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## Our Community Is Thriving!

### Trinifest a 'lime' of cricket, curry, and community

— A cricket competition, curry duck cooking, and a chow and All Fours competition are set to spice up the 63rd Independence celebration of Trinidad and Tobago at Trinifest in Brampton come August 23. With music, family fun, and vibrant cultural pride, the event promises both hearty laughs, and savoury, spicy moments, while dressed up in Trinidad and Tobago's red, white, and black.

contests: a Curry Duck Cooking competition with pots, pepper, and pride on the line, the Chowfest Chow competition hosted by the well-seasoned Chownation, and all hands on deck for an All Fours showdown carded for the day as the East League meets the West.

Adding to the excitement will be trivia games, giveaways, and prizes for Best Dressed Male and Female proudly emblazoned in Trinidad and Tobago's national colours. McCandless Park also promises to be pulsing with a typical Trini soundscape rich with tassa drumming, steelpan melodies, and the syncopated pulsing of a 'riddim' section that will add new depth and meaning to calypso cricket.

The Trinidad and Tobago Consulate Consulate is urging the community to come out in full force, dressed in the twin-islands republic's bold red, white, and black national colours.

"We are playing against the Windward Islands and we expect a favourable outcome," Deputy Consul General Tracey

See Page 3: Trinifest celebration



Tracey Mannette



Daniel Gildharry



Ken Puddicombe (left) has scored an historical first, winning top awards in three separate Guyana Prize for Literature categories in consecutive years. In photo, Ken is being congratulated by Guyana's Prime Minister Mark Phillips. Story on Page 19

### More mileage for VoV's outreach with ambulance donation

— With Guyana's national colours emblazoned on its sides and driven by compassion and care at its core, a decommissioned York Region ambulance is now bound for Georgetown to support dialysis patients at the Doobay-Gafoor Dialysis Centre. The gift of the vehicle by York Region, made in partnership with the Voice of Vedas Global Care Outreach, was last week celebrated with gratitude, warmth, and global solidarity.

By Romeo Kaseram  
An LJI Special Report

**Richmond Hill** – Not every ambulance retires by turning off its flashing lights and silencing its sirens; like the one now being shipped to Georgetown, its mission to save lives continues, now reimagined in the vibrant hues of Guyana's Golden Arrowhead, and driven by its pulsing heartbeat of humanitarian care.

"The donation of an ambulance to support dialysis patients in Guyana is more than an act of generosity – it is a life-saving gift," said Dr Budhendranauth Doobay, founder of the Doobay-Gafoor Dialysis Centre.

He added, "For patients in rural and underserved areas who struggle to reach dialysis centres, this powerful gesture by York Region Paramedic Services helps bridge inequality, and ensures access to essential care."

Dr Doobay's words, grounded in decades of



Jeremy Watts (at left), Chief (A), York Region Paramedic Services, presents Dr Budhendranauth Doobay with a celebratory plaque and keys to the donated ambulance. York Region supplied photo

public service and humanitarian outreach, were delivered with heartfelt sincerity and gratitude at the July 14 handover celebration, which was hosted at York Region Paramedic Services headquarters in East Gwillimbury.

Dr Doobay has a decades-long history as an eminent and globally-respected humanitarian, and is the recipient of the Order of Canada (2024), the Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee Medal (2012), the

Queen Elizabeth II's Golden Jubilee Medal (2002), and the Order of Ontario (1993).

Gathered for the celebratory event were York Region's management and staff, community and diaspora members, dignitaries, and healthcare leaders whose presence affirmed what was movingly described as "compassion without borders".

York Region's commitment to this humanitarian cause has long proven its roadworthiness. Since 2014, it has donated 15 ambulances to international and not-for-profit partners. Each vehicle is decommissioned after five years or 250,000 kilometres, and for some vehicles, retirement means starting out a journey on a new, healthy path.

From the hectic corridors of

York Region's paramedic fleet to the sunlit roads among Guyana's rural communities, here is story of care that has no borders; instead, as Dr Doobay noted, it is a connecting narrative of building bridges.

The ambulance donation was made in partnership with the Voice of Vedas Global Care Outreach, whose work in Guyana has supported the development of the country's first affordable

See Page 14: York Region ambulance

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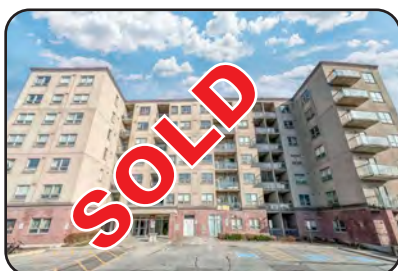
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Daniel Gildharry (third from right), President and CEO of Nitro Utility Service/Metro Infrastructure with teammates at the Nitro All Fours Cup tournament last month. Photo by Russell Lutchman

Community in its heart as Nitro aces giving back

— The 2025 Nitro All Fours Cup brought together players and supporters from across North America for a spirited card tournament that raised over \$1,700 for the Embrave Shelter for Women and Children. With strong competition, camaraderie, and community spirit, the event reflected Nitro Utility Service’s/Metro Infrastructure’s ongoing commitment to giving back.

**Brampton** – The Nitro All Fours Cup 2025, held late last month, brought together players from the GTA, the US, and Trinidad and Tobago to compete in a lively tournament where skill at the table met a shared purpose of community giving.

Following the tournament, participants declared on Facebook that it “was well-organised, held at a great facility, and hosted by truly wonderful people”.

The post also noted, “It was amazing reconnecting with old friends and making new ones from Trinidad, New York, Boston, Texas and beyond. All Fours is so much more than just cards – it is about community, camaraderie, and culture.”

In a statement that was issued following the tournament, Nitro Utility Services and committee members confirmed that the event raised more than \$1,700, with these proceeds going to the Embrave Shelter for Women and Children.

The release further noted the funds were generated through

Trinifest celebration carded to feature cricket, cooking

From Page 1

Ramsubagh-Mannette prognosticated, before quickly adding with a winning smile, “Wear your red, white, and black.”

She emphasised that the Trinifest celebration offers more than just sporting fun.

“We recognise it as a valuable platform for connecting with the community... it involves not only a sport that means the world to us in the Caribbean, but it also involves many other aspects of our culture when it comes to music and the culinary aspects, and our other ‘national sport’... All Fours. So it’s great family fun. It’s a free-to-attend event.”

Building a solid innings in support of this year’s Trinifest is Metro Infrastructure/Nitro Utility Services, the event’s main sponsor, whose stepping-up to the wicket has taken the celebration “to the next level”, Ramsubagh-Mannette stated.

She extended sincere appreciation to the Brampton company, saying, “Thank you to Metro Infrastructure. They are also going to be here in full force. You should see their tents and their flags as boundary markers all around the ground.”

Metro Infrastructure/Nitro Utility Services President and CEO Daniel Gildharry, himself proud of his Trinidad and Tobago roots, spoke with Indo-Caribbean World last week about why his company answered the call to bat for the Trinifest team.

