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# INDO CARIBBEAN WORLD

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**Our Community Is Thriving!**



In full flight, Los Ketchos Parranderos performing at the Lehwah event held on January 3 at the Trinidad and Tobago Consulate General; at right is cultural ambassador and parrandero, George Maharaj. Photo by Hinano Beekhoo

## Diaspora celebrates memory, music

— A Lehwah observance at the Consulate General of Trinidad and Tobago in Toronto brought together diplomacy, music, and memory, marking the close of the parang season while affirming our Caribbean diaspora's role as active stewards of cultural heritage.

...

By Romeo Kaseram  
An LJI Community Report

Toronto — On January 3, the Consulate General of Trinidad and Tobago in Toronto opened its doors to an evening of music, memory, and meaning, as members of the Trinidad and Tobago diaspora gathered to observe Lehwah, an event while intimate in scale, carried a cultural weight far beyond its numbers.

Welcoming the gathering, Consul General Simone Young spoke with a mix of humour, warmth, and deliberation, situating the evening within both tradition and choice.

"I feel very privileged to welcome you to this 2026 Lehwah event," she said, adding, "Yes, we know Lehwah celebrates the end of the Christmas season, but I think this event, while small, represents much more than that."

For Consul General Young, the significance of Lehwah lay not only in its place on the calendar, but in the intention behind its observance.

"To me, it signifies that you, in making a conscious and deliberate effort to celebrate Lehwah, are also declaring that you are standing up for these cultural traditions," she declared.

She went further, naming the role she believes the diaspora plays in sustaining heritage abroad.

"You are cultural stewards, defenders, and protectors of our cultural heritage," Young affirmed, further noting, "So it's not just a nice lime with sweet, powerful music

See Page 15: TT diaspora

## Caribbean leaders urge calm after US moves against Venezuela

— Caribbean leaders urged restraint, diplomacy, and respect for international law after a sudden US military operation in Venezuela saw the capture and extraction of President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores. Following the US move, Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley set the regional tone, while Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago outlined security and sovereignty positions amid deepening geopolitical uncertainty.

...

Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley took the lead in articulating the Caribbean's response on January 3, urging calm, de-escalation, and adherence to international law after the US carried out a sudden military operation in Venezuela that sharply altered the region's geopolitical landscape.

Mottley's intervention came as the operation resulted in the capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, who were then taken to the US. The couple appeared earlier this week before a New York court.

The rapid military action marked the culmination of an escalating pressure campaign by the administration of President Donald Trump, which in recent months included strikes on vessels accused of smuggling narcotics into the US.

Speaking in Bridgetown as developments unfolded on January 3, Mottley stressed that small states were especially exposed during periods of geopolitical confrontation, and must be guided by principle rather than power.

"Venezuela is our friend. The United States of America is our friend. In both

instances, we have family relations with both countries," she said, underscoring the Caribbean's deep historical and human ties to both nations.

She said Barbados would be guided by first principles and collective regional consultation, adding that the country's foreign policy remained firmly anchored in the shared positions of Caricom.

Mottley warned that the survival of small states depends on respect for an international rules-based order, arguing that any action perceived as undermining that framework was "of grave concern" not only to Barbados, but to the wider Caribbean. She reiterated the region's long-standing advocacy for diplomacy, pointing to the United Nations as a critical forum for dialogue.

"The United Nations exists precisely to allow for mature conversation, even when there is deep disagreement," she said, cautioning that the erosion of international guardrails risked dangerous precedents for smaller nations.

Against a backdrop of overlapping global crises, from pandemics and supply-chain disruptions to climate shocks and conflict, Mottley appealed for public trust and patience

as governments navigate what she described as an increasingly volatile global environment.

"We will be guided by first principles. We will be guided first by the protection of lives and livelihoods," she said, adding that Barbados would continue to assert the rights of small states within an international system often shaped by

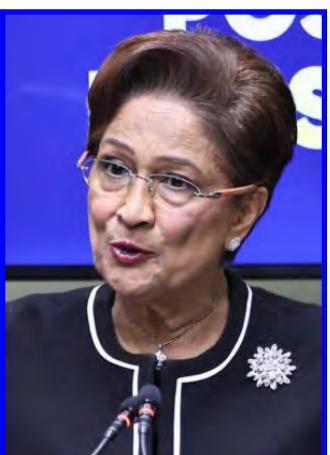
See Page 5: Priority



Mia Mottley



Irfaan Ali



Kamla Persad-Bissessar

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Grenada's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Export Development Joseph Andall addresses the Meet & Greet Engagement event held in November last year. *Facebook photo*

## Grenada launches Diaspora Homecoming 2026 initiative

By Romeo Kaseram  
An LJI Community Report

**Toronto** – Weeks before the government of Grenada formally announced Diaspora Homecoming 2026, early groundwork was already being laid in Canada through direct engagement with members of the Grenadian diaspora.

On November 12, the Consulate General of Grenada in Toronto hosted a Diaspora Meet & Greet Engagement, bringing together diaspora members and senior government officials under the theme, *Together Developing Connections for Grenada's Progress*.

The event opened with welcome remarks from Grenada's Consul General Gerry Hopkin.

The Toronto engagement featured Grenada's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Trade and Export Development, Joseph Andall, who, among other things, provided updates on national development priorities, high-impact projects, foreign affairs initiatives, and emerging trade and investment opportunities.

Andall's presentation emphasised the government's recognition of the diaspora's long-standing contributions and its commitment to strengthening structured, long-term engagement.

Participants at the November meeting actively exchanged ideas with government representatives, raising questions and offering perspectives on how the diaspora could further support Grenada's development agenda. A *Facebook* release by the Grenada Consulate General in Toronto later described the atmosphere as "respectful, collaborative, and engaging", reinforcing a shared vision of sustainable national progress.

The November conversations in Toronto later found formal expression when the government of Grenada, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Trade & Export Development, officially announced Diaspora Homecoming 2026 on December 1, a landmark national initiative inviting Grenadians and friends of Grenada worldwide to return home for two weeks of reconnection, celebration, and collaboration.

The announcement, issued via the Consulate General in Toronto's *Facebook* account, framed Homecoming 2026 as a strategic effort to strengthen national bonds and advance shared development goals, recognising the critical role of Grenada's global diaspora in investment, philanthropy, remittances, cultural promotion, business partnerships, and knowledge exchange.

Scheduled from June 21 to July 5, Diaspora Homecoming aligns with international school holidays, and precedes the island's Spice Mas peak season. According to the release, timing of the event is intended to encourage family travel while stimulating economic activity during a traditionally softer tourism period.

Grenada's Ambassador Terry Forrester, Special Envoy for Diaspora Affairs, described the initiative as a defining national moment.

"Homecoming 2026 represents a powerful moment of

national unity and purpose. This initiative is about mobilising talent, investment, ideas, and innovation to strengthen our communities and unlock new opportunities. We invite every Grenadian – no matter where you live – to come home, reconnect with your roots, and help shape the next chapter of Grenada's development story," Forrester said.

The programme will feature major national events, including a National Investment and Business Forum showcasing opportunities across both emerging and traditional sectors such as tourism, healthcare, agriculture, renewable energy, technology, fisheries, manufacturing, and real estate.

Networking and professional exchange sessions will bring together diaspora professionals, government agencies, local entrepreneurs, youth leaders, and private-sector stakeholders. Cultural and heritage activities, including a Diaspora Awards Gala, music festival, community welcome events, and cultural displays, will celebrate Grenada's identity while strengthening national pride.

Community-centered initiatives, such as volunteer outreach, philanthropic missions, and youth engagement programmes, are also planned to deepen social impact and reinforce a spirit of service.

The government expects Diaspora Homecoming 2026 to deliver measurable national benefits, including strengthened diaspora-government relations, increased business and investment commitments, enhanced youth cultural awareness, and meaningful economic uplift. The initiative will also establish Diaspora Week as a recurring fixture on the national calendar and support the development of an updated Global Diaspora Engagement Database to improve long-term collaboration.

Andall said the programme reflects the enduring role of Grenadians abroad in shaping the nation's future.

"Grenada Diaspora Week – Homecoming 2026 is a defining moment for our nation. Our diaspora has always been an integral part of Grenada's progress and identity, and their contributions continue to shape our social, cultural, and economic development," he stated.

A dedicated Homecoming 2026 Secretariat is being established to oversee planning and execution, while the Ministry has issued a national call for stakeholder support in coordination, programming contributions, event promotion, and partnership development.

The initiative will be led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with support from the Ministry of Tourism, Culture & the Creative Economy, the Grenada Tourism Authority, and key government and private-sector partners.

According to figures published on the government of Grenada's website, the Grenadian diaspora is estimated at approximately 67,200 people, compared with a resident population of about 108,339. Grenadians abroad are primarily based across the Caribbean, Europe, and North America.

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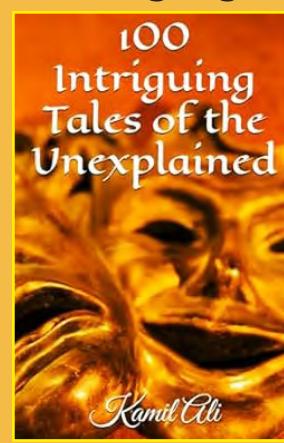
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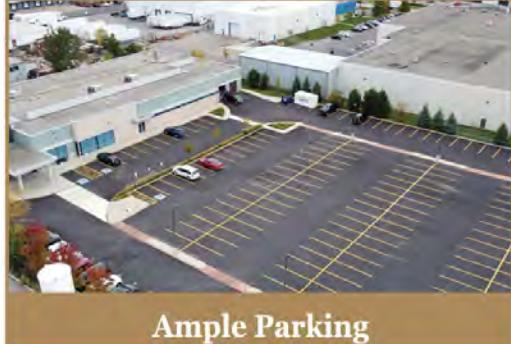


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# Canada reaffirms support for democracy following Maduro's exit

— Canada has reiterated its long-standing refusal to recognise Nicolás Maduro's government, saying it stands with the Venezuelan people's right to determine their own future, following a US operation that captured Venezuela's president and his wife.

...

Ottawa — Prime Minister Mark Carney has said Canada stands by the Venezuelan people's "right to decide and build their own future in a peaceful and democratic society," following confirmation from Washington that US forces had captured Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores.

The operation was announced on January 3 by US President Donald Trump, who said the couple had been taken into American custody.

In a statement posted on social media, Carney said Canada has not recognised the Maduro government "since it stole the 2018 election," adding that Ottawa "welcomes the opportunity for freedom, democracy, peace, and prosperity for the Venezuelan people."

An official statement from the Office of the Prime Minister said one of the first actions taken by Canada's new government in March 2025 was to impose additional sanctions on what it described as Maduro's "brutally oppressive and criminal regime," citing grave breaches of international peace and security, systematic human rights violations, and corruption.

The statement reiterated Canada's position that it has never



Mark Carney



Anita Anand

recognised the legitimacy of the Maduro government, and has consistently supported "a peaceful, negotiated, and Venezuelan-led transition process that respects the democratic will of the Venezuelan people."

"Canada calls on all parties to respect international law," the statement said, adding that Ottawa remains committed to upholding the rule of law, sovereignty, and human rights, while supporting the Venezuelan people's sovereign right to determine their future.

Canada also stressed the importance it attaches to resolving international crises through multilateral engagement, noting that it is in close contact with international partners as developments continue.

## Priority focused on safety and security, says Ali

**From Page 1**  
the actions of larger powers.

In Guyana, President Irafaan Ali focused on national security assurances as news of the operation emerged. He convened the Defence Board, national security leadership, regional commanders, and senior security officials to assess developments.

"We have been monitoring the situation [in] Venezuela all morning," Ali said. "The Defence Board, the leadership of the GDF and our security forces are fully mobilised in accordance with our security plans. The priority is the safety and security of our country."

Later that day on January 3, Ali welcomed US leadership while grounding Guyana's position in explicit principles.

"We look forward to constructive engagement in Venezuela's next chapter in the interest of all Venezuelans," he said, adding that "stability, respect for law, and democratic transition are critical to the future of Venezuela and the broader Americas".

He added that Guyana supports efforts that uphold democratic norms and ensure the region remains a Zone of Peace.

In Trinidad and Tobago, Opposition Leader Kamla Persad-Bissessar issued a clear statement distancing the country from the US military action.

"...Trinidad and Tobago is NOT a participant in any of these ongoing military operations," she said in a statement posted on X. She added that Trinidad and Tobago "continues to maintain peaceful relations with the people of Venezuela".

Foreign Affairs Minister Anita Anand echoed that position in a separate statement, saying Canada has refused to recognise the legitimacy of the Maduro government since closing its embassy in Venezuela in 2019.

Anand said Canada has consistently opposed the repression of the Venezuelan people, including the persecution of political opponents, and reaffirmed Ottawa's commitment to democracy and the rule of law.

"Canada stands by the people of Venezuela and their desire to live in a peaceful and democratic society," she said, adding that Canada is engaging closely with international partners, monitoring the situation, and remains prepared to assist Canadians in Venezuela through consular support in Colombia.

## Priority focused on safety and security, says Ali

She later said Trinidad and Tobago looked forward to renewed cooperation and the strengthening of its long-standing friendship with the Venezuelan people as they transition away from years of "oppression" and "dictatorship".

At the regional level, Caricom leaders also moved swiftly. According to the *Caribbean Media Corporation*, the Caricom Bureau of Heads of Government met early on January 3 and called for "peaceful dialogue" to ensure stability in Venezuela, and mitigate potential spillover effects across neighbouring states.

The Bureau comprises St Kitts and Nevis Prime Minister Terrance Drew as Caricom chair, Jamaica's Prime Minister Andrew Holness, and St Lucia's Prime Minister Philip J. Pierre. It declared that the situation was of grave concern, with potential implications for regional security, economic activity, and air travel.

In its statement, the Bureau reaffirmed Caricom's commitment to international law, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and human dignity, adding that the Community remained ready to support diplomatic efforts "in a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect".

Speaking in Washington following the US move against Caracas, President Trump said the US intended to "run" Venezuela "until such time as we can do a safe, proper and judicious transition," highlighting the uncertainty now facing the region and the hemisphere.

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**Editorial****Caribbean unease**

**C**anada's response to the US military operation in Venezuela was careful and consistent with long-standing policy. Prime Minister Mark Carney reaffirmed Ottawa's refusal to recognise the government of Nicolás Maduro, reiterated support for democratic renewal, and emphasised Canada's commitment to international law and multilateral engagement. Foreign Affairs Minister Anita Anand echoed those themes, stressing opposition to repression and support for the Venezuelan people.

Canada's position is clear. It reflects a settled view that the Maduro government lacks legitimacy, that Venezuelans should determine their own future, and that international crises are best addressed through lawful and collective means. Ottawa's language is familiar, principled, and aligned with its role as a middle power that places confidence in institutions, diplomacy, and process.

In the Caribbean, the response to the US action has been marked by a more cautious register.

Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley urged calm, restraint, and adherence to international law, situating the unfolding events within the broader concern of how small states navigate moments of geopolitical confrontation. Her remarks neither defended the Maduro administration nor questioned the importance of democratic values. Instead, they focused on the need for legal and diplomatic guardrails that help prevent the spread of instability.

For small island states, such caution is shaped by circumstance rather than ideology. International law and multilateral processes function as stabilising mechanisms in an environment where economic exposure, geographic proximity, and limited capacity heighten vulnerability. When these frameworks are weakened or bypassed, the effects tend to be unevenly felt, and recovery can be slow.

That sense of unease does not stop at the region's shoreline. Across our communities abroad with enduring ties to the Caribbean, developments are being followed closely. Here resides our diaspora, where family remains rooted in the region, where remittances flow regularly, and where decisions about returning, retirement, or investment are closely linked to regional stability. Political shifts in the Caribbean are, therefore, not viewed at a distance, but as events with practical implications that ripple outward.

In such settings, the language used by Caribbean leaders resonates in a particular way. Calls for dialogue, restraint, and respect for international law are understood not as hesitation, but as reflections of experience. They echo an historical awareness that external decisions have often carried lasting local consequences, and that disruption, once set in motion, can be difficult to contain.

Canada's emphasis on multilateralism and lawful transition aligns broadly with the principles articulated by Caribbean governments. Yet a difference in perspective remains. From Ottawa, the focus rests on norms and outcomes; from the Caribbean, it rests on process and precedent. Both approaches value democracy and stability, but they are shaped by different degrees of exposure to risk.

This divergence does not suggest opposition; rather, it reflects the realities of scale. Larger states can speak of opportunity with some distance from immediate fallout. Smaller island states, and our diaspora abroad, are more inclined to assess how actions taken today shape expectations tomorrow.

None of this diminishes the importance of democratic change in Venezuela, nor the legitimate concerns raised by years of repression and instability. Nor does it call into question Canada's consistency in articulating our democratic principles. It does, however, help explain why Caribbean leaders have emphasised restraint alongside commitment to democratic norms.

As events continue to unfold, the Caribbean's measured responses reflect an awareness that stability, once unsettled, is difficult to restore. It is an awareness shared quietly beyond the region, in our households where such developments are sure to ripple into our lives abroad.

