year, and Malsha Shehani, a versatile option capable of contributing with both seam and spin.

The five-match series begins in Visakhapatnam on December 21, before shifting to Thiruvananthapuram for the final two fixtures. **Squad: Chamari Athapaththu (captain), Hasini Perera, Vishmi Gunaratne, Harshitha Samarawickrama, Nilakshika De Silva, Kavisha Dilhari, Imesha Dulani, Kaushini Nuthyangana, Malsha Shehani, Inoka Ranaweera, Shashini Gimhani, Nimesha Madus.**

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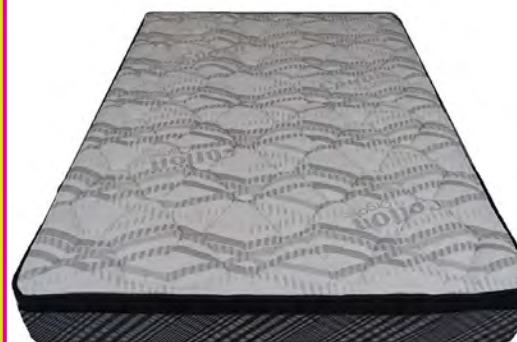
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