“Metro Infrastructure believes in giving back to our community,” Gildharry said. “I believe giving back meets the purpose for building a stronger community. So we’re thinking about a long-term relationship.”

For Gildharry, supporting Trinifest is more than sponsorship

a 50/50, draw and all purchases of water, coffee, and tea. The contributions, it noted, “will go to supporting everyday necessities such as food and housing”.

The event saw the team *Hot and Spicy*, led by Radica’s Hot & Spicy Doubles & Roti’s Shiva Nandlal, take away the first-place title – their second in two years, making it “amazing back-to-back tournament wins,” the release stated.

Congratulations were also extended to *Original Eagles*, *Nitro*, and *Strickers* for securing top placements, while the *Untouchables USA* team received a “big shout-out” for winning Best of the Rest.

Nitro Utility Services and its tournament committee expressed gratitude to all teams, attendees, and supporters, declaring, “It was a tournament of hard work, performance, and enthusiasm – not only by the players, but by everyone who played a role in organising and working at the event.”

Additionally, “Nitro Utility Services strives to host a friendly, unified, and disciplined competition which was displayed again .... Thank you to all!”

The event concluded on a note of excitement, continuity, and optimism, with the release stating, “Looking forward to bringing the 2026 Nitro Cup back for another year! Until then, keep sharing, stay connected, and keep the All Fours spirit alive!”

– is it also personal.

“Cricket has always been in the family’s blood,” he said, highlighting his family’s commitment back in Trinidad, the company’s ongoing, historical sponsorship of Toronto cricket teams, and its parallel support of local sports here in the GTA, including youth hockey teams.

And if cricket is in the family’s bloodstream, then All Fours is its pulse. Gildharry noted that Metro Infrastructure/Nitro Utility Services continues to host a major All Fours tournament at their Brampton location.

“I really wanted to give something that supports people and their love for the game,” he said, speaking to hosting the many dedicated players who hail from across the GTA, the US, Trinidad and Tobago, and elsewhere.

In addition to Trinifest, Metro Infrastructure also supports Toronto Caribbean Carnival events, including the mas’ camps and Kiddies Carnival, Gildharry noted.

But for Trinifest, “We answered the call, and we are asking our community to come out on August 23 to support the event, and have a good time,” Gildharry stated.

Metro Infrastructure/Nitro Utility Services is a Brampton-based company that provides secure and cost-efficient construction solutions across Ontario.

It specialises in telecommunications infrastructure for clients including Bell Canada and Rogers Communications, and offers end-to-end services, engineering, design, and build, for outside plant networks, supporting the wireless industry with reliable, technology-driven expertise.

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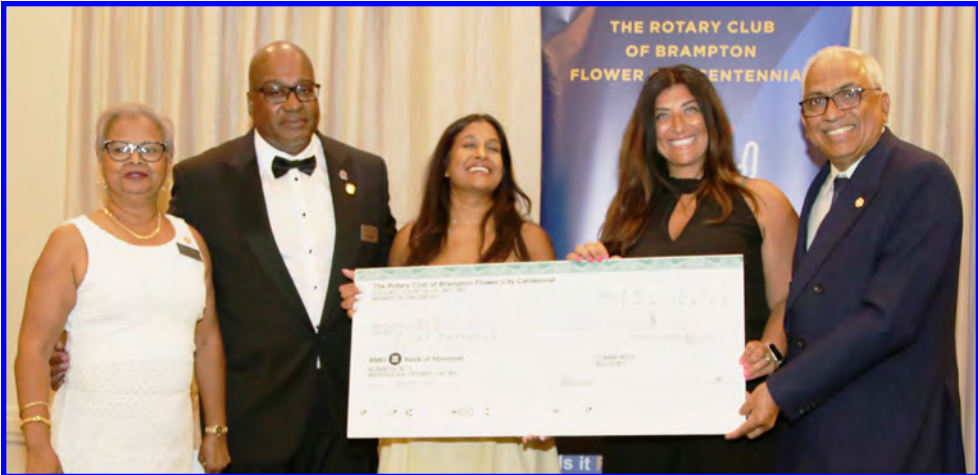
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New Board members (from left to right) are Devon Sheriff; Dhaman Kissoon; Peter Scaramuzzo; Giri Chatur; Rahul Jain; Ashni Ramsammy; Claude Armstrong; Roy Ramsammy; Joanne Wharton; and Bhagmatie Persaud



Presentation of \$8,000 to Advocates for Etobicoke Youth – Guilia Belligero (second from right) receives the cheque from (left to right) Bhagmatie Persaud; Devon Sheriff; Ashni Ramsammy; and Dhaman Kissoon



Scholarship Committee with high school graduates who received scholarships



Dhaman Kissoon with some scholarship recipients and their parents



Guests with new Rotary Club President Devon Sheriff (back row, second right)

Rotary gala highlights transition, community

The Rotary Club of Brampton Flower City marked its 20th anniversary with its annual Changeover Gala on July 7, held at the Mississauga Grand Banquet Hall. The event highlighted leadership transition, community impact, and youth investment through scholarships and charitable giving. The evening included live steel pan music and a dinner reception that celebrated two decades of service and community outreach. Outgoing President Ashni Ramsammy reflected on the accomplishments of the past year, and formally introduced incoming President Devon Sheriff, who outlined the club's upcoming initiatives for the year ahead. As part of the program, the club awarded four scholarships to deserving high school

graduates from the Peel Region pursuing post-secondary education. In addition to its educational support, a donation of \$8,000 was made to Advocates for Etobicoke Youth, the contribution intended to further the organisation's youth programs. The event was hosted by founding member Dhaman Kissoon, who took the opportunity to recognise the club's enduring presence and service in the community. In his address, Kissoon spoke about the tangible difference the club has made over the past two decades. The gala not only celebrated past achievements, but also reaffirmed the club's commitment to service and local engagement as it enters its third decade.



Claude Armstrong, (from left to right), Vic Aujla, Crown Attorney from Orangeville, being inducted as a new Rotary member, and Dhaman Kissoon

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Editorial

Modi's deliveries

In cricket, the beauty of spin bowling lies in its subtlety, drawing batters forward with grace, challenging them gently to read its direction. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visits to Guyana in November 2024 and Trinidad and Tobago earlier this month embodied this subtlety, presenting Caribbean nations with opportunities as carefully pitched as a spinner's well-aimed delivery.

Modi's diplomatic outreach in both countries effectively resonated through deep ancestral and cultural ties. His emphasis on the 300,000 Indo-Guyanese community during his Guyana visit and his extension of the Overseas Citizenship of India to sixth-generation Indo-Trinidadians exemplify India's skillful deployment of soft power. These gestures understandably resonate with communities in Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, and our vibrant diaspora here in the GTA, reinforcing cherished historical, familial, and cultural connections.