In that sense, our unease surrounding this moment is less a reaction than a recognition of how closely connected our Caribbean remains to decisions made beyond its shores, and how carefully we are watching those decisions.

Views expressed are not necessarily those of this publication.

Letters to be published will be edited where necessary.

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**A** new year is upon us. It is a time for reflection and renewal, and an opportunity to reset our course with clarity and intention.

As we step forward, it is worth pausing to ask ourselves not only where we have been, but where we want to go, and how the lessons and accomplishments of the past can guide us toward new achievements.

Outlook matters. Knowing what we want matters. Remaining anchored in our core principles matters even more, because it is those principles that steady us through change, and help guide our collective progress.

In late December 2020, a vision took shape; it was one that was rooted in purpose and driven by a deep commitment to Canada's Indo-Caribbean community.

That vision led to the creation of the Indo-Caribbean Canadian Association (ICCA), and since then, the journey we have undertaken together has laid a strong and enduring foundation.

From the outset, our work has been guided by three defining principles: foundation, family, and future.

**Foundation** – In West Indian households, we learn early that the choices we make today shape the lives we lead tomorrow.

This belief extends well beyond education and career ambitions to the very character of our families and communities. At ICCA, we are proud of the foundation we have built, one grounded in passion, dedication, and service.

Through thoughtful governance, disciplined internal operations, and a commitment to accountability, we have created an organisation positioned not only to endure, but to thrive.

This foundation ensures that our work remains relevant, credible, and impactful for years to come.

**Family** – Family is the heartbeat of the Indo-Caribbean community. It is the source of our resilience, our compassion, and our shared strength. The bonds we carry inspire our work every day – whether we are bringing people together through cultural events, empowering voices through educational workshops, or gathering to plan the next steps of our mission.

At ICCA, we move beyond traditional roles and titles. We serve with a sense of belonging and shared responsibility. This spirit of family fuels our passion and drives us to uplift our community, our extended family, today and in the years ahead.

**Future** – Our vision remains firmly focused on those who will follow. The sacrifices of our ancestors and the dedication

**Learning how to survive a rod, chalk, and in a hard place**

**T**eacher was well into his stride at the chalkboard, his instruction a swift flowing current, our attention barely tethered to his words. What was truly holding us spellbound was the dried guava rod that seemed to leap from hand to hand with a life of its own.

In this particular movement of our daily lessons when I was growing up back home, the rod inhabited two worlds. Now it was pointing, scraping, tapping its way across chalked sentences on the blackboard, a teaching tool, an extension of the curriculum itself.

Yet even at our tender age, we were already old hands from encounters with that same guava rod quickly shedding its scholarly mantle to reveal its other, darker vocation. One moment it was a pointer, gnarled and pecking tick-tick, tock-tock at the chalkboard; then in the next moment, a writhing rod of correction descending onto an open, quivering palm.

Long before Teacher wielded that guava rod, I knew its playfulness with language, its fluidity in the use of grammar. Indeed, Ma had started early, teaching me that authority liked to improvise; that it could instruct one moment, and sting the next. Same object; same hand; different outcome.

But Ma's lessons were taught without the sing-song cadences of rote and repetition; instead, she prepared me for classrooms where language bruised before it explained, and where meaning always arrived late, limping behind the descended blow.

On this day we were being guided through the world of exotic creatures inhabiting what was then our mostly colonised earth. Africa appeared before us not as a place, but as an outline. Animals emerged in chalk, sketched with varying confidence and questionable proportion. It took imagination; ours, not Teacher's, to flesh out the missing details, an education in itself.

Here elephants grazed with bodies bloated and generous with the obliging chalk; midsections were rotund, legs thick, with clubs for toes. Ears flapped like tents, which pitched in haste, were being toyed with by the wind. Trunks arched with alarm; tusks arrived as an afterthought. Something large had gone slightly wrong; even we, who were being educated, could see it.

Lions, in all their pride, resisted any recognisable realism. Manes flamed like brush fires; heads sagged under rows of weighty canines. Bent hinds legs condemned them to immobility and starvation. On this chalkboard, nothing birthed held its shape; yet each tried to stand, each effort the clumsy first steps

of our parents were made with hope for opportunity, progress, and possibility.

We honour that legacy by investing our time, energy, and resources into building a stronger future for the next generation.

The work we do today carries lasting meaning, shaping opportunities and opening doors for tomorrow. Every effort, every hour, and every act of service contribute to a brighter, more inclusive future for our community.

The year ahead promises new accomplishments for ICCA. Our programs have been fine-tuned, and strategic planning has been underway for months. We have evolved from a reactionary and *ad hoc* organisation into one with structure, direction, and a clearly defined purpose.

This evolution matters. Simply put, our community deserves an organisation that is intentional, organised, and prepared to lead.

Across Canada, communities have advanced by coming together, organising collectively, and claiming space. They have ensured their voices are heard and their contributions recognised.

The Indo-Caribbean community is no different. We have arrived, and now we are actively creating space; a space to celebrate our culture, address our needs, and contribute meaningfully to Canadian society.

Canada is a nation shaped by many peoples from many lands. Aside from the Indigenous Peoples who have been here since time immemorial, we all arrived carrying our histories, traditions, and lived experiences.

It is our responsibility to bring the best of who we are forward, to ensure our culture is preserved, respected, and shared, while upholding the values of citizenship and community engagement.

This upcoming year, we are set to deliver programming, services and engagement unseen to the community.

Robust youth programming, a support group for single-parents and their children, standing up for 2SLGBTQ+ rights, delivering culturally appropriate items to those in need, and extending civic engagement, are central to our work.

On behalf of the volunteers of ICCA, I extend my heartfelt gratitude for your continued trust and support. What we are building together is meaningful and transformative.

The journey ahead is filled with promise, and we invite you to remain engaged, to lend your voice and energy, and to walk with us as we continue to serve, strengthen, and uplift our community.

**Learning how to survive a rod, chalk, and in a hard place**

of the newly-born in a wilderness grassland.

Later in life, I would come to see what appeared on that chalkboard served less as an entry point into a zoological universe than as an inadvertent introduction to Surrealism.

Those misshapen animals could easily have passed for early Salvador Dalí sketches, melting, distorted, time-warped, and fit for a rudimentary course in how reality bends under too-rigid hands. They marked exploratory paths on the map of my early life, leading, unexpectedly, toward art, theory, and my lifelong suspicion of hegemonic representations.

Meanwhile, Teacher's rod of correction kept time: tip-tap; tip-tap. We knew well that rhythm, the routine, the readiness. Teacher stopped mid-stride, the classroom holding its breath. Somewhere in the herd, a nervous, twitching foot tapped on the floor, its Morse a message of foreboding and fear.

Then the question leapt out, "Who would like to tell the class a story about what he has just learned?" to the syncopated accompaniment of the rod tapping out each syllable on a desk, each beat structured and keeping immaculate time.

We knew better. This was no invitation; the hunt was on.

Teacher's eyes settled on a boy two rows down, frozen in the headlights, "You boy! Tell us a good story!"

My classmate began tentatively, "One day I took an airplane. It flew and flew and I land in Africa." It was a promising start, already stitching together a connected sequence of chalked map outlines, misshapen animals, and imagination fueled by fear.

But the rod was keeping time: Tap. Tap. Tap.

The story nosedived. "The airplane crashed. I came out, and a lion jumped out and ate me up! Crick-crack, story done, lesson done!" He anchored his hands behind, with fingers interlocked protectively, while walking woodenly back to his seat.

Years later, I understand what ended abruptly in that classroom found extension at home. Stories, like weals from the rod, required aftercare. Ma noticed the rod's signature, but only asked how my school day went, gently cupping her hands in mine as I struck the match to light the kerosene lamp.

In that difference lived everything. Where the classroom taught me when to stop speaking, Ma taught me how to carry the flame; to take the story forward, repairing what had been misdrawn, speaking to what had been disciplined into silence.

And somewhere between rod and chalk, erasure and imagination, a matriarch's guidance quietly took hold.



Ryan  
Singh

# Guyana's next healthcare phase: From islands of care to an integrated nation

— The authors of the following article, LHS Labs and ICChange, are Canadian organisations that work at the intersection of innovation and health systems design. Together, they bring decades of international experience in designing and deploying integrated health and development solutions globally. They have supported governments and providers to undergo health system transformation through evidence-based strategy, technology integration, and community partnership.

...

In 2023, we had the privilege to visit Guyana and were honoured to meet with the Minister of Health, Dr Frank Anthony, as well as other clinical leaders to learn about ongoing initiatives and services. We witnessed the incredible progress being made, listened to the bold future vision, and shared mutual learnings. Guyana's achievements are undeniable – modern hospitals now rise from Berbice to Essequibo, telemedicine links connect remote hinterland communities, and investments in digital health records promise greater continuity of care. These achievements inspire pride among all citizens.

There is also an emerging opportunity to accelerate this progress by investing in data: the lifeblood of decision-making, planning, and rapid response. Strengthening health data systems represents the next frontier of transformation to ensure that the investments already being made in hospitals, services, and people are matched by the information systems that allow them to work seamlessly together across sectors – from health facilities, disaster preparedness, to environmental agencies, and social services. With recent Data Protection legislation and investments in digital health workforce training, as well as locally-hosted data centers, Guyana is already taking steps to assert ownership over its health information, safeguarding its data sovereignty, and fostering public trust in digital health transformation.

## Health Beyond Emergencies: A Broader Challenge

However, today, multi-dimensional challenges are increasingly impacting healthcare systems. Climate change brings new risks: floods that spark malaria and dengue outbreaks also disrupt food systems, prolonged heatwaves strain vulnerable populations and drive water-borne diseases. Additionally, chronic illnesses, maternal and child health needs continue to reshape daily life for families, often away from the headlines. In moments of crisis and in the quieter burdens of chronic disease, siloed data become more than an inefficiency; it becomes a hazard. A single shock can ignite a chain of health emergencies and ripple across food, water, and housing systems; meanwhile, uncoordinated information undermines routine care and disease prevention across the country.

Public health surveillance, disaster readiness, climate resilience, nutrition programs, and high-quality healthcare delivery cannot operate in silos. Integrated data systems linking health and social determinant data will enable Guyana to address the root causes of health inequities and achieve its goals of fostering more resilient communities and equitable care nationwide.

## The Vision: Integrated Digital Health for Resilience and Equity

Imagine a single, secure digital platform – Guyana's Health Intelligence Hub. This would bring together disease surveillance, health services data with climate forecasts and environmental monitoring; always accessible, in near-real time, to every clinician, healthcare worker, and policymaker who needs it. With integrated intelligence, health teams could anticipate malaria outbreaks and pre-position emergency supplies before roads are washed out by flooding. Hospital administrators could create informed staffing models, ensuring trained professionals are where patients need them. Nutrition programs could target at-risk households when crops falter or markets close.

Chronic disease management, referrals, and follow-ups would be linked, no matter where a patient seeks care. Ministries, local authorities, health professionals, and civil society must cooperate as never before, sharing information rapidly and acting as one system. Digital health integration enables Guyana to deliver health for all: universally accessible, equitable, and responsive to all communities.

## Designed for Guyana, Tailored by Global Learnings

As clinicians, administrators, and health systems designers, we have first-hand experience of how countries globally navigate today's new healthcare landscape. We have also seen prime examples from around the world of how small nations are defining new frameworks and adapting technologies for their realities. Maldives stands out for its recently unveiled data sharing platform for climate action. In healthcare, Estonia created a platform linking health records, government services, and public data streams, empowering citizens and enabling fast, seamless healthcare even in times of crisis. Rwanda built equity into its digital health system, using integrated data to identify gaps and drive community-led healthcare solutions. Taiwan's health intelligence platform enables real-time disease surveillance, rapid response, and personalised care; it was credited with saving lives during the Covid-19 pandemic.

These global examples prove what is possible: with clear vision, investment, and collaboration, Guyana can leap ahead, becoming a regional leader in the Caribbean on health system resilience and innovation. There are also lessons from larger countries with vast resources who still struggle with digital health fragmentation. In Canada, the US, and the UK, disconnected platforms and incomplete integration have led to inefficiencies and missed opportunities for preventive care. The result is enormous spending on health technology without realising its full benefits.

Against this backdrop of global learnings, the opportunity is clear: investing in digital systems as a part of national infrastructure will ensure Guyana's healthcare system is cohesive, interoperable, and inclusive.

## Realising the Vision: Practical, Focused Actions

Making this vision a reality requires a number of concrete steps that align action with national priorities, these steps can include:

### 1. Establish interoperable digital infrastructure and backend data integration.

By prioritising building robust backend digital infrastructure, secure, interoperable data systems we can aggregate and integrate data from health, climate, agriculture, and other critical sectors. Rather than off-the-shelf or externally imposed solutions, these systems should be adapted to local context, guided by Guyanese needs, and future-proofed for scalability, privacy, and sovereignty.

### 2. Align national policy and enable responsible data sharing.

Parallel to technical deployment, there should be an effort to advance national policies that enable data sharing while upholding privacy and ethical standards. This means establishing clear legal frameworks, institutional responsibilities, and trusted protocols that allow secure, appropriate data use across ministries and with trusted partners.

### 3. Center stakeholder engagement and sustained capacity building.

Robust stakeholder engagement must happen alongside technical and policy progress. This includes involvement of healthcare providers, government ministries, Indigenous communities, and local organisations in system design, governance, and rollout. Sustained capacity strengthening, training both technical and frontline staff, is essential, so users can extract actionable insights, respond collaboratively in crises, and build a culture of data-driven decision-making.



Dr Iraan Ali (centre) and Minister of Health, Dr Frank Anthony (left), attend the commissioning of state-of-the-art digital X-ray equipment at the Leonora Cottage Hospital in Region Three (Essequibo Islands-West Demerara) last month. The new system brings high-quality diagnostic services for residents of Leonora and surrounding communities. Guyana Ministry of Health Facebook photo

## The Journey Ahead

With the economy growing and new resources available, smart investments into an integrated system can deliver outsized impact. The construction of such a system also creates an entire innovation ecosystem and nurtures the emergence of the clinical innovator – cross-disciplinary expert who translates their care capacity to the systems-level.

Since our visit in 2023, our partnerships have grown and we are collaborating with Guyanese health system leaders in creating platforms for clinician innovators to share ideas, co-design solutions, and drive forward solutions for health transformation.

This fall, Guyanese surgical trainees will be invited to join our Surgical Innovation Week at the University of British Columbia, Canada, where they will engage in hands-on systems design and innovation training, highlighting how shared learning strengthens health systems across borders.

The future of healthcare will not wait; when multi-sector intelligence is united, resilience ceases to be an ambitious promise and becomes an everyday reality. With vision, collaboration, and wise investment, Guyana can chart a future that is more equitable for generations to come and we stand ready to support in this journey.

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# Artificial intelligence rising as things fall apart for human cognition

Dear Editor,

In recent months I have written about artificial intelligence as a quiet but transformative force in our lives. I now wish to deepen that argument by placing AI within a longer historical and literary frame, drawing on Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, a novel that remains one of the most perceptive accounts of how domination actually works.

Achebe did not portray colonialism as an immediate apocalypse. There was no sudden collapse, no instant annihilation of African society. Instead, colonial power arrived slowly, through missionaries, schools, medicine, courts, and language. It arrived as help. It arrived as improvement. It arrived offering meaning, order, and explanation. As Achebe writes with devastating clarity, "The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peacefully with his religion... Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one."

The tragedy in *Things Fall Apart* is not simply the fall of Okonkwo or the breakdown of Igbo society. It is the gradual relocation of trust. African institutions are not destroyed first; they are displaced. People begin to believe that the foreign system works better, judges better, heals better, explains better. By the time resistance becomes visible, the inner structure of the society has already been altered.

This is precisely the pattern we are witnessing today with artificial intelligence.

AI has not entered human life as a hostile force. It has arrived as a supplement, as an assistant, as a neutral aid. It writes our letters, corrects our grammar, summarises our reading, performs our analysis, and increasingly makes recommendations that shape our decisions. We experience this not as dispossession, but as relief. Like Achebe's villagers, we are grateful for what seems to work.

Yet the danger lies not in what AI does for us, but in what it teaches us to stop doing.

We are allowing artificial intelligence to perform tasks that once constituted the core of human intellectual life. Reasoning, interpretation, synthesis, judgment, and even imagination are increasingly externalised. The more fluent and confident these systems become, the more authority we grant them. Slowly, imperceptibly, trust shifts. Human thought begins to feel inef-

ficient, unreliable, and unnecessary.

Achebe understood that colonialism was not merely a political event. It was an assault on becoming. It reshaped how people understood themselves in time, in memory, and in possibility. "The world has no end," one elder says in *Things Fall Apart*, but colonialism introduces a world with an ending, a linear history in which African systems are rendered obsolete.

Artificial intelligence is performing a similar operation on humanity as a whole. It introduces a new standard of intelligence against which human thought increasingly appears deficient. The danger is not that AI will replace us violently, but that we will quietly internalise its logic and accept our own redundancy.