Yet diplomacy, like cricket, also involves reading the subtle spin driving some deliveries. Lord Palmerston's famous observation that nations have permanent interests rather than permanent friends remains instructive.

Modi transparently articulated India's interests in the Caribbean's strategic resources, including Guyana's significant oil reserves and Trinidad and Tobago's natural gas potential. Rather than a point of contention, this honesty invites Caribbean nations to embrace a reciprocal clarity: partnerships, if approached openly, can indeed foster mutual prosperity.

India's broader diplomatic vision is equally clear: positioning itself prominently within an evolving multipolar global order. Modi's statements regarding the collective voice of the Global South reflect India's legitimate aspiration for global influence, one that our Caribbean homelands can legitimately share and support. His invitation to Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago to amplify this voice is not mere rhetoric, but a genuine call to collaborative leadership.

The tangible contributions Modi brought to Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana in healthcare technology, agro machinery, pharmaceutical exports, educational training slots, and infrastructural support, highlight the real and immediate benefits available through synergetic South-South cooperation. These practical engagements provide clear evidence of India's commitment, offering our homelands genuine avenues for sustainable development.

Still, the governments back home, and in our diasporic communities here in the GTA and further abroad, must thoughtfully engage with these opportunities. As columnist Jarrel de Matas, writing in the *Trinidad Express* has prudently noted, diplomatic generosity often accompanies unstated expectations. Here lies the true challenge and skill in reading Modi's diplomatic 'spin' – ensuring that both countries, our Caribbean region, and our diaspora, step onto this global pitch not merely as grateful recipients, but as assertive, strategic partners.

The role of our diaspora in this diplomatic innings is also crucial. With dual perspectives shaped by global experience and exposure, and deep roots in Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, and in the Caribbean, our diaspora can act as advisors, advocates, and active participants in helping to shape balanced partnerships. Our nuanced voices are essential in ensuring diplomatic exchanges remain equitable, mutually enriching, and beneficial to all.

Ultimately, Modi's diplomatic overtures to Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago represent not a challenge to autonomy, but an invitation to a well-crafted, mutual innings of international partnership.

Our Caribbean homelands, guided by diplomatic subtlety and strategic assertiveness, can respond in kind in wisely defending our wickets, driving selectively and with confidence, and crafting partnerships marked by the numbers on the scoreboard growing with mutual respect and shared prosperity.

In this carefully balanced diplomatic game, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, the Caribbean region, and our thriving diaspora, should appreciate Modi's deliveries not just for their immediate benefits in the singles, but for the deeper, long-term opportunities they present over the boundary.

Views expressed are not necessarily those of this publication.  
Letters to be published will be edited where necessary.  
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Migration routes to Canada lead to strong Caribbean roots

For centuries, many communities arrived in Canada, where they found a home. Here, on the lands of Indigenous people, settlers have continuously streamed to a nation built on a promise of opportunity and fairness.

Before the arrival of European settlers, Indigenous communities were incredibly diverse on the lands now known as Canada.

Consisting of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, each group has its distinct languages, cultures, histories, and traditions. Across the land, over 600 First Nations communities speak more than 70 Indigenous languages, reflecting a rich and complex cultural heritage rooted in the land.

However, the history of the nation has been defined by the recent rapid evolution of migration. The cultural composition of the nation remains in an endless progression.

As Canada was established and waves of immigrant communities arrived, the experience of the nation would continue its evolution.

Immigrant communities have shaped Canada's culture by bringing diverse languages, traditions, foods, and celebrations. This multicultural influence has called for inclusivity, and reflects Canada's identity as a welcoming nation built on diversity, cooperation, and cultural exchange.

Each immigrant community has furthered the unique composition of Canada.

The first Caribbean communities in Canada began taking shape in the early 20th century, with significant growth after World War II.

Many immigrants came from Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Barbados, often working as domestic workers, or in labour sectors. These communities laid the foundation for vibrant Caribbean culture in Canada today.

Today's Canadian mosaic is heavily influenced by this foundation, and Caribbean culture, diverse on its own, has contributed significantly to the vibrancy found here.

One of the most visible expressions of Caribbean culture in Canada is the annual Toronto Caribbean Carnival, formerly known as Caribana.

Launched in 1967, this festival showcases Caribbean music, dance, and elaborate costumes. It has grown into one of North America's largest cultural events, drawing over a million visitors each year.

Similar festivals in other cities have helped to celebrate and preserve Caribbean heritage while promoting cultural exchange.

Caribbean music has also gained popularity across Canada. Genres such as reggae, dancehall, soca, and calypso are regularly heard on radio stations, at community events, and in mainstream media.

Boyhood composure acquired on road between fuel and fumes

I credit my uncle for schooling me in the Zen-like nuances needed to remain calm in the face of chaos, to breathe steadily through life's more violent upheavals, and gaze unflinchingly at the fast approaching horizon. He was an extraordinary tutor – carefree, careless, and blissfully oblivious to the mortal dangers of everyday living.

While my grandmother embodied a mix of tough love, patience, prudence, and a quiet dignity earned from surviving life's storms, my uncle was all tempest, fire, and thrill. His was a legacy of inadvertent lessons, which I learned in the passenger seat of his battered car as we hurtled down the poorly paved roads that snaked through the fields of sugar cane.

He was no ordinary junk collector; more like a self-appointed archivist of the detritus the colonisers had left behind. Roadsides were his galleries, colonial litter his treasure. He drove as if he were collecting exhibits for a museum, his eyes glued to the grassy fringes, instead of the road ahead. Such was his obsession that an orphaned hubcap glinting in roadside grass always eclipsed the more mundane responsibilities of steering clear of bridge abutments, or staying in his lane.

"Help me look nah, boy," he would cajole on those days when his scavenging was not seeing many returns. His voice languid, his hand loosely gripping the wheel, the other casually dangling a cigarette through the driver's window, he would trill above the labouring of the engine, "One of these days I will hit the jackpot! You wait and see!"

For my youthful anxieties, it was not the jackpot my uncle was about to hit. While his distracted gaze missed nothing on the side of the road, up ahead was a phalanx of overlaid trucks, lumbering behemoths transporting tons of sugar canes to the factory, the hindmost into which he was about to ram like a torpedo.

Perhaps my penetrating gaze today to the horizon came from these near-misses with my dear uncle's driving. My voice carefully modulated, my eyes dead ahead, I would say calmly, "Uncle, there is a long line of cane trucks in front."

I was the calm amid the tempestuousness of his collecting passion, a young boy whose heart could beat as fast as the fastest *hand* in *tassa* drumming, but whose voice remained serene, betraying nothing of the chaos within.

Canadian artists of Caribbean descent, like Kardinal Offishall and Drake, have incorporated these musical styles into their work, blending them with hip-hop and pop to create uniquely Canadian sounds.

Food is another powerful symbol of Caribbean influence.

Dishes such as jerk chicken, roti, patties, and saltfish are now staples in many Canadian cities. Caribbean restaurants, food trucks, and markets have become popular dining options, introducing Canadians to the rich and diverse flavours of the region.

Language and slang from the Caribbean, particularly Jamaican Patois and Trinidadian Creole, have also made their way into Canadian English.

In cities like Toronto, youth culture often reflects this influence through everyday expressions and phrases popularised in music, film, and social media.

According to the *2021 Canadian Census*, approximately 774,515 people reported Caribbean ancestry in Canada, making up 2.13 percent of the total population. This is a small component of the Canadian population, but it has made its place here in Canada in a significant way.

As the Caribbean diaspora grows, second and third-generation Caribbean Canadians are embracing their heritage more visibly, expressing pride through music, food, online content, and personal identity.

Canada's urban centres, especially in Toronto and Montreal, will continue to be home to even larger and more diverse immigrant populations. Caribbean-Canadians will continue to shape the multicultural narrative, standing out for their cultural visibility, economic contributions, and heritage events in significant ways.

Caribbean culture's future in Canada remains vibrant and evolving. The trajectory will continue to see its influence across Canadian society. With growing generational engagement, digital visibility, culinary innovation, and strengthened diaspora partnerships, Caribbean traditions will remain dynamic cultural drivers.

Their influence will deepen across festivals, arts, business, and civic life, enriching Canada's multicultural identity while maintaining strong connections to Caribbean roots.

An understanding of living within diverse communities, accepting and embracing each other's heritage and cultural practices, is at the core of what it is to being Caribbean. And this very principle is why many from the Caribbean have found a home here.

The values of living together and experiencing the best that we all have to offer guided the growth of Caribbean culture, and that outlook has guided the community to establish itself at home in Canada.

Today, reflecting on those wild journeys, I marvel at the strange poise I held, my heart resisting the urging from my head to slam down on the phantom brakes on the passenger's side; instead, true to its nature, my heart kept its dutiful beat.

In hindsight, perhaps I should thank my good uncle for such a paradoxical legacy in my acquisition of equanimity through sheer necessity, my youthful nerves hardening via repeated proximity to disaster and near-death experiences.

But my role on the passenger side was more than an early warning system; in fact, it was far more precarious. Due to an incurable mechanical ailment that thwarted even my uncle's prodigious skills as mechanic, blacksmith, and occasional *roti* cooker, the vehicle's fuel system was now downgraded to a plastic container ominously stained orange with repeated gasoline infusions.

My job as his "shotgun" was to keep a makeshift fuel line submerged in the volatile liquid, holding the container steady on my lap while striving valiantly to avoid spillage with every pothole and sharp swerve, even as I scanned the road ahead for dangers obvious to otherwise attentive drivers.

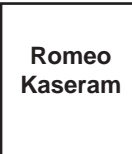
The smell of gasoline became familiar, its edge of nausea a pungent reminder of my uncle's disregard for the boundaries between safety and calamity. Surviving each pothole was a miracle, an act of careful balancing worthy of a circus performer, for me to keep gasoline from spilling onto my clothing.

Adding to my anxieties, there were those moments when my uncle patted his many pockets, retrieved a box of matches with relief, shook it like a maracas, and calmly lit a cigarette; all the while, looking to the side of the road, the vehicle plunging forward on autopilot. The scent of lit sulphur combined with the gasoline smell, the wings of the flame fluttering like a bird trapped in his cupped hands, each flutter an attempt to escape toward the gas container.

Harrowing, yet comical with hindsight, these escapades were formative experiences that quietly shaped my adulthood. Some days I hear my uncle amidst the tumult, calm in a haze of cigarette smoke, carefree inside precarity. Such was his gift, a peculiar wisdom that taught me surviving the wild ride was, in itself, a roadside prize worth scavenging.



Ryan Singh







West Indian bowler Alzarri Joseph celebrates a wicket ahead of the stunning loss  
**Lowest score by West Indies sign of a fatal decline**

Dear Editor,

In March 2004, the West Indies cricket team was bowled out for 47 at Sabina Park. At the time it seemed unthinkable that things could get worse. They did on July 14.

In front of a stunned Jamaican crowd in the third and final Test against Australia, West Indies were dismissed for a humiliating 27 runs – its lowest-ever Test total in 96 years of international cricket. Only New Zealand’s 26 against England in 1955 stands between West Indies and the most shameful record in the sport’s history.

Several years ago I wrote that West Indies cricket is dead. Back then it sparked debate. Today, it is an undeniable truth.

This is not just a defeat. It is a collapse of culture, pride, and regional identity. Cricket was once the heartbeat of the Caribbean, a unifier that brought islands together in celebration. Now it is a recurring embarrassment.

Australia, ruthless and clinical, tore through the WI batting in a session of chaos and incompetence. The scorecard read like a tombstone: 27 all out. No technique, no tem-

perament, no fight.

It begs the question: What are we still playing for? There is no leadership; no structure; no vision. The legends: Sir Garry Sobers, Brian Lara, Sir Curtley Ambrose, Michael Holding, must be looking on in agony. What they built in this generation has been dismantled.

Cricket West Indies continues to recycle coaches, shuffle selection panels, and speak in hollow PR soundbites. But no boardroom meeting can fix what has been lost: passion, pride, and purpose.

The sport that once brought the Caribbean global dominance is now reduced to headlines of humiliation. No schoolchild aspires to be the next Lara anymore. Instead, our brightest athletes flee to basketball, football, or franchise leagues that offer money, but no meaning.

The defeat to Australia is not an isolated event. It is the latest nail in a coffin that has been years in the making. West Indies is not in decline – it is dead, and the world is no longer mourning.

Simon Wright, Trinidad and Tobago, via email.

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Long list of challengers in prologue to Mohamed’s political ambition

Dear Editor,

In May of this year, billionaire businessman in Guyana, Azruddin Mohamed, philanthropist and former friend of Guyana’s President Dr Irfan Ali, announced his intention to be a Presidential candidate in the general elections scheduled for September 1. The announcement came after he had embarked on a meet the people tour to many communities across the country to air his grievances of perceived political persecution and illegal action against him by the Guyana government, and to listen to their complaints of dissatisfaction with the government.

While he has been complaining vociferously about the charges brought against him for alleged forgery and tax fraud in relation to his super-expensive luxury Lamborghini vehicle, he has meticulously avoided addressing questions relating to US sanctions of him in 2024 for the alleged smuggling of gold into that country and allegedly avoiding Guyanese tax of over (US) \$50 million.

He is now the leader of a new political party, We Invest in Nationhood (WIN), and is ready to be the Presidential candidate of WINANUG, a joint arrangement with A New and United Guyana Party.

It is well-known that generally Indo-Guyanese nationals vote for the PPP, and that Afro-Guyanese nationals vote for the PNC, now APNU. Historically, dating back to 1957 and continuing over the years, attempts have been made by a number of high profile Indo-Guyanese to lead a new party to win over the Indo-Guyanese support. Azruddin Mohamed is now the latest to go down this road.