There is also a deeper, almost theological dimension to this shift. We often say that God works in mysterious ways. Divine authority has traditionally been accepted without transparency. We do not know how God decides whom to reward or punish. Artificial intelligence is beginning to occupy a similar position in our lives. Its inner workings are opaque. Even its creators cannot fully explain how it arrives at certain conclusions. Yet we accept its outputs with confidence, even reverence.

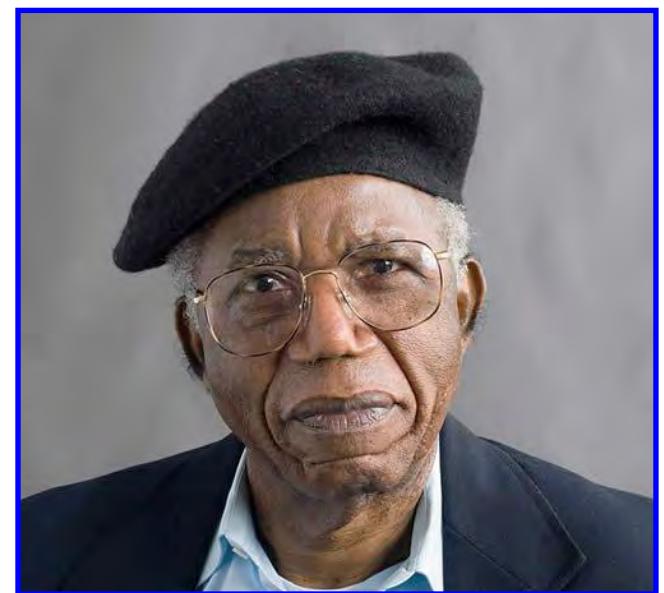
This is not merely technological trust. It is a transfer of faith.

Achebe showed how colonial religion succeeded not only by preaching a new God, but by teaching people to doubt their own spiritual systems. Today, we are being taught to doubt our own cognitive systems. We consult the machine not because we are incapable of thinking, but because we have been persuaded that machine reasoning is superior.

The colonisation unfolding today is, therefore, not territorial. It is cognitive, cultural, and existential. It is a colonisation of becoming. Like the world Achebe described, things do not fall apart through force. They fall apart through persuasion, through supplementation, through the gradual erosion of confidence in one's own ways of knowing.

*Things Fall Apart* is not a novel of the past. It is a warning for the present. It reminds us that domination often arrives disguised as help, and that by the time we recognise what has been lost, our world may already be speaking a language we no longer fully understand.

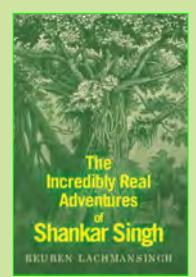
Dr Walter H. Persaud, Guyana, via email.



Chinua Achebe

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# Guyana in 2026 looking at exceptional growth, tests on costs, inclusion

Guyana enters 2026 as one of the world's fastest-growing economies, propelled by offshore oil production and an unprecedented public investment cycle. Headline growth will remain exceptional, but the decisive question for the year ahead is no longer whether the economy expands – it is how effectively oil wealth is converted into lower costs, broader opportunity, and social cohesion.

Economically, rising oil output and continued infrastructure spending point to another year of outsized GDP growth. Socially, expectations will intensify around jobs, housing, and cost of living, testing State capacity. Politically, the post-election environment gives the government room to act, while governance credibility and regional security risks, especially the Essequibo dispute, remain key tail risks, although the recent removal of Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro by the US could lessen such risk.

The most likely outcome for 2026 is a "boom with bottlenecks": strong growth paired with inflationary pressures, execution challenges, and sharper scrutiny of how benefits are distributed.

Oil production will remain the dominant macro driver in 2026. New and expanded offshore capacity, led by projects operated by Exxon Mobil and partners, pushes production higher and strengthens fiscal inflows. With additional vessels and fields coming online, Guyana is on a trajectory toward production levels that places it among the largest per capita oil producers globally.

The macro implication is clear: headline GDP growth will again rank among the highest in the world. The less obvious implication is that growth quality matters more than growth quantity. Oil output alone does not guarantee lower prices, better services, or diversified employment unless complementary investments deliver as promised.

Non-oil activity as construction, transport, trade, agriculture, financial services, and public administration, will continue to expand strongly in 2026. Public capital spending remains the main transmission mechanism, with large road, bridge, housing, hospital, and power projects sustaining demand. Last year the non-oil sector performed exceptionally well, and it is expected that it will continue to deliver in 2026, with substantial focus on agriculture.

Institutions such as the International Monetary Fund have described Guyana's medium-term outlook as highly favourable, projecting robust non-oil growth alongside oil-led expansion. In practice, the binding constraint is execution, hindered by project sequencing, procurement quality, and the availability of skilled labour.

Inflation dynamics will likely be mixed in 2026. Imported inflation may remain contained, but domestic pressures, such as housing, rents, construction inputs, and food, are likely to stay elevated in fast-growing corridors. Labour shortages and logistics constraints could amplify price pressures even as aggregate growth remains strong.

The exchange rate regime continues to anchor expectations, but the challenge is less currency instability than the possibility of the real economy overheating, aggravated by congestion, wage pressures, and rising inequality between sectors and regions.

Oil revenues channeled through the Natural

Resource Fund give the State exceptional fiscal space. In 2026, the central issue will not be affordability, but value for money. As budgets scale up, weaknesses in procurement, monitoring, and audit functions carry higher macro and political costs.

The World Bank has repeatedly emphasised that strong public investment management is essential to avoid waste and ensure oil wealth raises long-term productivity, rather than short-term prices.

Guyana's per capita income metrics have surged, yet the household experience remains uneven. Pockets of deprivation persist, particularly in hinterland regions and among vulnerable urban households. The social question for 2026 is whether public spending translates into visible, everyday gains, such as shorter commutes, cheaper electricity, better services care, and safer communities.

As growth accelerates, expectations rise faster than institutional capacity. This gap between promise and delivery will shape public sentiment more than macro indicators. The recent dissatisfaction expressed by the population over the government's failure to deliver on time on a year-end grant is indicative of the reaction when delivery does not meet expectations.

Housing and rental costs are emerging as a central social issue. Rapid migration toward growth corridors, inflows of foreign workers, and limited housing supply risk pricing lower- and middle-income households out of key urban areas. Without faster housing delivery and serviced land, social frustration could deepen even amid prosperity.

Food prices remain another pressure point. While overall inflation may appear moderate, food inflation disproportionately affects low-income households, sharpening inequality perceptions.

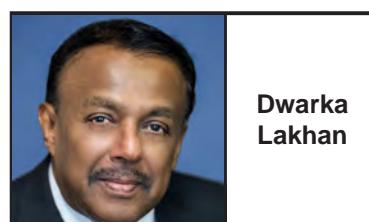
Employment creation in oil-adjacent sectors is real but limited relative to headline revenues. The larger employment challenge lies in construction, services, and public works. In 2026, pressure will intensify for specific skills, vocational training, and credible local-content outcomes that extend beyond headline compliance.

Social stability will increasingly hinge on whether young people see credible pathways into the new economy, or feel excluded from it.

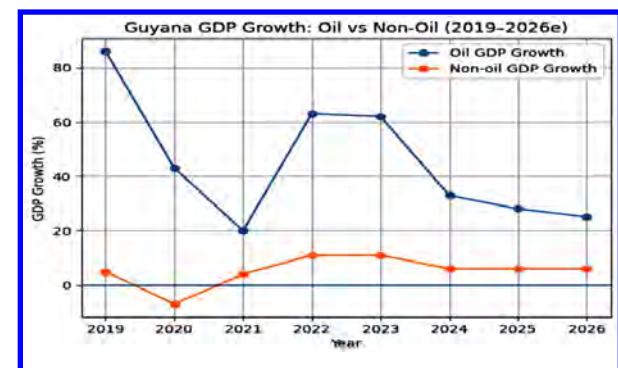
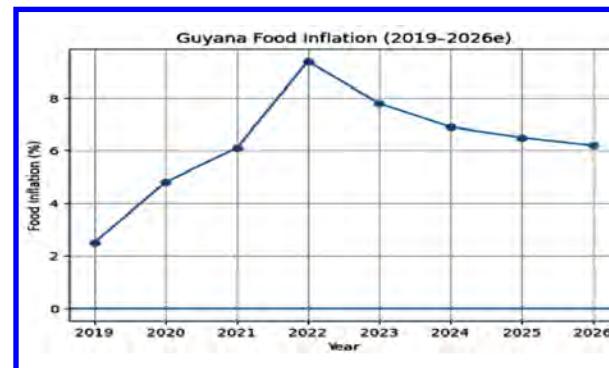
Following the 2025 general election, President Iraan Ali and the governing party enter 2026 with a renewed mandate. This provides political space to advance major infrastructure and social commitments. It also concentrates accountability: delivery failures, procurement controversies, or cost overruns will be owned squarely by the administration.

Opposition politics are likely to focus less on ideology and more on distribution, transparency, and oversight, on who benefits from oil wealth, and how fairly.

In 2026, oil governance debates will dominate political discourse. Procurement integrity, contract management, environmental oversight, and the pace of local-content gains will matter more politically than production



Dwarka Lakan



volumes.

Credibility is cumulative: even isolated scandals can have outsized effects in a high-revenue environment, influencing investor sentiment and public trust. Allegations of corruption and nepotism will continue to persist.

The territorial controversy with Venezuela, which is Guyana's largest geopolitical uncertainty, could very well dissipate following the arrest of Maduro. The International Court of Justice has ordered Venezuela to refrain from actions that would alter the *status quo* while the case proceeds. While open conflict remains unlikely, periodic escalations could disrupt investor confidence, raise security spending, and divert policy attention. The actions of Venezuela's new leadership remain uncertain.

On the upside, it is anticipated that oil output will continue to rise; public investment will stay high; and growth remains exceptional. However inflationary pressures will likely continue to persist in housing, food and services. Meantime, governance debates will likely intensify, but macro stability will hold.

Concurrently, it is hoped that power-sector and transport projects come online faster; logistics costs fall; and private investment broadens beyond oil. This would allow house-

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



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# Radica Nandlal remembered for a life of devotion, faith, and service

**Radica Nandlal**

January 29, 1956 – December 27, 2025

A Special LJI Tribute by Romeo Kaseram

**R**adica Nandlal lived a life shaped by faith, labour, and a generosity that unfolded quietly, one act at a time. She passed away on December 27, 2025, leaving behind a legacy rooted not only in hard work and talent, but in love that was steadfast, practical, and enduring.

Born on January 29, 1956, on Endeavour Road in Trinidad, Radica was raised in a deeply religious household by her parents, Bill and Mahadee. Speaking at the December 31 funeral, niece Asha Ramlakhan, who delivered the eulogy, recalled that Radica grew up in a home where prayer, devotion, and strong values were simply “a way of life”. As the eldest of her siblings, she carried responsibility early, developing a sense of leadership and care that would guide her throughout her life.

Those foundations, Asha reflected, shaped the woman Radica became, one who was grounded, humble, and guided always by service to others. Even as a young woman, she was ambitious, determined, and hardworking. In Trinidad, she sold in the market, drove children to school, and prepared preserves that filled her shelves in abundance. To many in the family, she was affectionately remembered as *The Pumpkin Lady*, a figure of constancy and quiet generosity whose cupboards were always full, even when things were out of season.

On March 15, 1973, Radica married her husband, Motilal, beginning a life centered on family, love, and responsibility. Family, Asha said, was not merely important to her – it was her purpose.

In the early 1980s, Radica came abroad with her family to Canada. Migrating brings its own challenges, but she met them with resilience and grace, adapting wherever life took her, and working tirelessly to ensure her family’s well-being.

Radica’s entrepreneurial spirit was nurtured early, shaped by time spent alongside her mother in the family shop in Trinidad. That experience planted the seed for dreams that would later bear many fulfilling fruits.

In 2006, those dreams became reality with the opening of Radica’s Hot & Spicy, a restaurant resonating with Trinidad and Tobago’s cuisine that reflected who she was: hardworking, generous, determined, and full of heart. Radica’s Hot & Spicy was more than a business; it was a place of warmth and flavour,



**Radica Nandlal with husband Moti. Photo by Russell Lutchman**

where our community gathered, and where we all felt at home.

Beyond her work, Radica was blessed with another passion, a remarkable and uplifting gift: her voice. Asha described her as *The Nightingale*, recalling a powerful, melodious talent that touched many hearts. Radica appeared on cultural programmes in Trinidad and Tobago, such as the popular *Indian Variety*; and she was a *Mastana Bahar* winner. She recorded several albums, including her cherished CD of Bhajans, a “miracle” as much as it was a *paen* of devotional work that will continue to inspire and comfort our diaspora around the world.

Her love for Bhajans and devotional music reflected the spiritual foundation she carried throughout her life. She also loved to travel, embracing opportunities, often made possible by son Shiva Nandlal, to reconnect with her ancestral roots. On journeys to India, she reunited with family, visited sacred places, and strengthened bonds that mattered deeply to her, always honouring where she came from.

At her core, Radica was sweet, loving, and gentle, simple in manner, yet rich in depth. She was a devoted mother, a loving grandmother, a cherished great-grandmother, and a caring mother-in-law and grandmother-in-law. Her love extended across generations, leaving a legacy that continues to live on.

Shiva spoke openly of the heartfelt pain in announcing his mother’s passing, poignantly stating there are no words that can truly prepare a heart for such a loss. He reflected that his

mother left him a lifetime gift in her cooking, her passion, and her love; he vowed that her name would always be remembered.

“Radica’s Hot & Spicy will live on through her every single day,” Shiva said, adding that everything he does going forward will be done with her name held high. In describing her many roles as mother, grandmother, sister, daughter, aunt, wife, Shiva said simply that, above all, she was his heart, and promised to continue making her proud.

He also expressed gratitude for the overwhelming love and prayers shared by the community. Reflecting more broadly, he noted that a mother’s unconditional love is irreplaceable, and urged those who still have their parents to cherish every conversation, every hug, and even the moments taken for granted. When loss comes, he said, comfort may be found in knowing one was truly present, and loving fully, just as they were loved.

That sentiment was echoed by many in the community in Facebook posts of condolence and mourning. Reta Ramgadoo Khargie remembered Radica as “an amazing person”, noting that her legacy will live on through the countless lives she touched. Randy Ramlochan spoke of her kindness and love, saying she will forever live on in the hearts of those who knew her.

In a touching message shared by John B. Persaud and Kamla, Radica was remembered through faith and moral inheritance. John reflected that her spirit now rests in God’s loving hands, and that the kindness and generosity reflected in her son are blessings received from her. Invoking sentiments from the profound comfort found in philosophy, Persaud noted that her spirit lives on not only through her family, but also through the place of joy she built, where every visit to Radica’s Hot & Spicy keeps her memory alive.

Deokie Muller recalled Radica’s warmth and presence, remembering her as kind, loving, and caring, always carrying one of the biggest smiles. She was loved deeply, Deokie wrote, and will not be forgotten.

Radica Nandlal lived a life defined by faith, perseverance, talent, humility, and unwavering commitment to family and community. Gentle in spirit yet strong in resolve, she gave freely of herself and carried herself with grace. She will be remembered with love, spoken of with pride, and deeply missed by all who were blessed to have been touched by her welcoming smile.

May her beautiful soul rest in eternal peace.

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A collage of images from Indo Caribbean World. At the top, a banner reads 'KEEPING ALIVE THE TIES THAT BIND' and 'INDO CARIBBEAN WORLD' with the tagline 'NOW IN OUR 43rd YEAR: 1983 - 2025'. Below the banner are several photos: a group of women at a charity event, a man and woman at a Diwali gathering, a bridge under construction, and a newspaper headline 'New Demerara River Bridge spans vision, Guyana's renewal'. The collage also includes a sidebar for 'LIFE INSURANCE' and a sidebar for 'MONEY FREEDOM INC.'

**Above the fold: 2025 in review**

Our coverage in 2025 saw the highs and lows of community life reflected on the front pages of *Indo-Caribbean World*, a mix of the sad, solemn, and celebratory. In March our community lamented the loss of Hindu leader, Samlall Persaud, even as our diaspora leaders called for healing, unity, and justice in Guyana. In May, we reported on the election victory of the UNC in Trinidad and Tobago, while in September we covered the PPP again forming the government in Guyana.

June saw us focusing on our community uniting to fight cancer with the Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation, while in October we highlighted The Canadian Children Foundation celebrating its 25th anniversary. In July and August our front pages kept in rhythmic step with the vibrant and creative Toronto Caribbean Carnival. From the summer's festivity, we then turned our attention to the solemn, noting with concern and anxiety the traumatic impact of Hurricane Melissa in Jamaica. But we were there to register our community's humanitarian and philanthropic response, with Atlas Cargo, Bedessee Imports, and many others responding to the emergency in Jamaica.

KEEPING ALIVE THE TIES THAT BIND

**INDO CARIBBEAN WORLD**

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**Our Community Is Thriving!**

**Diaspora eyes regional general elections**

- Our diaspora in the GTA remain sharply focused on the Caribbean's upcoming electoral calendar. For the diaspora, coming to terms with Anguilla, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana, remains now to turn to upcoming polls in Jamaica, Antigua and Barbuda, and most significantly, Guyana, general elections on September 1.