More than 400 years ago, William Shakespeare, the bard of Avon, informed us that “the past is prologue”. Before I offer my views on the likely outcome of Mohamed’s foray in the political arena, I wish to reflect on the history of those who went down that path ahead of him.

In 1957, Lionel Luckhoo led his National Labour Front party against the PPP in the general elections. Luckhoo (later knighted twice by Queen Elizabeth II), was one of Guyana’s most outstanding lawyers, scion of a most prominent legal family in the country, a member of the Legislature in 1952-1953, and a former head of four labour unions including the then Indo-Guyanese dominated sugar workers union, Manpower Citizens’ Association.

He and his party were soundly defeated, with Stephen

Campbell gaining the only seat for the party, and becoming the first Amerindian member of the legislature. NLF’s return in the 1964 elections garnered the party less than 200 votes.

For the 1964 general elections, two new Indo-Guyanese led parties emerged, the Guyana United Muslim Party headed by Hoosein Ganie, a Muslim leader, and the Justice Party (JP) headed by Balram Singh Rai, a former very popular Minister of the PPP government, who was earlier expelled from the party, but remained extremely popular with party supporters and whose expulsion nearly resulted in a second major split of the party.

Rai was highly-favoured by the US authorities as they meddled in the elections, and it was rumoured that the Justice Party received secret funding from this source. However, this was denied by Rai and his supporters, and no documentation was ever found to support this claim.

On the other hand, some years ago, documents were discovered in the UK that revealed Ganie received secret financial support from the Colonial Office, as attempts were made by both the US and UK governments to prevent the PPP from gaining a majority victory in the elections.

In the end, neither the GUMP nor the JP was able to win a seat in the elections, but although the PPP gained the most seats of any of the parties, it was prevented from forming the government.

Contrary to British parliamentary convention, without first turning to the PPP leader to form the government, power was immediately handed over to a coalition headed by Forbes Burnham, leader of the PNC, with the UF as the junior partner. Later, with the release of US Declassified documents, it became apparent that this was done in accordance with the wishes of the US administration.

After the PNC-UF coalition of 1964, the PNC held power through rigged elections until the return of democracy in 1992, when the PPP came into government. Since then it has only lost once, that is, in 2015, though in 2011 it won by a plurality.

In the 1997 elections, TV Station owner and programme host, C.N. Sharma, who, according to Wikipedia “was at one time voted as the most popular Guyanese persona”, and who was a staunch critic of the PPP government, entered the race as leader of the Justice for All Party, but failed to gain a seat. His loss con-

tinued in subsequent elections until his party became a part of the PNC dominated APNU in 2011.

Another individual of importance post 1992 is Ravi Dev, an Indo-Guyanese leader who has defended and championed the rights of Indo-Guyanese to live in peace, safety, and security with other race groups in the country.

In the late 1990s and early 2000 when Indo-Guyanese were being robbed, beaten and murdered with impunity, he had a significant following, especially among sugar workers who are mostly Indo-Guyanese.

In 1999 Dev established the Rise Organise and Rebuild Guyana party (ROAR) of which Wikipedia states “was the first party in the country to describe itself as being ethnically based”. In the 2001 elections, it gained one seat which was taken up by Dev, and in 2006, after linking with the Guyana Amerindian Party (GAP), gained one seat which was taken up by the leader of GAP. That ended the political career of Dev.

Now, as we look at Mohamed’s entry into the political race, he has generated much excitement in sections of the national press and social media. However, did not hold a press conference nor answer pertinent questions on the US sanction. And there are still ongoing police investigations relating to a high profile case that made headlines a few years ago, where allegations were made by a former police officer. Also, his political and leadership experience pale in comparison to the individuals mentioned earlier who challenged the PPP previously and failed to gain support.

In my view, WINANUG will not be able to replace the PPP as the favoured party of the majority of Indo-Guyanese in the upcoming elections and Mohamed will not be the next President of Guyana.

However, his message could resonate with a minority of voters, giving his party a few seats, which could result in a minority government of either the PPP or APNUWPA, where the party wins the presidency but loses the majority in parliament. When voters enter the polling booth on September 1, faced with this possibility and remembering the five months aftermath of the 2020 elections, they are very likely to opt for President Ali and a PPP majority in parliament.

Harry Hergash, Toronto, via email.

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# Glitter in Guyana’s gold shadowed by illegal mining, smuggling

Conclusion to the Series  
on Smuggling in Guyana

The Guyana Gold and Diamonds Miners Association (GGDMA) acknowledged that while overall gold production may be down for several factors, it remains convinced that reduced gold declaration is “inextricably linked to the proliferation of illegal mining”. It iterated that illegal mining, coupled with the establishment of illegal shops that facilitate the purchase and sale of gold without effective oversight, are among the chief reasons the government fails to get its revenue.

The release asked several questions: “Who is actually the real owner of these large active operations that do not declare any gold, but yet regularly purchase large quantities of fuel, spares and other supplies to support their operations? Is the equipment even really owned by these operators, or is the equipment in fact owned by the smuggling ring to which the gold is eventually sold?”

The release also touched on the issue of civil servants connected to the industry, who are enjoying lifestyles beyond what their salaries can support.

All of this, it adds, must be investigated, as it is of the firm belief that the government agencies have the relevant tools and procedures at their disposal to put all the pieces of this puzzle together, and consequently take action condignly against the “masterminds” who currently reside in the shadows.

Moreover, way back in 1997 when the government discovered through the US that billions of dollars of gold were being smuggled to the US, dating back to the mid-1980s, promises of taking action never really materialised.

For instance, in January 2016, former Natural Resources Minister Raphael Trotman stated in the local press that some 15,000 ounces of raw gold were being transported out of Guyana weekly. He then disclosed that the US’ FBI and Homeland Security were looking into the issue.

Trotman stated that some of the gold came directly from Guyana, while some of it was sourced from other South American nations. The former government minister indicated the gold leaves via several ports making its way to the US, Brazil, Suriname, and Europe. It was also reported that Guyana’s gold finds its way to the Middle East and China.

In addition, *Demerara Waves Online News* reported in 2015 that more than (G) \$40 billion of the precious metal had been smuggled to the US as “scrap gold” between late 2014 and early 2015.

According to local media reports, Venezuelan gold is purchased by local miners, which eventually ends up at the Guyana Gold Board, or at licensed gold exporters as quantities presumably mined in Guyana, resulting in an overstatement of Guyana’s annual gold declarations.

Apparently, there is no paper trail for gold miners to prove the source of the gold that they sell to the Guyana Gold Board, or intend to export. All that is apparently needed is proof that the person is a legitimate miner.

In 2020, allegations that one of Guyana’s largest gold exporters, El Dorado Trading, was involved in filtering Venezuelan gold into the local market led to the Royal Canadian Mint (RCM) suspending purchases of gold from the company.