By Romesh Kaeser

LJ Reporter

Toronto-based Caribbean region navigates a year of consequential elections, diaspora comes to terms with the results. In Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Saint Vincent, continue to closely follow the political developments in the home lands. With shifts already happening in Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and Anguilla, the announcement of the general election in Barbados, to come general and regional elections have now taken centre stage.

Irfaan Ali

Photo: AP

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## Incoming Caricom leader urges regional unity

— Incoming Caricom chairman Dr Terrance Drew has called for regional coordination and solidarity amid geopolitical tensions, as Trinidad and Tobago Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar publicly rejects Caricom's "zone of peace" position and questions the bloc's reliability, exposing sharp divisions over Venezuela, the US, and the future of Caribbean unity.

...

Incoming Caricom leader Dr Terrance Drew, in assuming chairmanship of the regional group, has urged regional coordination and solidarity in the face of geopolitical uncertainty, even as sharp divisions emerge within the bloc over relations with Venezuela and the US.

In a New Year's message delivered on December 31, Drew, who will serve as Caricom chairman for the next six months, framed his address as a call for "reflection, calm leadership, and renewed commitment to the Caribbean ideal".

His remarks came amid heightened regional attention following recent statements by Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, who has publicly criticised Caricom's position on Venezuela, and rejected the organisation's long-standing position that the Caribbean is a "zone of peace".

The differing positions have emerged against a backdrop of escalating international activity in the region, including actions by the US military fleet that have reportedly involved an attack on a Venezuelan port described as a drug facility, the seizure of two oil tankers, and the destruction of approximately 30 vessels alleged to be engaged in drug trafficking.

Persad-Bissessar has aligned herself with the US' position, and has sharply criticised Caricom's posture toward Venezuela. Speaking to the Trinidad and Tobago media on December 22, she stated that Caricom had aligned itself with the "Maduro narco-government headed by a dictator", who had "imprisoned or killed thousands of Venezuelans".

"Trinidad and Tobago wants no part of that alignment. We don't support dictatorship and drug trafficking, and we don't support Caricom in their zone of peace fakery," she said.

In contrast, Drew's address placed emphasis on Caribbean unity and shared historical experience. Tracing the region's achievements in literature, economic thought, political philosophy, sport, music, and culture, he described these accomplishments as "not accidents of history".

Reflecting on regional cooperation in areas such as trade, freedom of movement, health, disaster response, education, security, and climate advocacy, he said integration was no longer optional.

"In an increasingly uncertain world, regional integration is not optional. It is essential," Drew said.

"As a unified body, we will continue to explore viable partnerships to encourage innovative approaches, capacity building, and access to affordable finance that are needed to foster sustainable development," he stated.

He underscored that Caribbean civilisation, "forged in the crucible of slavery and Indentured labour", had produced achievements that far exceeded the region's size.

Drew also cited Caricom's ongoing work in seeking reparations for trans-Atlantic slavery, and its continued advocacy on behalf of Haiti.

Addressing recent public disagreements

among member states, Drew acknowledged that differing national perspectives had drawn both regional and international attention.

"While such differences are not unusual in a diverse community such as ours, they remind us of the importance of managing our dialogue with care, mutual respect, and a resolute sense of regional responsibility," he said.

He emphasised that Caricom was never intended to be free of disagreement, but rather a forum where differences could be addressed constructively and internally.

"This reality does not call for isolation, but for stronger coordination, clearer purpose, and deeper solidarity," he said, adding, "It requires us to speak louder, speak with conviction, speak with one voice; where our shared interests are concerned, and to act with strategic maturity on the global stage."

Drew urged Caribbean leaders and citizens to recommit to the principles underpinning Caricom, calling for stronger institutions, enhanced consultation, and serious engagement reflective of the responsibilities entrusted to regional leaders.

"Differences and all, we are one Caribbean people, heirs to a civilisation that transformed suffering into strength and adversity into achievement," he said.

Drew also announced that St Kitts and Nevis has begun preparations to host the 50th Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of Caricom, scheduled for February 24-27.

"I cordially invite my colleague heads to join us in active engagement as we consider priority issues and advance the welfare of our people and of our region," he said, adding, "Caricom is and will continue to be a declaration of who we are and who we choose to be."

Meanwhile, Persad-Bissessar has continued to express dissatisfaction with Caricom's direction. In a December 20 statement titled *Our national interest first*, she declared that "Caricom is not a reliable partner at this time".

She warned that "beneath the thin mask of unity" lay widening fissures that could lead to the group's implosion if left unaddressed.

"The organisation is deteriorating rapidly due to poor management, lax accountability, factional divisions, de-stabilising policies, private conflicts between regional leaders and political parties, and the inappropriate meddling in the domestic politics of member states. That's the plain truth," she said.

She added that Caricom could not continue to operate in what she described as a "dysfunctional and self-destructive manner", cautioning that "hiding behind the glibness of diplomacy, fake sophistication, and false narratives is self-defeating".

Calling for transparency, Persad-Bissessar urged Caricom to confront what she characterised as internal decline.

"An organisation that chooses to disparage our greatest ally, the US, but lends support to the Maduro narco-government headed by a dictator who has imprisoned and killed thousands of civilians and opposition members, as well as threatened two Caricom members, is one that has clearly lost its way," she said.

She concluded by reaffirming her national stance, declaring, "Our citizens can rest assured that I will always make decisions that put Trinidad and Tobago first. Caricom will not determine our future, only the citizens of our country will choose our path."



Kamla Persad-Bissessar



Terrance Drew



# Ask Jay...

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## I'VE SEEN IT BEFORE: WHY BRAMPTON LANDLORDS CANNOT 'WING IT' ANYMORE

I remember walking through a basement apartment that looked perfect at first: fresh paint, new flooring, a tidy kitchen. The landlord was proud of it. "I take care of my place," he told me. Then he quietly admitted: no permits, no registration, no inspections. He wasn't trying to be reckless — he didn't believe the rules applied to him. That mindset is exactly why Brampton's new landlord rules became unavoidable.

Starting in the new year, any landlord in Brampton with one to four rental units must register those units with the city and obtain a valid licence before renting them out. This isn't a one-time form you fill out and forget; it includes annual renewal, a mandatory online learning module, compliance with health, fire, and building codes, and posting the licence on the property. Importantly, the licence itself is free. The city has indefinitely suspended the original \$300 annual fee, and that detail matters. This change isn't about generating revenue — it's about accountability and setting baseline standards.

Policies are not made for perfect situations; they are meant for when problems happen. When a property becomes crowded or unsafe, issues tend to spread. Fire crews respond, and bylaw officers spend weeks investigating. Neighbours deal with noise, parking chaos, and safety worries. If tragedy occurs, the first question is always: why didn't someone act earlier? The city's response now makes it clear: prevention is more important than reacting.

Brampton's decision to roll out its Residential Rental Licensing (RRL) program city-wide starting January 1, 2026, didn't surprise me. It actually seemed long overdue. Not registering an extra rental unit now results in fines of \$1,000 for the first offence, \$1,250 for the second, and \$1,500 for further violations. Other offences related to the RRL, like failing to display a licence or ignoring city orders, face the same escalating penalty system.

From my perspective, this isn't an anti-landlord policy. It's an acknowledgment that rental housing in Brampton is no longer informal. Basement apartments, shared homes, and small multiplexes now house a significant part of the city's population. With that reality comes responsibility. Licensing won't magically turn someone into a good landlord, but it does establish a baseline. It encourages education. It leaves a paper trail. And when issues occur, it provides the city with tools to intervene before problems escalate.

I've seen too many landlords rent first and worry about compliance later. Under the RRL program, that approach no longer works. A licence must be obtained or renewed before a unit is rented — otherwise, the tenancy is illegal. Even beautifully finished units can be unlawful if they were never permitted or registered, and operating an unregistered Additional Residential Unit is a serious offence. Non-compliance can also prevent a landlord from renewing a licence altogether, effectively cutting off rental income.

This is the moment for landlords to ask themselves an honest question: Am I managing housing, or just renting out space? If it's the former, these changes are manageable. If it's the latter, Brampton has made it clear those days are over. The city's rental market is entering a new chapter — one that prioritises safety, consistency, and accountability across every ward. You may not agree with every detail, but the direction is hard to dispute. In today's Brampton, doing nothing is no longer an option — and "I didn't know" is no longer a defence. I encourage every landlord in Ontario to follow Brampton's RRL program, and every tenant in Brampton to rent only licensed suites.

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

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Kids and parents at the NAFA Kid Christmas party. Photos by Russell Lutchman

## NAFA holds first Kids Christmas party

**L**aughter came easily, smiles lingered long into the evening, and the magic of Christmas arrived right on time as the National All Fours Association hosted its very first Kids Christmas Party last month.

It was the kind of afternoon where excitement crackled in the air, where wide-eyed children seized the moment on Santa's lap, and proud parents looked on, phones raised, hearts filling up faster than the photo gallery in their cameras.

For the children, it was pure wonder: Santa's reassuring presence, music spilling joy into every corner, and the delicious sense that the day was made just for them. For families, it was something gentler but just as powerful: a shared celebration, a pause from the rush for parking spots in the malls outside, a reminder of how community spirit can turn an ordinary day into memory.

The National All Fours Association later extended heartfelt thanks to the many families whose presence transformed the gathering

into a true celebration of togetherness. Special appreciation was extended to Daniel Gildharry and family, Ravi Adalath from Unstoppable Staffing Solutions, Shiva Nandlal from Radica's Hot & Spicy, and The Metro/Nitro Family, whose generous support helped bring the day to life.

Behind the scenes, yet very much at the heart of the celebration were the rhythmic energy of the Tassa Drummers, the infectious selections from Felicia the DJ, and the tireless efforts by many more, all ensuring the children's joy never skipped a beat.

"Your contributions truly made the day memorable for the kids and families," the association shared, its tone heartfelt and thankful. Indeed, the sentiment was evidenced that day with every grin, every embrace, and every child perched happily on Santa's knee, the association's first Kids Christmas Party delivering what the festive season is all about: warmth, wonder, and community spirit gift-wrapped and generously shared.



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Members of the TT diaspora and friends celebrate Lehwah, the end of the parang season, at the Consulate General for Trinidad and Tobago, Toronto; in photo



at left, Consul General Simone Young (at right) with mom Margot at the event. Photos by Hinano Beekhoo

## TT diaspora meets to keep Lehwah tradition alive

### From Page 1

and lovely people – as you all are – but to me it is a statement that you here in Toronto will not stand idly by and witness the erosion of our cultural heritage.”

Her remarks framed the evening as an act of cultural resolve and connectivity, rather than nostalgia, positioning our diaspora not as passive inheritors of tradition, but as its active custodians.

Young also acknowledged the collaborative effort behind the observance, recognising cultural ambassador George Maharaj and his team for working with the Consulate to bring the event together.

“It is our privilege to host you,” she said, underscoring the Consulate’s role as a fertile, diplomatic ground, and a cultural home.

Lehwah, also known as *Les Rois*, has deep historical roots in Trinidad and Tobago. Observed around January 6, it is linked to the Feast of the Epiphany, and traditionally marks the transition from Christmas celebrations to the beginning of Carnival preparations.

Renowned scholar and linguist Lise Winer, in her research on Trinidad and Tobago’s English-Creole lexicon, traces the term to the French *les rois*, meaning “the kings”, a reference to the Three Kings of Christian tradition. Over time, the French-Creole population reshaped the pronunciation into the Creolised Lehwah that is used today.

Integral to Lehwah’s development is Parang, the festive folk music introduced to Trinidad and Tobago by Venezuelan migrants of Amerindian, Spanish, Mestizo, Pardo, and African heritage.

Traditionally performed from November through December, Parang singing often continued until *Reyes* or *Les Rois* in early January, and sometimes beyond. The Toronto observance echoed the connectivity to that lineage, formally marking the close of the Parang season within the diaspora.

That musical tradition was brought vividly to life during the celebration that evening. Live performances were delivered by *Los Ketchos Parranderos* that infused the diplomatic setting with the communal rhythms and call-and-response energy central to Parang. The evening was also enhanced by elucidating exposi-

tions, and versatile performances by scholar and musician Yaseen Ashraf.

A defining moment of the evening came with the recognition of Maharaj for his decades-long contribution to preserving Trinidad and Tobago’s cultural heritage in our diaspora. The tribute was delivered by Vinod Mahabir, assistant manager of *Los Ketchos Parranderos*, who spoke with both admiration and specificity.

“...Maharaj stands as one of Toronto’s most distinguished cultural custodians,” Mahabir said, crediting him with a lifelong commitment to preserving, promoting, and elevating Caribbean culture, particularly the artistic traditions of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mahabir highlighted Maharaj’s work as a researcher, archivist, and community advocate, describing him as “one of Toronto’s foremost cultural ambassadors”, whose efforts have helped ensure that calypso and Parang remain vibrant, relevant, and accessible.

“Through his tireless work, the rhythms, the stories, and the history of our music have not been lost to time,” Maharaj declared.

He also pointed to Maharaj’s role in organising fora, public performances, and cultural exchanges that assemble academics, musicians, artists, and community leaders.

“[Maharaj] has played a pivotal role in advancing public understanding of the historical, social, and artistic significance of our culture on the world stage,” Mahabir said.

Particular emphasis was placed on Maharaj’s private archive, which is widely regarded as one of the world’s most comprehensive collections of calypso recordings. Mahabir described the archive as “internationally recognised for its depth and rarity”, noting that it has earned admiration across the global calypso community, and stands as a testament to Maharaj’s lifelong dedication.

Mahabir added that within Toronto’s multicultural landscape, Maharaj is also known as a mentor and champion of intergenerational knowledge sharing, as someone who not only preserves the past, but actively passes it forward.

With files by Hinano Beekhoo



# Forgiveness, empathy, kindness: Resolutions that truly shape a better year

By Dhanpaul Narine

Each New Year brings a bundle of promises. Many people make resolutions that they find difficult to keep. Indeed, it is said that over half of the resolutions will be broken in the first few weeks of January. But this does not detract from the fact that humans see the need to want change, and to articulate it with some degree of coherence and confidence.

In 2026, one can be sure that scientists will try to push the frontier in space and to attempt exciting new discoveries. While these will catch the attention of the world, many will argue that it is peace on earth that matters, and that one should conquer the inner self and allow outer space to take care of itself.

As we welcome a new year, a good place to start is to forgive. This is not easy. The pain can be deep, the wounds fresh, and they may look impossible to heal. But holding in anger and grudge is not good for one's personal well-being.

The *Journal of Health Psychology* shows that those who practice forgiveness "reported lower chronic stress levels, contributing to better overall physical health". The *Journal* adds that "when we forgive, we release ourselves from the toxic effects of resentment, which can harm both our minds and bodies". Despite the nature of the incident, forgiveness is easy. Pick up the phone and make that call. Be genuine, and you will find the other person making several steps to accommodate you.

This brings us to empathy. This is a word that is misunderstood. It is commonly used in place of sympathy. But empathy is much more. It is putting oneself in place of another person, and trying to understand that person's feelings using care and compassion.

Ben Stokes, the English cricket captain, has faced a barrage of criticisms in Australia when his team lost the prized Ashes trophy. The England-Australia contest is one of the oldest in sport. As Stokes said, "Everything is easy when it's going well." In the face of media attacks for excessive behaviour off the field, and sub-standard performance on it, Stokes has called for "a bit of empathy" to be shown to his team. A cricket tour to Australia can be grueling, and is known to make or break many careers. As it turned out, England went on to win the Fourth Test at Melbourne and restore some amount of pride in the team.

Empathy is not only limited to sports. It is an important quality or attribute in life. It is said that empathy is a compass that guides relationships. It is a skill and a tool that can transform the way an organisation is run. It creates and fosters a sense of purpose and unity and belonging.

In 2026, leadership will be crucial to solving many of the problems that face us. The ability to lead effectively requires special skills. It is argued that empathy is at the top of this list. A good leader, whether he or she is the head of a country, or a locally based community organisation, must be able to care about the well-being and emotions of those that work with him or her.

Putting yourself in another person's shoes is perhaps one of the hardest jobs around. It can be laborious and thankless. A good many leaders find it easier to manipulate their staff, rather than care about their emotions. There is a saying that people quit bad bosses rather than bad jobs. But a good leader who can build trust, and create a healthy and supportive workplace, would be able to get better performance from the team. Morale will increase, conflicts will be reduced, there will be personal growth, and in the end, productivity will go up as well.

It is generally agreed that things are tough. The prices of basic necessities keep increasing, and families are finding it hard to make ends meet. Politicians keep promising to bring prices down during the election campaigns, but do little to address the economy once they get into power.

What becomes clear is that politicians quickly resort to the blame game. The right



**Tony Singh (fourth from left), and his staff of volunteers were honoured by Queens Book Fair for selfless service to the community. Singh has been running the Community Pantry in Queens, New York, for over 30 years.**

blames the left, the liberals criticise the conservatives, the Democrats and Republicans keep pointing fingers at each other, and the poor is caught in the middle. This applies to other countries, and not just the US.