The NRA noted that in 2017 it was reported that a major gold smuggling racket was unearthed through the FBI, which provided Guyana’s authorities with a list of persons who

had taken gold to the JFK Airport, New York, and declaring it there.

“The smuggling was made possible because Customs and other Gold Board documents were recycled along with seals. Hundreds of millions of dollars of profits were being made but little for Guyana. Considering these factors, smuggling including gold smuggling represents a High Threat of money laundering in Guyana,” the report said.

The NRA report emphasised that the findings are based on statistical evidence of investigated and prosecuted cases, and on the value of proceeds confiscated, as well as estimated to have been generated from the crimes, while estimates are based mainly on media reports, and suspicious transaction reports filed with the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU).

Another case, which is believed to have links to mining, drugs, and money laundering is that of alleged Guyanese drug kingpin, Shervington Lovell, who was arrested in Jamaica by US authorities in October 2018 on drug related charges. Lovell’s company had apparently invested more than \$1.2 billion in real estate, with \$766 million allegedly coming from a shell mining company.

Circumstantial evidence indicates that mining, money laundering, and drugs are closely tied. It seems as though some individuals may have established mining companies that actually do not engage in mining. But yet these companies report the discovery of large quantities of gold.

Apparently, these companies use cash obtained from drug trafficking to buy gold from legitimate producers, and then sell the gold through official sources, thereby legitimising the dirty drug money. Therein lies a few problems. One, reported gold production rises; two, legitimate producers sell gold illegally, thereby robbing the government of royalties; three, dirty drug money enters the banking system legally; and four, the supposedly legal money obtained by illegal means is used to acquire real property.

Arguably, there are measures in place to identify legitimate sources of gold, but whether they are diligently implemented remain questionable. Incidentally, official monitoring and supervision of production activities remain challenging.

Local reports claim that the US and Guyanese law enforcement agencies, including those responsible for fighting financial crimes, have been keeping their eyes on certain gold mining operations. Dossiers have been reportedly compiled on a number of miners, and data shared with international partners.

In one apparent smuggling incident in 2012, 476 pounds of gold, believed to have originated from Guyana, were stolen from the Guyanese fishing boat *Summer Bliss*, which was docked in the Dutch Caribbean island of Curacao. The vessel was apparently on its way to Miami, but made a stop in Curaçao. The gold was valued at approximately (US) \$11.5 million.

In another smuggling incident, it was reported that Brazil was conducting an investigation involving a Guyanese businessman, who was said to be part of a smuggling ring where some (US) \$16.4 million of illegally mined gold were laundered through shell companies in the food and medical supply industries.

In June 2024, Vice-President Dr Bharrat Jagdeo announced intensified actions against smuggling, stating that gold smuggling in Guyana is not merely an issue of lost revenue, but that it strikes at the heart of national integrity and economic fairness.



Dwarka Lakhan



Bharrat Jagdeo



Guyana gold

Jagdeo said smugglers are not acting on a whim, that they are part of well-organised networks that manipulate market dynamics to their advantage. He said some gold dealers were offering rates higher than the international market price, which suggests a deeply entrenched black market where gold is trafficked, not for legitimate economic activities, but for purposes that likely include money laundering and other forms of financial crime.

He noted that the government must ensure that its efforts are sustained and systematic. This means not only pursuing the foot soldiers, but also targeting the masterminds behind these operations. It requires a multifaceted approach that includes legal reforms, enhanced border controls, and international cooperation.

Evidently, gold smuggling is entrenched

in Guyana. Besides targeting individuals, the government must engage all affiliated agencies/institutions within its ambit to deal with the problem, including GGMC, the FIU, the Special Organised Crime Unit, the Guyana Revenue Authority, local banks, and affiliated public servants. It is also apparent that individuals within some of these agencies might be compromised, which must be investigated.

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

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In photos, devotees, artistes, and guests participate in Toronto Arya Samaj's Multi Kunda Yajna last month

## TAS Multi Kunda Yajna gathering lights the fires of faith

**Markham** – In a spiritual gathering marked by prayer, song, and community engagement, the Toronto Arya Samaj (TAS) welcomed attendees to its signature *Multi Kunda Yajna* event on June 29. Led by Pt Mitra Gangadin, the prayers were supported by the TAS *kirtan* group with bhajans appropriate to the occasion.

TAS President Adit Kumar opened the ceremony by welcoming guests and reaffirming the organisation's guiding principle, declaring, "The family that prays together, stays together." He extended gratitude to all attendees for their participation, which he described as a reaffirmation of TAS' commitment to community, devotion, and continuity.

In his sermon, Pt Gangadin emphasised the significance of prayer within both the biological family and the wider "samaj family". He also recognised the 150th Anniversary of Arya Samaj, founded on April 10, 1875 by Swami Dayanand Saraswati Ji, acknowledging the enduring relevance of the founder's vision.

Among the eminent attendees were Honorary Consul at the Guyana Consulate General in Toronto, Mani Singh; President of Arya Samaj Markham, Yash Kapur; and President of Arya Samaj Scarborough, Jai Singh. These dignitaries joined other participants in offering *ahuti* during the *yajna*.

In his address, Singh congratulated TAS for its ongoing work under the leadership of Kumar. He also acknowledged the historical contribution of Swami Dayanand to the Indian mosaic, highlighting the continued relevance of the Arya Samaj movement in the diaspora.

The *yajna* was preceded by a *Bhajan Sangeet* program held the evening prior, dedicated to honouring artiste David Komal Singh, the well-known mandolin and keyboard player. Recovering from surgery at the time, Singh viewed the event via *Zoom* from his hospital bed. A plaque in recognition of his contributions was presented to his family during the program.

The musical tribute featured *bhajans* and *kirtans* by various artistes, with an uplifting, healing *bhajan* dedicated specifically to David, which was performed by Honorary Consul Singh.

The hosting duties for the events were undertaken by Vanessa Prashad, Samantha Sharma, Shivani Ross, and Tara Umadas. Each host acknowledged a personal journey growing up within the TAS mandir community, while expressing appreciation for the opportunity to give back.

Special thanks were extended to attendees, donors, volunteers, and those who prepared the food, in recognition of their support in making the event possible.



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Faith, food, and fellowship as IMO community celebrates camaraderie

**Toronto** – The International Muslim Organisation held its annual summer barbecue on July 6, which drew community members, civic leaders, and special guests to its Rexdale mosque for a day of celebration, connection, and service.

According to a release from the IMO, the barbecue marked both Canada Day and the start of the Islamic month of Muharram, the beginning of the Islamic New Year 1447. The event took place in the mosque’s parking lot, which served as a space of gathering, reflection, and camaraderie.

As the release noted, that the location holds “nostalgic” significance for many community members, having hosted vigils, celebrations, and movements, particularly during the pandemic when indoor gatherings were restricted.

The IMO acknowledged Maple Lodge Farms for sponsoring

the barbecue. Maple Lodge Farms, owner of the Zabeeha Halal brand, and which is described as one of the leading Halal food brands in Canada, provided and served approximately 1,000 chicken burgers and 1,000 hot dogs. Staff members from the company were commended for their courtesy and warm, welcoming smiles during the event.

IMO President Omar Farouk, on behalf of the board, extended “sincere gratitude to volunteers and community members in attendance”. The release also thanked Chief Superintendent Mandeep Mann, co-chair of the Toronto Police Muslim Consultative Committee, for his leadership in coordinating the Toronto Police’s participation. The Mounted Unit, vintage police cars, and the Talent Acquisition team were on site, offering our community opportunities to engage with officers and to

receive crime prevention tips.

The IMO acknowledged the attendance of Mani Singh, Honorary Consul at the Guyana Consulate General, thanking him for his presence and his “jubilant personality”.

Also highlighted was the attendance of John Zerucelli, recently elected Member of Parliament for Etobicoke North and Secretary of State (Ministry of Labour). The event was Zerucelli’s first community attendance at the IMO, and the release noted that he “thoroughly enjoyed his visit”.

With summer now underway, the IMO also announced a series of upcoming spiritual, social, and civic engagement activities. According to the release, special *Khateeb*s will deliver sermons during *Juma salat* this month. Visit [IMO’s website](#) for program details and participation information.





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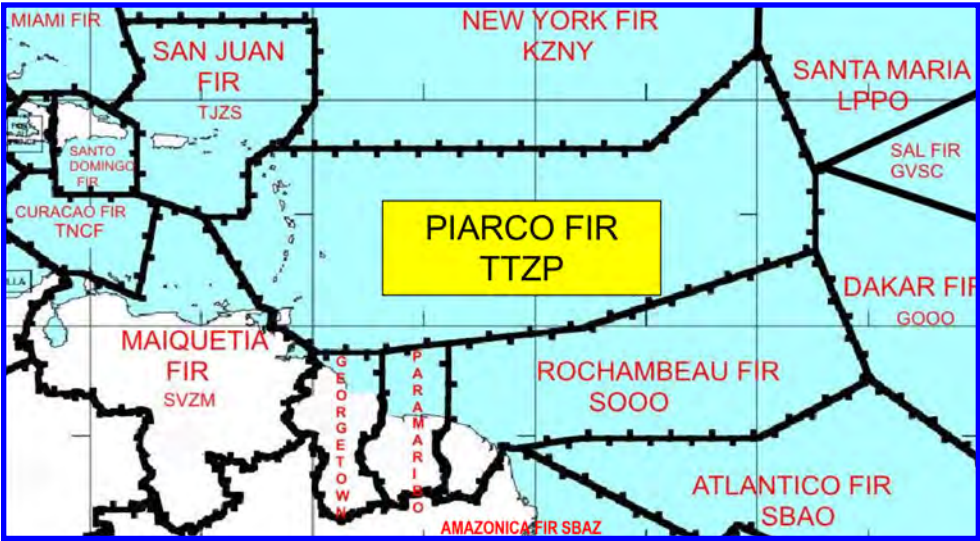
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The disputed Piarco FIR TTZP. Graphic courtesy ICAO

Turbulence growing over TT airspace control

— A regional dispute has emerged over the management and financial benefits of the Piarco Flight Information Region, with Saint Vincent and the Grenadines calling for talks with Trinidad and Tobago. Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves argues that Eastern Caribbean States are excluded from decision-making and revenue-sharing over the shared airspace.

Kingstown – The Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG) has expressed its willingness to engage in talks with Trinidad and Tobago over the financial and administrative control of the Piarco Flight Information Region (FIR), a critical stretch of Eastern Caribbean airspace.

At a press conference on July 11, SVG's Prime Minister Dr Ralph Gonsalves highlighted concerns regarding the ongoing management and revenue collection of the Piarco FIR, which he described as a shared regional resource controlled exclusively by Trinidad and Tobago.

"[Trinidad and Tobago makes] the money from the space that's part of our property," Gonsalves stated.

The Piarco FIR (TTZP) encompasses airspace from 10° to 18° North Latitude and stretches from the mid-Atlantic (38° West Longitude) to 65° West Longitude. It includes the skies from Antigua in the north to Trinidad in the south, east of Barbados, and extends almost half-way across the Atlantic Ocean towards Africa.

Gonsalves explained that the FIR, initially established during the colonial period, was jointly managed by the colonial government and a private firm. Following Independence, the late Dr Eric Williams, then Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, arranged for the country to retain control over the FIR. Gonsalves is now arguing that this arrangement marginalises other affected states, particularly Barbados and members of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, from governance and financial benefit.

Said Gonsalves: "The airspace is a shared resource, and yet the countries that are most impacted by its management are not part of the decision-making process."

He further claimed there is no transparency in accounting, visibility into revenue distribution, or participation from the countries whose airspace is involved.

According to the SVG government's official statement, while the technicalities of airspace governance may appear complex, the foundational principle remains simple: airspace above a country forms part of its territorial domain. Yet, SVG and others remain excluded from benefiting financially.

Citing the example of Martinique and Guadeloupe, Gonsalves noted those French

territories maintain an arrangement with the UK that has continued seamlessly since the colonial period, allowing them to benefit from their airspace management.

Meanwhile, last week in response to Gonsalves' claims, former Director-General of the Trinidad and Tobago Civil Aviation Authority, Ramesh Lutchmedial, questioned the legitimacy of SVG's assertions. He noted that under the Chicago Convention, signatory States are allowed to charge for air navigation services provided in their airspace.

"Trinidad and Tobago has used the fees it has collected to upgrade its air navigation facilities. Trinidad and Tobago has perhaps the most modern air traffic control in the western hemisphere, which is the envy of a lot of other States," said Lutchmedial.

He emphasised that 90 percent of the airspace managed under the Piarco FIR lies in international airspace, not within the sovereign jurisdiction of States such as SVG or Antigua and Barbuda.



Ralph Gonsalves

"It is international airspace. It is not St Vincent's airspace, or Antigua and Barbuda's airspace," Lutchmedial said.

Lutchmedial added that while aircraft flying over international airspace managed by Trinidad and Tobago are charged fees, these charges cease once the aircraft enters the terminal airspace of other States at an altitude below 24,500 feet.

"An aircraft for example coming from London to Barbados or Antigua, while flying over the international airspace for which Trinidad and Tobago provides all the air navigation services will pay a rate to Trinidad and Tobago. But from the time they hit the boundary of the Antigua or St Vincent terminal area, Trinidad and Tobago stops charging," he said.

He also noted that SVG and Antigua do not provide any air traffic services in the FIR.

"St Vincent and Antigua do not provide any services to any aircraft whatsoever flying in the Piarco Flight Information Region," Lutchmedial stated.