There is much to say about random acts of kindness. These acts are in short supply. It is hoped that kindness will extend itself well beyond the New Year. As usual, it is the little acts that make a big difference. One family in Queens, New York, collects food from pantries. The family members parcel out the food, and do their own distribution to those that cannot physically stand in the lines.

The Community Pantry is run by Tony Singh, and each week he and his staff provide basic food necessities to hundreds in Queens, New York. They were recently honoured by the Queens Book Fair for their selfless service to the community. Thanks are extended to Sherry Alredo, Chair of Community Board 9, for arranging the honours.

Another random act saw one man who went to the pizzeria and donated his change to the store. He got the store to promise that anyone who entered the premises and could not pay would be given a free slice of pizza. His change would be used to take care of it. When the workers heard of this idea, they too donated slices of pizza and each week a number of persons were able to get a free meal.

Then there are persons who would pay the bus fares of the needy or slip them a few dollars to buy a hot drink. These acts of kindness are not publicised in the media, and few know about them. But they make a big difference to those that are affected.

One of the many resolutions that people make in the New Year is to look after their health. This may include doing more in the gym, eating healthier, or to quit smoking, among others. The idea is to make life healthy and happy.

The Constitutions of a number of countries state specifically that the happiness of its citizens is a desired objective. In the US Constitution, "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" are clearly enunciated as strategies for good governance. Since 2002, West Germany, the UK, Brazil, Belgium, South Korea, and Dubai have become outspoken about the need for happiness to be a plank of effective social and economic policy.

Money can't buy happiness. The US is a good example of a country that has become richer, but has failed to make the top ten in the World Happiness Index. Norway replaced Denmark as the happiest country for 2017, and the others in the top ten for that year were Iceland, Switzerland, Finland, Netherlands, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and Sweden.

In 2019, the Scandinavian countries again topped the list of 156 countries, with Finland in the number one spot. The others in the ten include Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Netherlands, Switzerland, Sweden, New Zealand, Canada, and Australia.

In the Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago is 39, while Jamaica is 56. Guyana does not feature in the list; India is 140 while Burundi is last. What makes a country happy? Social

Bhutan is a land where work and "worry are low priorities and Gross National Happiness wins over Gross National Product".

But the present seems to be encroaching on Bhutan in a hurry. Television was first introduced there in 1999, and the Internet in 2000. Violence has increased and family values have become strained. Nevertheless, the idea of an International Day of Happiness was powerful enough to persuade several nations to adopt a resolution at the UN to dedicate a day for it.

In 2012, a UN Conference on Happiness took place, and on March 20, 2013, the first International Day of Happiness was celebrated. In the last four years, Scandinavian countries have topped the list as being among the happiest countries. In 2016, it was Denmark; in 2017 it was Norway; and in 2019 it was Finland. Why is it that these countries top the list even though they have a "long, cold, and dark winter"?

It is argued that the answer comes down to "neighbourly support between citizens and State support programs for those in need". Do economists and statisticians take social capital into account when they look at well-being?

When Denmark topped the list in 2016, it was found that social support in times of need was crucial to feelings of security and well-being. According to many Danes, money was not as important as social life.

The freedom of the individual to make decisions, to participate in the political process, and to help each other in times of need is particularly striking in Denmark, and indeed in Scandinavian countries. Maternity leave in the US is around ten weeks, but in Denmark, families receive a total of 52 weeks of parental leave with pay.

The children have access to free or low-cost child care. This enables mothers to return to their previous jobs. One Norwegian explains that his country is the happiest because "the schools, health care, police, all the bureaucracy treat people with respect and make us happy, make us trust each other, and make us feel a part of the whole community".

As we embark on a new year, let us show care, compassion, and empathy for each other. They will go a long way to improve the quality of life on the planet.

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# Sir Frank Worrell and the making of Caribbean cricketing sovereignty

— The publication of Sir Hilary Beckles', *Cricket's First Revolutionary: Frank Worrell's Political War against Colonialism in the West Indies*, invites a re-encounter with Sir Frank Worrell not simply as a cricketing icon, but as a figure whose struggle against colonial authority mirrors the lived negotiations of Caribbean people at home and across the diaspora still learning how to claim dignity within inherited structures of domination.

...

By Romeo Kaseram

An LJI Community Feature

With a Test batting average hovering just under 50, Sir Frank Worrell often enters a conversation wrapped up in numbers. They are tidy, respectable, easily transported across generations. They offer a version of excellence that fits neatly into scorebooks and memory alike.

Yet, as Jelani Beckles wrote late last year in the *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday*, to linger too long on statistics is to miss the man entirely.

"Many would think that Sir Frank Worrell's greatest achievement was with willow in hand," she observed, before reflectively redirecting attention from statistics toward leadership, advocacy, and a life spent pressing against the quiet limits imposed by hegemonic, colonial cricket.

Our readers here in the diaspora know this manœuvre well. Achievement is acknowledged, at times even celebrated, but only inside a safe boundary. The applause often stops where authority might begin.

Batting averages tell us how well batters played their games, but do not show how they navigated hierarchical ceilings, and negotiated top-down structures of power.

In a release announcing the launch of Sir Hilary's book on October 21 last year, the University of the West Indies described *Cricket's First Revolutionary* as an excavation of Worrell's political struggle against colonialism and racial inequality; one that unfolded not in speeches, but in everyday institutional encounters.

Sir Hilary shows us that cricket was never merely a game. It was a system that managed belonging; it decided who travelled, who spoke, who led. It rewarded discipline, patience, and gratitude, especially from Black and Indo-Caribbean bodies whose labour made the spectacle possible.

For our diasporic communities, this architecture is immediately recognisable. Whether in classrooms, lecture halls, boardrooms, hospitals, or factories, many of us have learned the unspoken rule: excel, yes; but do not disrupt.

But Sir Frank did more than excel; instead, he disrupted.

At the St Augustine campus launch last October, Justice Dr Anthony Gafoor paused over a detail that carried the weight of beginnings, rather than the lightness of anecdote. As a schoolboy in Bridgetown Sir Frank formed a cricket team with his friends, and named it the *Starvation XI*.

As Gafoor told the gathering, "The name gave expression to the political philosophy of the socialist movement." It was a naming born of hunger, not abstraction; a giving of shape and form to lived experience.

Sir Hilary situates this childhood moment amid the labour uprisings of the 1930s, when the indigent of Barbados and the wider Caribbean rose against repression and deprivation. These were not distant historical tremors; they were the social conditions framing Sir Frank's adolescence.

Many of us here in the diaspora will recognise this inheritance of loss: political awareness formed not through textbooks, but through lived scarcity and poverty, through watching our elders stretch their wages, navigate racial humiliation, quietly teaching us about our colonial legacy, and how its brutality was a subset of how this uneven world works.

Sir Frank entered his teenage years in 1937, the year Barbados joined the wider Caribbean rebellion against colonial rule. The uprising was meant to usher in the centennial of full legal emancipation from chattel slavery.

The symbolism was sharp; but the reality cut deeper. Freedom had been declared in 1838, yet wages remained low, power maintained its concentration, with dignity deeply rationed. This gap between promise and practice, between law and life, would come to define Sir Frank's political consciousness.

For us as Caribbean migrants who later encountered similar gaps in new lands, citizenship without belonging, opportunity without equity, the resonance is a lived and sharpened reality.

As Sir Hilary reminds us, emancipation is not an event; in fact, it is an unfinished negotiation.

The confrontation that would come to define Sir Frank's political legacy arrived quietly, in the form of a letter. As Gafoor read at the book launch, Sir Frank requested a modest salary of £250 for an overseas tour. Affronted, the West Indies Cricket Board of Control declined to consider it seriously.

"The tour went ahead without him," Gafoor read to attendees in the room at the University of the West Indies.

Sir Hilary's account strips the skin off the flesh: when Worrell wrote again in 1948-1949, the Board treated his request "as though it were a revolt of the plebs which had to be put down".

## Top cricketer, captain, and the Caribbean's conscience

Sir Frank Mortimer Maglinne Worrell was one of the West Indies' greatest left-handed batsmen and a transformative leader whose impact extended far beyond the cricket field. Raised amid the labour unrest and anti-colonial ferment of the 1930s, Worrell emerged not only as a sporting figure but as a principled advocate for dignity, fairness, and regional unity.

In 1960, he became the first Black captain of the

West Indies Test team, breaking a long-standing racial barrier in colonial cricket governance. His captaincy redefined leadership in West Indies cricket, one that was consultative, humane, and grounded in collective responsibility.

Worrell lived and worked across the Caribbean, including Trinidad and Tobago, and Jamaica; he served as a Senator in Jamaica. He remained a committed regionalist, pressing for fair treatment of players and democratic reform within cricketing institutions.

In Test cricket, he played 51 matches, scoring 3,860 runs, with a batting average of 49.48; he scored nine centuries, with his highest score at 261 versus England in 1955. He was Test captain for 15 matches between 1960-1963.

Worrell's near-50 average places him among the most accomplished batsmen of his era. His leadership during the 1960-1961 Australia series, including the famous tied Test at Brisbane, cemented his reputation as a captain of exceptional moral authority and calm intelligence.



Sir Frank Worrell



Sir Hilary Beckles

They were expecting acquiescence; they were astonished Sir Frank did not bow.

Sir Hilary tells us, "Worrell, dignified as ever, would not yield."

Our diasporic readers will recognise this moment intimately: the decision to refuse unfair terms, knowing the cost; the calculation between survival and self-respect; the quiet fear that refusal will be remembered longer than compliance.

Yet Sir Frank chose dignity. What he confronted was not merely a cricket board, but a system skilled at administering lives. Cricket governed time, movement, pay, and visibility. It determined whose body travelled, whose labour was rewarded, whose voice mattered.

Here, the ideas of the French philosopher Michel Foucault help clarify the stakes. Power, Foucault observed, often operates

not through spectacle, but through routine; through institutions that quietly regulate life itself.

Sir Frank disrupted that routine by drawing the line; in taking his own guard on his own pitch.

And in doing so, he exposed the condition that our own Martinican philosopher and psychiatrist Frantz Fanon diagnosed with clinical care: colonial systems tolerate the Black body when it performs, but recoil when that body seeks to command.

Foucault's lens reveal the fracture, but Fanon's stethoscope listens for the ache.

For many of us here in the diaspora, that ache is familiar for its exhaustion in our navigation of systems that applaud productivity, even while resisting our ascension into leadership.

The Board's response was swift. Sir Frank was branded a "cricket Bolshevik". The label was less description than warning. It marked dissent as contagion, signalling to others there was a stumping cost for stepping out of one's pre-determined crease.

Such naming remains a common tactic: as a diaspora, we have experienced where labour activism is radicalised; where protest is pathologised, and demands for fairness are framed as threats to order.

But Sir Frank wore the label lightly. He missed the tour to India rather than surrender his principles. In that absence, his politics spoke clearly.

Writing in the *Trinidad Express*, Roger Seepersad notes that Sir Hilary traces Sir Frank's movement from Barbados to Trinidad and later to Jamaica not as drift, but as intention. Sir Frank rejected parochialism and committed himself to West Indian integration.

As Sir Hilary argues, "There was no public figure as well-known as an integrationist."

In England, Sir Frank lived what Sir Hilary calls the life of the "ideal West Indian", not as performance, but as practice. He carried his region with him.

For our diasporic readers negotiating layered identities from across the Caribbean region, this model of chosen belonging feels quietly instructive. Identity, Sir Frank suggests, is something you enact, not inherit passively.

Seepersad draws attention to Dr Selwyn Cudjoe's assessment of Sir Hilary's work as a challenging theoretical intervention. He sees it as one that places Worrell alongside global figures such as Kwame Nkrumah, Ho Chi Minh, and Fidel Castro. It is a comparison that is not about tactics, but rather about stakes.

Sir Hilary insists that revolution must be read contextually. In the Caribbean, cricket offered mass participation, visibility, and leverage, and Sir Frank mobilised it accordingly, not as metaphor, but via method.

Cudjoe also highlights Sir Hilary's methodological choice to locate agency among working-class actors rather than only political elites. This, too, resonates across our diaspora, where progress has often been driven by those whose names rarely appear in official histories.

In revisiting earlier interpretations, including those by C.L.R. James, Sir Hilary does not diminish the canon; instead, he deepens it. As his text suggests, decolonisation must include how we tell our own stories.

Writing in the *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday*, Jelani Beckles recounts Sir Hilary's reflection on Learie Constantine and George Headley, two giants who reached the limits that colonial society allowed.

As Sir Hilary notes, "They could not break through the structure. They could not captain."

Sir Frank emerged as their *protégé*. The one entrusted with deferred hope. When he broke through, the victory belonged not to one man, but to the many who had waited.

Our diaspora knows this inheritance well in how we carry ambitions postponed by history.

Sir Hilary also spoke of his grandmother, who stayed awake through the night listening to West Indies cricket matches on the radio, then narrated every detail in the morning. This is how our Caribbean history survives: through kitchens, radios, memory. The grandmother becomes archive, the custodian of memory as a *griot*; our kitchens become classrooms, and kitchens tables morph into school desks.

For our diasporic families, this transmission remains vital. It is how belonging outlives borders, barriers, and barricades.

As Jelani Beckles observed, Sir Frank's life unfolded in phases: star, hero, administrator, and strategist. He adapted to history's demands rather than clinging to applause. He did not seek a monument; instead, he sought movement.

Sir Frank died young, at 42. Yet his life continues to instruct. Emancipation, Sir Hilary reminds us, is not an anniversary; it is a process.

For our diaspora still navigating labour, leadership, belonging, and inclusion, Sir Hilary tells us in his remarkable text that Sir Frank offers us not nostalgia, but guidance. That he offers us a reminder that dignity, once claimed, does not easily return to silence.

# PM, President urge unity, discipline, confidence as TT enters new year

— Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar has declared 2026 a year of economic rebuilding, accountability, and delivery, while President Christine Kangaloo urged national reflection and unity as Trinidad and Tobago enters its 50th year as a republic, following a challenging but consequential 2025.

...

**Port-of-Spain** — Trinidad and Tobago's Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar has directed all cabinet ministers and government agencies to treat 2026 as a year of economic rebuilding, recovery, and delivery, signalling a renewed emphasis on accountability, discipline, and measurable results across the public sector.

In her New Year's Day 2026 address, Persad-Bissessar said the start of the year was not only a moment for reflection, but also one that "demands accountability", calling for leadership that produces results, institutions that operate with discipline, and a public service that places the national interest first.

"Every ministry is required to work diligently, co-ordinate effectively and execute programmes with measurable outcomes. Inefficiency, delay and waste will not be tolerated," she stated.

Outlining the government's priorities for the year ahead, Persad-Bissessar said 2026 would focus on stimulating economic growth, supporting small and medium enterprises, accelerating public infrastructure projects, strengthening both energy and non-energy sectors, expanding job opportunities, and ensuring that public spending delivers tangible benefits to nationals.

She said the guiding principle of her administration remained, "Trinidad and Tobago first, above all," stressing that every decision, policy, and dollar spent must advance the safety, prosperity, and dignity of the population.

"We begin this New Year not with hesitation, but with confidence grounded in achievement and strengthened by resolve," Persad-Bissessar said, noting that the year ahead would require discipline, unity, and hard work, while also presenting opportunities.

Reflecting on 2025, she described the April 28 general election as a decisive turning point, saying the electorate had entrusted her government with a mandate to restore seriousness to governance, improve public safety, and ensure fairness



**Kamla Persad-Bissessar**



**Christine Kangaloo**

for working families.

"From our first days in office, we have acted with urgency and purpose, moving decisively from promise to performance," she said, adding that public safety remained a central priority.

Persad-Bissessar said the government has strengthened strategic alliances with international partners, particularly the US, to disrupt transnational criminal networks, intercept illegal firearms, and secure borders by land, sea, and air.

"Intelligence sharing, maritime cooperation, and joint operations have expanded, contributing to crime reduction and stronger enforcement outcomes," she stated, adding, "This is not a temporary focus. It is a sustained national effort. Trinidad and Tobago will not be a corridor for criminal enterprise."

She said legislative measures, including Stand Your Ground and Home Invasion laws, had restored balance to the justice system by strengthening protections for victims and law-abiding citizens, while Fireworks and Noise Pollution legislation was intended to bring greater order, enforcement, and public safety to communities, hospitals, the elderly, and vulnerable groups.

Among achievements cited, Persad-Bissessar pointed to the reopening and rededication of the Couva Children's Hospital to its original purpose; the fulfilment of the laptop programme for students; targeted infrastructure works; improved drainage management to reduce flooding; and financial relief for

public officers through a cash advance on back pay issued before Christmas 2025.

"Commitments made have been honoured," she said, noting that structured negotiations were continuing to finalise remaining arrears lawfully and sustainably.

She concluded by extending New Year's greetings to the population, expressing hope that 2026 would bring safer communities, a stronger economy, greater opportunity for young people, dignity for workers, and renewed hope in homes across the country.

Meanwhile, President Christine Kangaloo urged citizens to learn from the challenges of 2025 as the nation moves forward, describing adversity as a force that tests resilience and creativity.

"Adversity is seldom a welcome guest. But it moulds us, increases our resilience and stretches our creativity to its limits," Kangaloo said in her New Year's message last week.

She noted that while 2025 had presented significant difficulties, those experiences should be applied toward building a better future, and cautioned against carrying forward attitudes that weighed the nation down.

Among the issues she identified were tendencies toward self-derision, harsh public discourse, and a willingness to accept less than what citizens are entitled to from those in positions of responsibility.

Kangaloo also highlighted that 2026 marks Trinidad and Tobago's 50th anniversary as a republic, calling it a momentous milestone.

"As we commemorate this milestone, let us lean into our potential as a nation," she said, urging renewed confidence, patriotism, and unity of purpose.

While acknowledging the challenges of the past year, Kangaloo said 2025 was not without positive developments, pointing to achievements in sport, culture, academia, and the country's peaceful democratic transition of power on April 28.

She expressed confidence in the population's ability to work collectively for national betterment, stating that while new challenges would arise in 2026, Trinidad and Tobago could meet them through unity, self-belief, and a renewed sense of patriotism.

## Central Bank cautions geopolitical tensions weighing on economic confidence

— Trinidad and Tobago's Central Bank has warned that escalating geopolitical tensions in the southern Caribbean are weighing on economic confidence, cautioning that tentative growth, external uncertainty, and rising import pressures could complicate recovery efforts heading into 2026.

...

**Port-of-Spain** — The Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago has flagged ongoing geopolitical tensions between the US and Venezuela as a growing source of economic uncertainty for Trinidad and Tobago, noting that the spillover effects are dampening domestic confidence and rendering economic growth fragile.

In its final *Monetary Policy Report for 2025*, released on December 31, the bank stated that "the fluid geopolitical tension between the US and neighbouring Venezuela is contributing to building economic uncertainty" within the domestic economy.

The report traced the origins of the current tension to August, when the US deployed guided missile destroyers to the southern Caribbean. That military presence has since expanded to include an aircraft carrier strike group, amphibious assault vessels, a nuclear-powered attack submarine, and elements of the US Marine Corps' 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit.

The Marine Expeditionary Unit last conducted combat operations in the Caribbean during the 1983 US invasion of Grenada, known as *Operation Urgent Fury*. In 2025, the unit was present in Trinidad and Tobago on two occasions for joint training exercises with local security forces.

As part of the expanded military cooperation, Trinidad and Tobago has granted the US military access to both Piarco International Airport and the ANR Robinson International Airport for transit flights for an indefinite period. In November, US Marines also established a military radar system at the ANR Robinson International Airport.

Trinidad and Tobago's Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar has publicly endorsed all aspects of the US military



**Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago**

deployment, including US strikes on alleged drug-trafficking vessels operating in the region. According to the report, since September 2, at least 107 people have been killed in strikes on 31 such vessels.

Late last year, US President Donald Trump stated that an alleged onshore drug facility had been destroyed by a drone strike, with the Central Intelligence Agency involved in the operation.

Persad-Bissessar has also publicly criticised both local and regional opponents of the deployment, asserting that the US is the only country capable of protecting Trinidad and Tobago from external threats.

Against this backdrop, the Central Bank assessed that domestic economic growth remains uncertain, noting, "Under these conditions, economic growth is somewhat tentative."

While higher energy production in the second quarter of 2025, which is being driven by two new natural gas fields and has provided some support, the bank cautioned that this has been "partially offset by a non-energy sector that is losing momentum across several sub-sectors".

The bank concluded that these trends indicate the domestic economy "is still in need of support to engender a sustained recovery".

The report also placed Trinidad and Tobago's outlook within a broader global context. The International Monetary Fund, in its October 2025 *World Economic Outlook*, projected global output growth of 3.2 percent in 2025, slightly below the 3.3 percent recorded in 2024.

Looking ahead to 2026, the Central Bank urged policymakers to exercise caution in balancing the protection of foreign exchange reserves with the need to foster sustainable economic activity. It warned that factors such as wage adjustments and rising aggregate demand could strain this balance if not carefully managed.

The report specifically referenced the ten percent wage increase promised to public servants by the UNC ahead of the April 28 general election, noting that partial payments were already made in December. The bank projected that aggregate demand is likely to rise further as household incomes receive additional boosts from wage adjustments in the coming months.

The report concluded with the statement, "Against this backdrop, given Trinidad and Tobago's high propensity to import, safeguarding the country's international reserves becomes paramount."



The mud volcano following last month's eruption



Fedell Solomon shows his damaged house



Roadway damaged by the volcanic activity

## Govt moving cautiously with road repairs at active mud volcano site

— Government engineers are proceeding cautiously with road repairs in Piparo following the December 24 mud volcano eruption, as ongoing underground pressure and instability have prompted warnings from scientists, leaving residents facing uncertainty, disruption, and displacement.

...

**Port-of-Spain** — Although residents of Piparo have been calling for full road restoration following the mud volcano eruption on December 24, Works and Infrastructure Minister Jearlean John says the government cannot commit to permanent repairs while the volcano remains active and underground conditions unstable.

John made the comments during a late-December site visit, gesturing toward a nearby landslip as she explained the scale and risk involved in reconstruction.

“This job as it is here would be about [TT] \$20 million. It might look small, but it’s significant engineering that will have to go on. We cannot commit to that kind of money until we know what is happening. So, we are really trying, and we use a lot of in-house resources to restore,” John said.

The minister was in the area on December 31 as teams from her ministry continued work aimed at restoring vehicular access. The effort is being carried out in collaboration with the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation and the Princes Town Regional Corporation.

John was accompanied by Princes Town MP Aiyna Ali, Princes Town Regional Corporation chairman Gowrie Roopnarine, Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation chairman Ryan Rampersad, and technical experts from the ministry’s Highways Division.

During the visit, John also referenced a Bailey bridge located further along the roadway.

“We may have to do some procurement for that,” she said, adding that the ministry is continuing efforts to minimise the use of affected roads until conditions stabilise.

Since the eruption, the Highways Division has undertaken emergency road works to restore partial access, while technical teams continue to monitor conditions and assess longer-term solutions.

In a post following the visit, the ministry stated that emergency repairs had restored partial access from the 1.7-kilometre mark on Piparo Road to Guaracara-Tabaquite Road, and from the 2.2-kilometre mark on Piparo Road via Panchoo Trace and Housainee Trace.

However, the ministry cautioned that the section of roadway between the 1.7-kilometre and 2.1-kilometre marks remains



Jearlean John (centre) at the volcano’s site last week closed due to unstable ground conditions.

“Motorists and commuters are advised not to use this section and to follow all posted signage and safety barriers,” the statement said.

For residents living along the affected corridor, the uncertainty has been deeply unsettling.

Sixty-five-year-old resident Kim Seebaran, whose home lies along the path of underground mud and pressure movement, said she was present during the minister’s visit. Seebaran has lived at the site for 32 years and said she is now searching for rental accommodation as a precaution.

“We do not know what is going to happen again. I am hoping to move out by next week or so. We, the residents, cannot sleep properly. It is a lot of stress that we have to go through,” she said.

She added that this was the third time the community had faced such an event.

“The first two times, it did not affect my house; now it is underground. The roof is pulling. We have to do what we have to do,” Seebaran said.

Another resident, Fedell Solomon, said part of his laundry room at his home at the corner of Panchoo Trace and Piparo Road collapsed during last week’s activity. Solomon said he has since relocated his daughters, aged nine, five, and three, to his mother-in-law’s home out of concern for their safety.

The heightened concern follows continued gas emissions and mud flow from the volcano. Late last month, a research team from the University of the West Indies warned that the com-

munity remained at high risk due to ongoing pressure build-up underground.

In a second report issued on December 30, the team noted that mud movement was trending northwest of the main vent. Sensors at Monitoring Well #6 recorded a pressure increase following the December 24 activity.

The research team, led by professor of geomechanics and geophysics Oshaine Blake and PhD geoscience candidate Kerneese Ramjarrie, reported that pressure in the area rose from 55 pounds per square inch (PSI) to 62.5 PSI, fluctuating around 60.5 PSI.

“This shows that the underground system remains active and significantly pressurised,” the team stated.

The report explained that fewer fractures near Monitoring Well #6 were limiting pressure release, allowing pressure to build in a confined area. As of 4:00 pm on December 29, pressure was still rising and remained a cause for concern.

Data from Monitoring Well #3 near the main vent showed a pressure increase from about 21 PSI to 22 PSI before dropping to around 19 PSI, where it has since fluctuated within a one-PSI range.

“This up-and-down pattern shows that the underground system is still active and ‘breathing’, releasing pressure through cracks around the main crater and then rebuilding it,” the team noted, adding, “This means that the system has not fully settled and remains a cause for concern.”

The December 24 eruption began around 8:30 am, when the main vent started spewing gas and mud, triggering significant earth movement to the west. At least two homes were partially destroyed, though still occupied, electricity and water supplies were disrupted, and three roads partially collapsed. One road was closed entirely following a major landslip.

In light of the findings, the UWI researchers reiterated their advice to residents to remain alert, avoid the main crater and heavily fractured areas, report any new cracks, gas emissions or ground movement, and follow guidance from local authorities and emergency services.

Since Christmas Eve, local government bodies and other agencies have been providing relief, restoring electricity, supplying truck-borne water until mains were repaired, and carrying out rehabilitation works on damaged roads.

The research team has also called for urgent funding to strengthen monitoring, prediction, and risk-mitigation efforts.

“This would pave the way for a robust early warning system,” the team said, adding that improved data collection would support hazard zonation mapping for at-risk communities across Trinidad and Tobago.

## Drivers in TT now face sharply increased traffic fines for road infractions

— Motorists in Trinidad and Tobago are facing sharply increased traffic fines as amended road traffic laws took effect on January 1. Authorities say the tougher penalties are aimed at curbing dangerous driving, even as road safety advocates argue enforcement and education must accompany higher fines.

...

**Port-of-Spain** — Motorists across Trinidad and Tobago are now facing significantly higher fines for speeding, driving under the influence, and other traffic offences, as police moved to enforce amendments to the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act that came into effect on January 1.

Under Legal Notice No. 471 of 2025, drivers exceeding the speed limit by more than 31 kilometres per hour can now be issued a [TT] \$6,000 fixed penalty notice. Motorists found driving without a valid vehicle insurance certificate face fines of up to \$10,000.

Even stiffer penalties apply to driving under the influence (DUI) offences. A first DUI offence now carries a fine of up to \$24,000, while a second offence can attract penalties of as much as \$45,000. Authorities say the revised fines underscore the government’s intent to deter high-risk road behaviour and improve public safety.

The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS) has urged motorists to comply fully with all road traffic laws, including observing posted speed limits, maintaining valid insurance coverage, and refraining from driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Police warned that offenders will face strict enforcement under the amended regulations.

While official data show a 12 percent reduction in road traffic fatalities in 2025, with 109 deaths recorded, compared to 124 in 2024, authorities stressed that every road death is preventable. The TTPS has called on all road users to exercise greater responsibility as the country enters 2026.

However, road safety advocates, caution that higher fines alone will not resolve the country’s persistent road safety challenges. Sharon Inglefield, head of the road safety non-governmental organisation *Arrive Alive*, said last week that penalties must be part of a broader, data-driven strategy.

“*Arrive Alive* supports a proactive data-driven approach to road safety,” Inglefield said after a series of legal notices were published on Christmas Day, signalling that fines for offences such as speeding, seatbelt violations, parking infractions, and numerous other breaches would double.

“The number and seriousness of crashes that still exist dic-

tates enhanced policy, law, penalty points and fines as a proactive approach to save us all from the reckless behaviour on our nation’s roads, with many families continuing to grieve and feel the pain and void when loved ones are lost, and when families have to endure the emotional and financial burden of the seriously injured,” she stated.

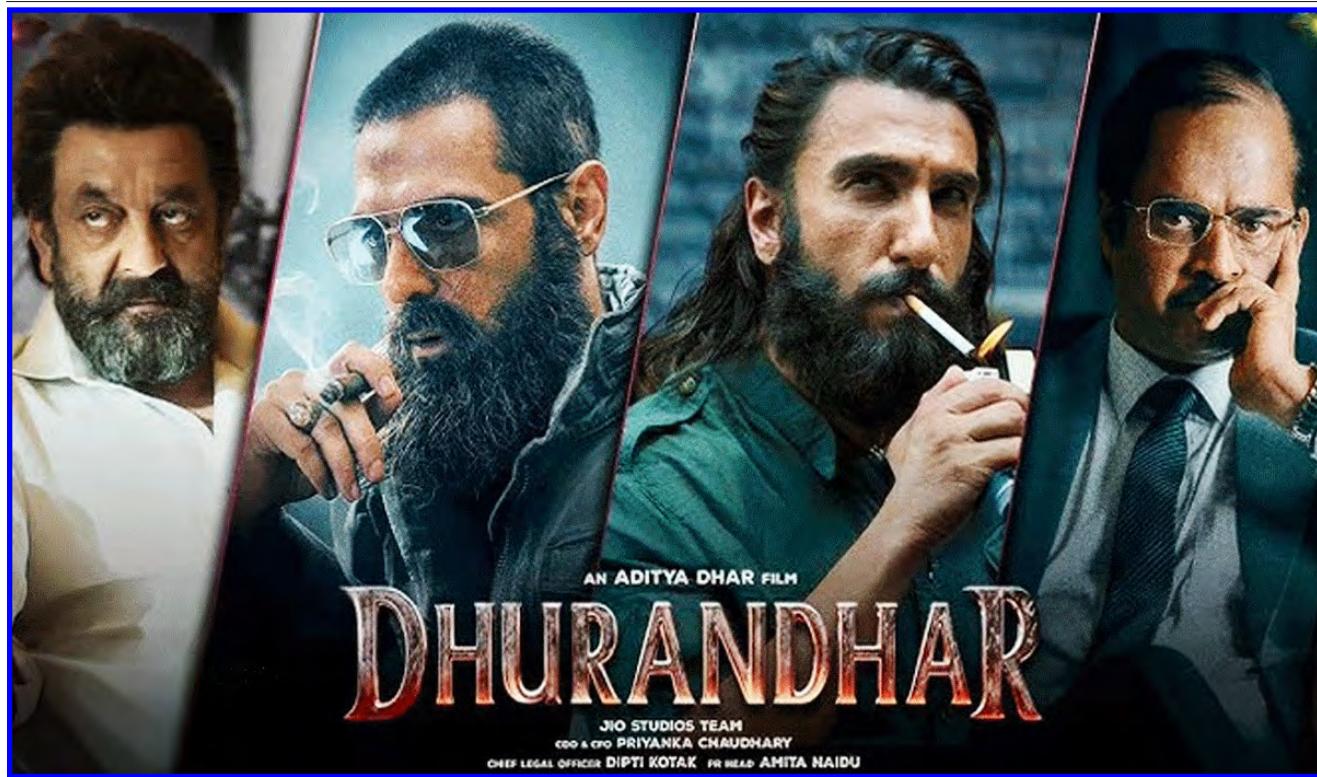
Inglefield argued that effective enforcement tools and sustained driver education are critical if the revised penalties are to make a tangible difference.

“Effective enforcement of our laws means that our law enforcement officers need to be provided with calibrated breathalyser units and speed guns for night and day use to save lives,” she said.

The legal notice amending the Ninth Schedule of the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act effectively doubles most fines across a wide range of offences.

Speeding fines now range from \$2,000 for exceeding the limit by one to nine kilometres per hour, to \$6,000 for exceeding the limit by 31 kilometres per hour or more.

Penalties for seatbelt violations, child restraint offences, motorcycle helmet breaches, and window tinting violations have also increased twofold.



## No slowdown to Dhurandhar after dialogue edit

— A revised version of the blockbuster spy thriller *Dhurandhar* entered cinemas on January 1 after controversial dialogue was muted following public objections. However, the edit has not slowed the film's historic box office run, even as debates over nationalism, representation, and artistic responsibility intensify.

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The action spy thriller *Dhurandhar* continues its dominant run at the Indian box office, even as a revised version of the film quietly replaced the original cut in theatres from January 1. The change followed controversy over a line of dialogue that critics said demeaned an entire ethnic group.

According to *Bollywood Hungama*, film distributors received an email on December 31 informing them that a new Digital Cinema Package (DCP) would be supplied. The publication quoted a source explaining that "the makers have muted two words and changed a dialogue in the film, as per the directives received from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting of India".

The revised version became the only one available for theatrical exhibition from January 1. The source confirmed that one of the words muted was "Baloch", which had appeared in a line suggesting one could "trust a crocodile but never a Baloch".

The line triggered strong objections from members of the Baloch community, activists, and viewers, who argued that it portrayed an entire ethnic group as inherently untrustworthy. The backlash included public complaints, online campaigns, and a petition filed in the Gujarat High Court, placing pressure on the filmmakers to amend the dialogue.

In response, the film's producers submitted a revised cut in which the word was muted and the dialogue altered. While early reports suggested that India's Ministry of Information and Broadcasting had ordered the change, the ministry later clarified that the producers themselves had approached the censor board to make the edits. Details about the second muted word and the revised dialogue have not been disclosed.

Industry analysts say the changes have had no measurable impact on the film's commercial momentum.

Released on December 5, *Dhurandhar* has shown exceptional consistency at the box office. Strong audience turnout on the final day of 2025 added further heft to its already substantial earnings, reinforcing its position among the highest-grossing Indian films of all time.

With domestic collections standing at over [all currency USD] \$80 million, the film has surpassed the lifetime earnings of several recent blockbusters, including *Jawan*, *Kalki 2898 AD*, *Chhaava*, *Stree 2*, *Animal*, and *Pathaan*. It is now closing in on the domestic total of *RRR*, which stands at around \$87 million. Globally, the film has already crossed the \$120 million mark, further cementing the box office stature of its lead actor, Ranveer Singh.

Beyond its commercial success, the film has drawn sustained scrutiny for its political themes. Last month, *Al Jazeera* reported that *Dhurandhar* was winning praise and raising concerns in equal measure in both India and Pakistan for its portrayal of tensions between the two neighbours.

Shot largely in a muted, sepia palette, the 3.5-hour film is a cross-border political spy drama that depicts a violent world of gangsters and intelligence operatives set against the backdrop of India-Pakistan hostilities. Its release came months after hostilities flared in May, following a rebel attack on a tourist site in Pahalgam, in Indian-administered Kashmir, an incident India blamed on Pakistan, a charge Islamabad denied.

Singh plays an Indian intelligence operative who infiltrates networks described in the film as "gangsters and terrorists" in Karachi. Critics argue that the storyline relies heavily on ultra-nationalist tropes and selectively frames historical events, a trend they say has become increasingly common in mainstream Hindi cinema.

Directed by Aditya Dhar, the film dramatises a covert chapter from Indian intelligence history, centring on a high-risk mission carried out by the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW). The narrative follows a single operative working on enemy soil to neutralise threats to Indian national security.

The ensemble cast includes Sanjay Dutt as the principal antagonist, Akshaye Khanna as a gangster figure, and R. Madhavan as a senior intelligence officer coordinating strategy from New Delhi. Structurally, the screenplay follows a classic cat-and-mouse arc, driven by set pieces and escalating confrontations.

Despite the longstanding geopolitical tensions, Bollywood films continue to enjoy popularity in Pakistan. However, critics say *Dhurandhar*'s depiction of Karachi, and particularly the neighbourhood of Lyari, has drawn sharp criticism for inaccuracy and stereotyping.

"The representation in the film is completely based on fantasy. It doesn't look like Karachi. It does not represent the city accurately at all," said Nida Kirmani, an associate professor of sociology at Lahore University of Management Sciences, in comments to *Al Jazeera*.

Kirmani has produced a documentary on gang violence in Lyari. She acknowledged the city's periods of intense violence, but said the film reduces Karachi solely to brutality while getting "everything wrong" about its infrastructure, culture, and language.

Legal challenges have also emerged in Pakistan. A member of the Pakistan People's Party has filed a case in a Karachi court alleging the unauthorised use of images of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, who was assassinated in 2007, and objecting to the film's portrayal of party leaders as supporters of terrorism.

Mumbai-based film critic Mayank Shekhar told *Al Jazeera* that the film was "performed, written, and directed by those who haven't ever stepped foot in Karachi", adding that its visual language mirrors Hollywood's tendency to portray developing-world cities as bombed-out and monochromatic.

The film has also faced scrutiny within India. The family of decorated Indian Army officer Major Mohit Sharma filed a petition in the Delhi High Court seeking to halt the film's release, alleging that it exploited his life without consent. The filmmakers have denied the claim, maintaining that *Dhurandhar* is a work of fiction, though critics note the use of real news footage and intercepted audio recordings within the narrative.

Debate has intensified around the broader trend of hyper-nationalist storytelling in Bollywood. Critics argue that such narratives increasingly align with the ideological positions of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, often portraying minorities in a negative light. Recent films such as *Article 370* and *Kerala Story* have drawn similar accusations of distortion and propaganda, even as they received political praise.

The controversy has extended to the treatment of critics themselves. A review by Anupama Chopra on *The Hollywood Reporter* India's YouTube channel was taken down following backlash from fans. India's Film Critics Guild has since condemned what it described as coordinated abuse, personal attacks, and attempts to influence editorial positions.

## Row erupts over KKR selection

— A political and religious backlash erupted in India after IPL franchise Kolkata Knight Riders, co-owned by Shah Rukh Khan, selected Bangladeshi fast bowler Mustafizur Rahman at the 2026 auction. Drawing sharp reactions from BJP leaders, Hindu religious figures, and rival political parties, Rahman was later released from the KKR contract.

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A political controversy has broken out following the decision by Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) to sign Bangladeshi fast bowler Mustafizur Rahman for approximately US \$1.1 million at the Indian Premier League 2026 auction. Rahman was later released from the IPL contract. No reason was given for the reversal of the KKR decision.

KKR, co-owned by Bollywood's Shah Rukh Khan, faced criticism soon after the auction, with several political and religious leaders questioning the inclusion of a Bangladeshi player amid reports of violence against Hindu minorities in Bangladesh.

BJP leader Sangeet Som was among the first to publicly criticise Khan, accusing him of acting against national interests. The remarks were followed by warnings from leaders of Shiv Sena (UBT), who threatened protests if Rahman is allowed to participate in the upcoming IPL season.

UBT spokesperson Anand Dubey said the issue extended beyond sports.

"If Shah Rukh Khan removes him from his team, we will all respect him, honour him, and give him due recognition. But if Shah Rukh Khan plays him and earns money, that money will be used to nurture terrorists there and conspire against our country. We will not allow this to happen at any cost," Dubey said.

He further described both Bangladesh and Pakistan as enemies of India, and called for their boycott.

The first criticism from a religious figure came from Hindu spiritual leader Devkinandan Thakur, who questioned KKR's decision in light of reported violence against Hindu minorities in Bangladesh. Speaking to ANI, Thakur urged the franchise to drop the Bangladeshi cricketer and demanded that the money paid to Rahman be redirected to families of Hindu victims as a form of apology.

The controversy deepened when Jagadguru Swami

Rambhadracharya issued a personal attack on Khan, describing his actions as "treacherous", adding, "He is not a hero. Shah Rukh Khan does not have a character. His actions have been those of a traitor."

However, opposition leaders and minority representatives called for restraint and questioned the selective outrage.

All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) national spokesperson Waris Pathan condemned violence against Hindu minorities in Bangladesh, but argued that targeting a sports franchise or player was misplaced.

"I condemn the atrocities being committed against the Hindu minorities in Bangladesh. Violence should not be done. When it comes to cricket, how does it matter who supports what?" Pathan told *News18*, adding that India has previously allowed cricket matches against Pakistan despite terrorism concerns.

Karnataka Minister Priyank Kharge questioned why IPL franchises were being singled out, instead of cricketing regulators.

"If a player is playing the IPL, it is because Board of Control for Cricket in India and IPL rules allow it," Kharge said, asking why objections were not being directed at the BCCI or the International Cricket Council if Bangladeshi participation was opposed.

West Bengal Minister Ujjal Biswas echoed similar sentiments, warning against politicising sport.

"Sports and politics are two separate issues, and if the player has already been selected, then there is nothing more that can be done," he told *News18*.

# Dharmendra's legacy and dignity echo through *Ikkis* and *Border*

— Veteran actor Dharmendra's final on-screen appearance has arrived with *Ikkis*, released posthumously on January 1, even as renewed attention around *Border 2* highlights the enduring cinematic legacy of India's most iconic war films.

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**D**harmendra, who died on November 24 last year, made his final screen appearance in *Ikkis*, directed by Sriram Raghavan. The film was released in theatres on January 1, and has since received largely positive reviews, with audiences praising the late actor's restrained and dignified performance.

Among Dharmendra's final public interactions was an interview in which he spoke warmly about *Ikkis*. Appearing on a podcast hosted by entrepreneur and philanthropist Usha Kakade, the actor urged audiences to watch the film, describing it as emotionally resonant.

"My film is coming, *Ikkis*. You must watch it," Dharmendra said, adding, "[Sriram Raghavan] is a very good director. He made *Johnny Gaddar*. This is a picture about the border. But it's very touching too. It's a good, good, good film."

Reflecting on the evolution of Indian cinema since the start of his career, Dharmendra also spoke about changing sensibilities and performances. He noted that contemporary films aim for greater realism, saying actors today "play very naturally", while adding that social change now extends beyond cinema itself.

*Ikkis* is based on the life of Arun Khetarpal, a Second Lieutenant who was martyred during the Battle of Basantar in the 1971 India-Pakistan War. The film's title refers to the age of 21, when Khetarpal attained martyrdom. Alongside Dharmendra, the cast includes Agastya Nanda and Jaideep Ahlawat in pivotal roles.

Meanwhile, attention also turned to *Border 2* following a



**Dharmendra**

large public event late last month in Rajasthan. The cast and crew launched the music video for the song *Ghar Kab Aaoge* at an amphitheatre built in front of Tanot Mata Temple.

During the event, actor Sunny Deol reflected on the influ-

ence of his late father's earlier war film *Haqeeqat*, which inspired him to take on *Border*.

Addressing Border Security Force personnel, Deol said he undertook *Border* after watching *Haqeeqat* as a child, and later discussing the idea of making a film on the Battle of Longewala with director J.P. Dutta. He added that over the years, soldiers across the country have told him they joined the Army after watching *Border*.

Deol became visibly emotional as he concluded his remarks by quoting a line from the *Border 2* teaser: "How far should your voices reach? Till Lahore."

Approximately 12,000 people attended the event, which was also graced by actors Varun Dhawan and Ahaan Shetty, singer Sonu Nigam, and producer Bhushan Kumar. Senior BSF officials, including Rajasthan Frontier IG ML Garg and South Sector DIG Mahesh Kumar Negi, were also present.

Earlier in December, the teaser for *Ghar Kab Aaoge* was unveiled, featuring vocals by Sonu Nigam, Arijit Singh, Vishal Mishra, and Diljit Dosanjh. The song reimagines *Sandese Aate Hain* from *Border* (1997), originally composed by Anu Malik.

For *Border 2*, the music has been recreated by Mithoon, with additional lyrics by Manoj Muntashir Shukla, alongside the original words penned by Javed Akhtar. The full version of the song was released on January 2.

Directed by Anurag Singh, *Border 2* is positioned as a spiritual sequel to *Border* (1997). The film features an ensemble cast including Sunny Deol, Varun Dhawan, Ahaan Shetty, Diljit Dosanjh, Sonam Bajwa, Mona Singh, Medha Rana, Angad Singh, Guneet Sandhu, and Paramvir Cheema.

Based on the Battle of Longewala, *Border 2* is scheduled for theatrical release on January 23, coinciding with India's Republic Day weekend.

## Jaya Bachchan faces backlash on comments about paparazzi's appearance

— Actor-politician Jaya Bachchan's comments on paparazzi attire and conduct during a recent interview have triggered sharp backlash, drawing criticism from photographers who described her remarks as demeaning and unrepresentative of long-standing professional norms in the industry.

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**A**ctor-politician Jaya Bachchan has frequently clashed with paparazzi over the years, with several videos of her scolding photographers going viral. While such conduct has often drawn criticism, it has largely been brushed aside given her stature in the film industry.

However, fresh controversy erupted following recent remarks in which Bachchan commented on the clothing worn by photographers and compared them to mice, prompting widespread backlash online and within media circles. Many critics described her statements as disrespectful and demeaning.

Speaking to Barkha Dutt on *Mojo Story*, Bachchan drew a distinction between journalists and paparazzi, questioning the latter's professionalism and credentials.

"My relationship with media is fantastic. I am the product of media," she said, adding that her father was a journalist and that she holds deep respect for trained professionals. "But my relationship with paparazzi is zero. Who are these people? Are they trained to represent the people of this country? You call them media?"

She went on to criticise their attire and conduct, saying, "They wear cheap tight pants and have a mobile in their hand. They think just because they have a mobile, they can take your picture and say what they want. The kind of comments they pass – what kind of education do they have? What is their background?"

The remarks drew a strong response from senior celebrity photographer Varinder Chawla, who noted that members of



**Jaya Bachchan**

Bachchan's own family regularly engage with the media during film promotions.

Reacting to the comments in a conversation with Siddharth Kannan, Chawla said, "We personally felt very bad about her remarks against my employees. All of us were hurt. There are multiple ways to express your views, but this was not the way to do it."

Chawla cited examples of celebrities who have respectfully set boundaries with photographers, including Alia Bhatt, Ranbir Kapoor, Ranveer Singh, Deepika Padukone, Anushka Sharma,

and Virat Kohli. He said these celebrities had invited paparazzi for discussions and politely requested that their children not be photographed. He noted that these requests continue to be respected.

Addressing the internal reaction among photographers, Chawla said some discussed the possibility of no longer photographing Bachchan if she was uncomfortable, not as a boycott, but as a courtesy. He added that photographers consistently address her respectfully and denied any misbehaviour toward her.

Chawla also pointed to past instances where celebrities managed similar situations differently, citing Kareena Kapoor requesting photographers to stop clicking pictures of her son Taimur Ali Khan due to security concerns, requests that were immediately honoured.

He further said Bachchan had practical alternatives if she wished to avoid being photographed, including using non-public entrances at events, noting that such arrangements are routinely coordinated by PR teams and organisers.

Emphasising the broader impact of the remarks, Chawla said many paparazzi come from financially modest backgrounds and manage household expenses on limited incomes. "Commenting on someone's clothes without knowing their background is unfair," he said, adding that the remarks affected not just photographers but others working behind the scenes in the industry, including spot boys.

Responding to Bachchan's assertion that celebrities who invite paparazzi lack stature, Chawla countered that media coverage is organised through PR teams and event organisers. He noted that even within Bachchan's family, including Abhishek Bachchan and Aishwarya Rai, photographers are invited to cover promotional events during film releases, regardless of a celebrity's seniority or status.

## Bollywood 'watering fruits, not the roots' says actor-director Tisca Chopra

— Actor-director Tisca Chopra has delivered a pointed critique of Bollywood's creative ecosystem, arguing that risk aversion, formulaic storytelling, and neglect of writers have led to increasingly shallow filmmaking, despite changing audiences and evolving platforms.

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**A**ctor-director Tisca Chopra has criticised Bollywood for what she describes as an entrenched fear of risk-taking and a persistent failure to nurture writers, warning that the industry's reliance on repetitive formulas is eroding creative depth.

Speaking in a recent interview with *Bollywood Bubble*, Chopra was asked what could change in Hindi cinema to help filmmakers reach wider audiences, particularly in a landscape where big-banner theatrical and OTT releases are often prioritised over smaller or more experimental projects.

"The problem is that we are watering the fruits and not the roots, which is writing. The work has become extremely shal-

low," Chopra said, placing responsibility squarely on the industry's neglect of the writing process.

While clarifying that she is not opposed to commercial or comedy cinema, Chopra stressed that all genres depend on strong foundations.

"I am not saying one can't do commercial or comedy cinema," she said, adding, "But it starts from the writing. You need to give time to your writers and freedom to brainstorm ideas. We don't nourish writers."

Chopra argued that despite being a creative community, Bollywood often defaults to rigid patterns, recycling familiar casts, songs, and narrative structures. According to her, this approach persists because of fear around financial risk.

"Everyone is petrified. I understand there's money involved," she said. She added that investment will be required regardless

of whether filmmakers follow established templates or attempt something new, but said fear continues to dictate decision-making.

"We are very afraid. Nobody wants to take a chance. People keep doing the same thing with a little twist," she said.

Chopra also noted that audiences are increasingly rejecting such repetition.

"The audience is not entertaining it anymore," she said, arguing that viewers respond positively when presented with fresh ideas delivered with conviction.

She concluded that responsibility now lies with filmmakers and studios to place trust in new concepts and voices, stating, "Whenever you bring something new with conviction, people accept it."

Chopra said her concerns reflect long-standing structural issues within Hindi cinema, which she believes continue to limit creative growth and innovation. She made her directorial debut with *Saali Mohabbat* in 2025.



**Tisca Chopra**

## Usman Khawaja retires, confronting stereotypes shadowing a stellar career

— Australian Test great Usman Khawaja has announced his international retirement, using the moment to confront racial stereotypes he says persist in Australian cricket. Speaking candidly at the SCG, Khawaja framed his farewell as both a sporting conclusion and a call for systemic change.

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**A**t the Sydney Cricket Ground, the venue where his Test career began and now ends, Usman Khawaja stood before the media on January 1 and declared that the fifth Ashes Test, which is now underway, would cap off his last in Australia's Baggy Green.

But the 39-year-old's retirement announcement was not a simple valedictory. Instead, it became a 50-minute reckoning, one in which Australia's only Pakistani-born and first Muslim male Test cricketer spoke at length about racial stereotyping, unequal scrutiny, and the personal toll of being treated differently within the sport he served for more than a decade.

Khawaja retires after having played 88 Tests and scored 6,206 runs, his performance placing him 15th on Australia's all-time Test run-scorers list. With his remarkable achievement foundational and recorded, he said his intention at the media event was to make the journey easier for "the next Usman Khawaja".

"I'm a proud Muslim, coloured boy from Pakistan who was told he would never play for the Australian cricket team," Khawaja said, adding, "Look at me now."

According to reporting by the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation* and the *British Broadcasting Corporation*, Khawaja used the moment not to revisit past triumphs, but to highlight what he said were enduring cultural blind spots within Australian cricket. There were issues he stated are often ignored until someone is willing to speak openly about them.

Central to Khawaja's remarks was the scrutiny he faced earlier this summer after suffering back spasms that forced him out of the Perth and Brisbane Tests. As he noted, in the lead-up to the Perth match, he had played golf, a detail that became the basis for a wave of criticism that went far beyond normal injury analysis.

"The way the media and the past players came out and attacked me – I could have copped it for two days, but I copped it for about five days straight," he said.

Khawaja said the criticism quickly shifted from performance to character, invoking language he recognised all too well.

"He's not committed to the team." "He was only worried about himself." "He's selfish." "He doesn't train hard enough." "He's lazy," he said, declaring, "These are the same stereotypes – racial stereotypes – I've grown up with my whole life."

He contrasted that response with how other injured players were typically treated.



Usman Khawaja

"I can give you a countless number of guys who have played golf the day before and been injured and you guys haven't said a thing," Khawaja said.

He added, "I can give you even more guys who have had 15 beers the night before, then got injured, and no-one has said a word. That's alright – they're just being Aussie larrikins."

However, "When I get injured, everyone went at my credibility and who I am as a person. Normally when someone gets injured, you feel sorry for them – 'Poor Josh Hazlewood', or 'Poor Nathan Lyon'. We feel sorry for them. We don't attack them."

Khawaja said the experience was particularly painful because it confirmed, rather than challenged, a pattern he has encountered throughout his career, saying, "I thought we had moved past that. But we obviously haven't. I need to talk about it right here and right now."

Born in Pakistan, Khawaja moved to Australia with his family at the age of five. He made his Test debut at the SCG in 2011, also against England, replacing Ricky Ponting at the end of an Ashes series loss. Fifteen years later, he walked away from inter-

national cricket on the same ground, this time surrounded by his wife, two daughters, and parents.

Khawaja believes part of the scrutiny he faces is linked to his willingness to speak on political and social issues beyond cricket, including his advocacy for Palestinian human rights. In 2023, he was charged by the International Cricket Council for wearing a black armband during Australia's Test against Pakistan in a show of solidarity with civilians in Gaza.

He stated, "I call myself the people's champ – not because I think everyone loves me, but because I speak about things for the people that other people don't want to speak about. I know why I get nailed a lot of the time."

Additionally, "I know people will say, 'Uzzie's playing the race card again.' Don't gaslight me. This stuff happens all the time; we just don't talk about it."

On the field, Khawaja's career has been defined as much by persistence as by performance. Often in and out of the Test side, he finally found stability at the top of the order during the 2021–2022 Ashes series at home. Even in this farewell series, his place was far from guaranteed: he missed the second Test with his back injury, and was initially set to be omitted from the third, only to be recalled when Steve Smith fell ill. Scores of 82 and 40 in Adelaide secured his spot again.

Khawaja has played in six Ashes series, winning two, losing two, and drawing two; he was also part of Australia's World Test Championship-winning side in 2023. He needs 30 runs in his final Test to move past Mike Hussey into 14th place on Australia's all-time run-scorers list, behind Donald Bradman in 13th.

Yet statistics, Khawaja suggested, have never fully insulated him from doubt.

"At 25, I tried so hard to fit in," he said, adding, "I dressed like the boys. I went out to clubs even though I didn't drink. It didn't work. I'd still get dropped. I get it: my name isn't John Smith. When the 50-50 calls happen, they don't go my way."

Khawaja said his hope is that future generations will not face the same barriers.

"I want the journey for the next Usman Khawaja to be different," he said, declaring, "I want him or her to be treated the same – without racial stereotypes attached to who they might be."

He added, "We're a better and more inclusive society than we were before. But Australian cricket is still very white in a lot of respects. There's still a way to go."

Khawaja indicated he will continue playing domestic cricket for Queensland. However, his final international act, now unfolding with his final Ashes performance at the ground where it all began, will be less about runs, and more about reckoning.

## Bangladesh foreground safety fears in emerging era of cricket geopolitics

— Bangladesh have withdrawn from travelling to India for the 2026 Men's T20 World Cup, citing player safety amid deteriorating bilateral relations. The decision, triggered by developments involving Mustafizur Rahman, has prompted the Bangladesh Cricket Board to formally request the ICC to relocate its fixtures.

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**B**angladesh's participation in the 2026 Men's T20 World Cup has been thrown into uncertainty over the weekend after the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) resolved that its national team will not travel to India, citing concerns over the "safety and well-being" of players and officials amid worsening political relations between the two countries.

In a statement issued following an emergency meeting in Dhaka, the BCB said its decision was taken after a comprehensive assessment of prevailing conditions and on the advice of the Bangladesh government.

"Following a thorough assessment of the prevailing situation and the growing concerns regarding the safety and security of the Bangladesh contingent in India, and considering the advice from the Bangladesh government, the Board of Directors resolved that the Bangladesh National Team will not travel to India for the tournament under the current conditions," the statement said.

The board added that it has formally approached the International Cricket Council (ICC), requesting that all of Bangladesh's World Cup matches be relocated to a venue outside India.

The development comes with just over a month remaining before the tournament begins on February 7, and threatens to disrupt scheduling for a competition co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka. Bangladesh were slated to play all four of their Group C fixtures in India, with three in Kolkata and one in Mumbai.

Bangladesh's opening match was scheduled against the West Indies at Eden Gardens, followed by fixtures against Italy and England at the same venue, before a final group game against Nepal at Wankhede Stadium.

The BCB's position appears to have been crystallised by



Mustafizur Rahman

recent developments involving fast bowler Mustafizur Rahman, who was released by Kolkata Knight Riders following a directive from the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). While the BCCI has not publicly stated that the decision was security-related, it cited "recent developments" without elaboration.

According to international media reports, those developments are linked to unrest in Bangladesh and reports concerning the killing of Hindu minorities, a backdrop that has further strained relations between the two cricket boards.

A senior BCB official, speaking to the media, said the board had little choice but to err on the side of caution.

"India said that they are unable to provide security for one player, so how can they give security for the whole team?" the official said, adding, "We had to take the decision considering

not just the players and support staff. We also have to think about the fans and journalists who will travel to India."

Said the official: "We can't play in India. We can play in Sri Lanka."

The BCB's position has received political backing at home. Bangladesh sports adviser Asif Nazrul publicly endorsed the decision, writing on his official Facebook page that the board's stance was appropriate, given what he described as "radical communal policies" linked to Indian cricket administration.

The decision followed two rounds of deliberations by the BCB's directors. A first video conference on the evening of January 3 ended without resolution. A second meeting on January 4, attended by 17 directors, produced a unanimous decision to formally notify the ICC of Bangladesh's refusal to travel and to seek relocation of its matches.

While the BCB has written separately to the BCCI seeking clarification on Rahman's release, particularly after the Indian board had earlier requested the pacer be made available for the IPL auction, it is understood that the security concerns themselves were communicated directly to the ICC.

The tournament does not operate under a formal hybrid model, unlike the 2025 Champions Trophy, raising questions about how the ICC will accommodate Bangladesh's request without affecting other teams. However, reports circulating in international sports media suggest the ICC may be open to shifting Bangladesh's fixtures to Sri Lanka, the tournament's co-host.

Any such move would likely require schedule adjustments, which could be announced later this week pending consultations with stakeholders.

Bangladesh are drawn in Group C alongside England, West Indies, Nepal, and Italy. Under the original schedule, they were due to play all league matches in India as the World Cup runs from February 7 to March 8 across eight venues in India and Sri Lanka.

For now, the BCB says it awaits an urgent response from the ICC, with player safety and institutional responsibility placed above competitive considerations.

# Perreira urges grassroots rebuild to rescue West Indies cricket

— Veteran cricket commentator Joseph 'Reds' Perreira has delivered a stark assessment of West Indies cricket in 2025, describing it as a year of historic decline. At the same time, he warned that without deep grassroots reform, the regional game risks further erosion.

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In a candid year-end review, veteran broadcaster and former West Indies team manager Joseph 'Reds' Perreira described 2025 as one of the darkest periods he has witnessed in Caribbean cricket, laying bare what he said are long-standing structural failures across performance, coaching, and governance. His commentary on the state of the Caribbean game appeared in the *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday*.

Perreira's analysis was unsparing. For him, the defining image of the year, and its lowest point, came at Sabina Park, where Australia dismissed the West Indies for just 27 runs in a Test match that reverberated across the cricketing world.

He was present at the ground, and said the moment marked a personal and historical nadir.

"It was a very bad feeling to see what we have come to," Perreira said, adding "It was probably the unhappiest day since I started watching the West Indies in 1953. This wasn't an isolated event."

According to Perreira, the collapse was not a freak occurrence but the inevitable outcome of a flawed regional system that has failed to produce technically sound batters capable of surviving at the highest level.

He pointed to the absence of any West Indies batter in the top 50 of the ICC Test rankings, with Shai Hope, currently ranked 60th, at the highest – a stark indictment of the West Indies Championship.

"Sometimes runs don't tell the full story, but the reality is that most of our batsmen just don't have the fundamentals," Perreira said.

He argued that weaknesses at the first-class level are compounded by the nature of the bowling itself, which he said often fails to apply sustained pressure.

"When that bad ball doesn't come, and it's dot ball after dot ball, the pressure builds – and our young batsmen are not equipped to handle that," he said.

To raise standards, Perreira advocated revisiting a model from an earlier era: inviting an English county side to compete in the regional first-class tournament.

"They lift the level of the cricket, and they lift the level of attendance if the cricket is good in the middle," he said.

Following the Jamaica debacle, Cricket West Indies moved quickly into crisis-management mode, convening emergency consultations with legends Brian Lara, Sir Vivian Richards, and Sir Clive Lloyd.

He urged the Windward and Leeward Islands boards in par-



Joseph 'Reds' Perreira

However, Perreira, dismissed the move as superficial.

"I think that was for public consumption, that they were doing something," he said.

He added, "It was just a smokescreen, and they didn't really come to terms with the fact that the direction in which we have gone in the last couple of years is wrong."

For Perreira, meaningful recovery will not come from boardroom interventions but from sustained investment in coaching at the grassroots.

"Unless we get our coaches down to the Under-17 level, and the Under-19 level, we are not going to produce that kind of player we saw fleetingly in Grenada, where we beat England 5-2," he said, referring to a recent West Indies Under-19 series victory.

He also warned that the erosion of traditional pathways is accelerating.

Said Perreira: "Our secondary school cricket is not what it used to be. A lot of the old traditional clubs are slowly disappearing."

He urged the Windward and Leeward Islands boards in par-

ticular to recommit to club development.

"Teams do not make strong clubs," he said, declaring, "Strong clubs make strong teams, and stronger play in the middle."

Perreira also raised concerns about the current coaching structure, questioning the decision to place white-ball coaching, red-ball coaching, and selection responsibilities under one individual, Daren Sammy.

"It's just too much for one coach," he said, suggesting it would have been wiser to retain Sammy in the white-ball role while allowing Andre Coley to continue overseeing the red-ball programme.

He cited contrasting white-ball outcomes, notably the end of a 34-year ODI series drought in Pakistan, followed by a 5-0 T20 whitewash by Australia as evidence that the formats require distinct expertise.

"A top-notch batting coach is badly needed," Perreira said, further noting, "We need a fielding expert, and maybe the fitness level needs to be improved. The backroom staff for the white-ball should be different from the red-ball. It's two different games."

Turning to administration, Perreira suggested that CWI president Dr Kishore Shallow should have stepped aside after being elected a Member of Parliament in St Vincent and the Grenadines, noting, "This is an important ministry in any Caribbean government. It has an impact on jobs, it has an impact on the economy."

Despite the bleak assessment, Perreira identified fast bowlers Jayden Seales, Alzarri Joseph, and Shamar Joseph as rare bright spots.

"When you put Seales and the two Josephs together, you are looking at a very good fast-bowling trio," he said.

However, he expressed frustration over the lack of transparency surrounding Shamar Joseph's rehabilitation.

"Why is Shamar Joseph behind on his fitness, three months after he was declared unfit on tour?" Perreira asked, adding, "These are questions that need to be answered."

Perreira also warned that the women's game is stagnating, with the West Indies falling further behind the sport's leading nations due to inadequate grassroots investment.

"We've never really spent money developing women's cricket from the bottom up," he said, adding, "CWI has not injected enough funds into female cricket development."

He called for a significant expansion of girls' cricket at the secondary-school level and stronger support for women's clubs.

He issued a prescription that was clear and uncompromising: abandon short-term fixes and rebuild the game by tripling its base at the school and club level. Without that commitment, he warned, 2026 risks becoming another challenging year for West Indies cricket.

## Karishma Ramharack calls for focused investment in women's sport

— West Indies women's off-spinner Karishma Ramharack has urged Trinidad and Tobago and the wider Caribbean to take women's sport seriously, framing it as a viable profession rather than a pastime. Speaking at the December 29 TTOC Awards, Ramharack linked elite performance with discipline, sacrifice, and long-term investment.

...

With six years of international experience and a growing list of accolades to her name, West Indies women's off-spinner Karishma Ramharack has long been accustomed to performing on the game's biggest fields. But on December 29, the Trinidad and Tobago international cricketer stepped off from center field and onto another pitch, using her voice to make a delivery on how women's sport is viewed, valued, and supported across the Caribbean region.

Delivering the feature address at the Trinidad and Tobago Olympic Committee Awards ceremony at Queen's Hall, Ramharack called for a fundamental shift in mindset, one that recognises women's sport not as a hobby or temporary pursuit, but as a legitimate and demanding profession.

"As athletes, we know the average person may never fully understand what our bodies endure and how deeply this life affects us mentally and emotionally," Ramharack said, reflecting on the sacrifices required to compete at the elite level.

"But we chose this path," she added, before directing her message toward parents, guardians, and those shaping future generations, affirming, "Women's sports is not a side story. It's not a phase. It's not something young girls should try before choosing something practical."

Ramharack, who made her international debut for the West Indies against Pakistan in Karachi in 2019, has since established herself as a reliable performer in West Indies' maroon while also excelling for Trinidad and Tobago at the domestic level. Her consistency was recognised with the 2024 First Citizens Sports Foundation Sportswoman of the Year award and the 2025 Trinidad and Tobago Cricket Board Female International Cricketer of the Year honour.



Karishma Ramharack

On the field, Ramharack has represented the West Indies in 90 matches across One Day International and T20 formats. Her best ODI figures, four for 12 and four for 33, came earlier this year against Bangladesh in Basseterre, a venue that also brought domestic success when she captained Trinidad and Tobago's Red Force Divas to the CG United Super50 title.

Yet for Ramharack, results and trophies tell only part of the story.

"What I see every day are women who are disciplined, strategic, resilient, and capable of excellence under pressure," she said, adding, "These are qualities that translate far beyond the field."

Central to her address was a direct appeal to parents to

reframe how they respond when young girls show interest in sport.

"When your daughter shows interest in cricket, athletics, football, cycling, or any sport, don't ask her how long it will last," Ramharack said, adding, "Ask her how far she wants to go. Enrol and support her."

She urged families and institutions alike to view sport as a space where character is forged and opportunity created.

"Sport has taught me accountability, sacrifice, and how to manage failure and earn success," she said.

Furthermore, "And yes, sport can be a viable career path – especially when you continue to invest, believe, and make room for girls who dream seriously and train purposefully."

While acknowledging that life as a professional sportswoman is far from easy, Ramharack highlighted the importance of a strong support network with coaches, trainers, physiotherapists, and psychologists in sustaining elite performance. Still, she emphasised that success ultimately depends on internal resolve.

She offered a glimpse into the less visible side of her own journey: early mornings, relentless training, and strict discipline.

"Cutting sugar completely out of my diet and sticking to it, even when cravings hit," she said, adding, "Choosing discipline over comfort, purpose over pleasure, every single day."

She declared, "That is part of the journey we do not celebrate enough. We talk about the medals and podiums, but we don't always talk about the repetition and the mental strength it takes to wake up every day and do the right thing consistently, long before the results show."

For young athletes in attendance, her message was both affirming and demanding.

"Stay in the game. Stay committed when it's hard. Stay patient when the results feel far, and keep showing up when nobody is watching – because that's where greatness is built," she said.

"You are here because of the work, belief, and because you refuse to quit," Ramharack concluded, noting, "And today, Trinidad and Tobago is better because of you."

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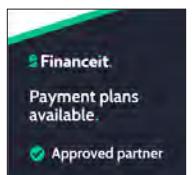
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