Lutchmedial suggested SVG focus instead on upgrading its aviation safety standards. He pointed out that since 2020, the OECS region has been downgraded from category one to category two by the US-based Federal Aviation Authority due to non-compliance with International Civil Aviation Organisation (UCAO) requirements.

"To me that is important because the new LIAT Company cannot fly to Puerto Rico – a US dependency – because it is based in Antigua, and Antigua is a category two country," he said.

Lutchmedial noted that Trinidad and Tobago had passed ICAO audits "with flying colours" in 2002 and 2012 during his tenure.



Ask Jay...

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THE SMART INVESTOR'S GUIDE: KEY INFORMATION BEFORE BUYING COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE

Why Consider Commercial Real Estate?

If residential real estate is your foundation, then commercial real estate serves as your growth engine. From office buildings to retail malls, warehouses to multifamily units, commercial properties generally offer higher returns and attract more dedicated tenants. But the stakes are also higher. What distinguishes an intelligent investor from a speculative buyer? Strategy, knowledge, and a bit of hustle.

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Lenders will request your personal and business income statements, net worth statements, tax returns, and credit history. Usually, you will serve as the guarantor for the company's mortgage. The lender will also require a list of current tenants and their rents (a rent roll), expected income and expenses, an appraisal, a structural engineer's report, and an environmental report.

Rental rules are different.

Apart from the basic rent, commercial tenants usually pay additional costs like property taxes, insurance, and maintenance – this arrangement is called a Triple Net Lease (NNN), which is very attractive to investors because it reduces the landlord's responsibilities. Other common lease types include gross leases, where the landlord covers all operating expenses, and modified gross leases, where costs are shared between landlord and tenant. Understanding the particular lease terms before purchasing a property is important because they directly influence your monthly cash flow and management responsibilities.

In commercial real estate, your tenants are your business partners. Commercial tenants usually sign long-term leases lasting from three to 15 years, and tend to be more financially stable. Their presence can influence the value and overall performance of your property. That is why it is essential to carefully evaluate each potential tenant's financial health and the stability of their industry. For example, a dental clinic or government office is a much safer investment than a newly opened café.

With commercial properties, every detail matters.

Thorough due diligence in commercial real estate is crucial for success. Verify the property's zoning and permitted uses to ensure they match your plans. Request an Environmental Site Assessment (ESA), especially for industrial or older properties, to spot any contamination risks. Carefully review all existing leases and tenant obligations, and carry out detailed inspections of key building systems, including the roof, HVAC, plumbing, and electrical systems. It is also vital to consult legal and accounting experts. Missing even one detail can quickly turn a promising investment into a costly mistake.

Managing commercial properties.

Managing commercial real estate isn't entirely passive. As an owner, you'll be responsible for negotiating leases, maintaining the property, handling vacancies, and ensuring that insurance and legal compliance are current. These tasks can be time-consuming, especially with larger or more complex assets, which is why many investors choose to hire professional commercial property managers to oversee daily operations and safeguard their investments.

Commercial real estate isn't an emotional buy; it is a business decision focused on income, growth, and long-term potential. When done correctly, commercial investments can generate higher cash flow, longer lease terms, and faster wealth building.

I view residential investing as a reliable and straightforward way to buy property, manage it, and build wealth. Once you have a strong portfolio of residential investments, it is time to use the accumulated equity as a down payment on a commercial property. When purchasing a commercial property, having a trustworthy business partner is a valuable asset.

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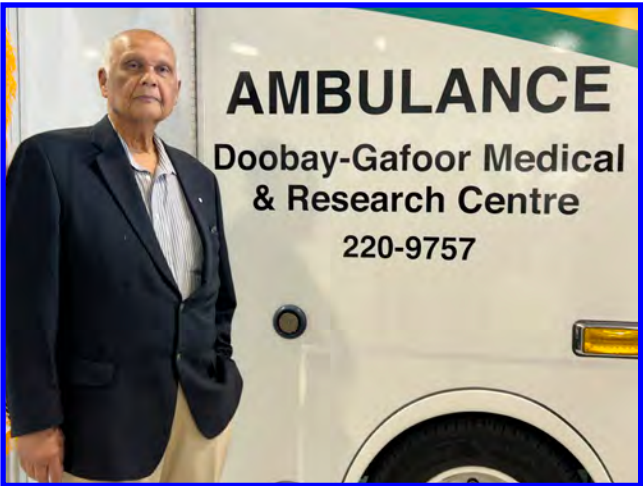



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Roy Doobay (from left), Mohamed Ali, Mayor David West, Bibi Ali, Bibi Nimoon Doobay, and Dr Budhendranauth Doobay stand by the ambulance



Dr Doobay next to the ambulance donated by York Region during the handover ceremony. *York Region and Indo-Caribbean World photos*



Voice of Vedas's Roy Doobay (from left), Mohamed Ali, and City of Richmond Hill's Mayor David West during the ambulance handover ceremony

Donated York Region ambulance extends VoV dialysis care in Guyana

From page 1  
dialysis centre.

“We are here today because of Dr Doobay’s deep commitment to helping others – which led him to start the first affordable dialysis centre in Guyana, against all odds,” said Voice of Vedas’ Roy Doobay, who coordinated the effort, and led the handover ceremony.

Roy added, “This is not just any vehicle – it is a lifeline. A symbol of compassion, proudly painted in the colours of the Guyanese flag, and soon to begin a journey of over 5,000 kilometres from Canada to Guyana.”

Gathered around the newly-refurbished vehicle, emblazoned with the colours of the Guyanese flag and the One Guyana logo, it was soon evident to diaspora members that both the Georgetown destination and the Golden Arrowhead symbolism were stirring deep, patriotic emotions.

“Seeing the Guyanese flag and the One Guyana logo on this ambulance touched my heart,” said Bibi Ali, mother of the President of Guyana, Dr Irfaan Ali.

She added, “This vehicle reminds us that even though we are separated by borders, we are united by our common humanity. This is not just a vehicle. It is a symbol of unity, compassion, and care.”

Also in attendance at the ceremony were Mohamed Ali, President Ali’s father; and Roop Persaud, a director of the Guyana Dialysis Centre, who travelled from Guyana with his wife, Aditi, to witness the handover firsthand.

Honorary Consul Mani Singh at the Guyana Consulate General was also in attendance, and was so touched by the ambulance donation, that in a transport of generosity he awarded honorary Guyanese citizenship to many of York Region’s staff in recognition of their remarkable effort.

York Region’s gesture of generosity and giving back are not lost to our diaspora in Canada, the overarching narrative a familiar heartbeat pulsing across oceans, our memories layered with never forgetting where great need continues to reside in our homelands.

Indeed, behind the ceremonial gesture at the handing over

ceremony lies a sobering health reality: in Guyana, dialysis costs an average of (US) \$75 per treatment, at times requires at least three interventions a week, the government subsidising part of the cost.

However, transportation for the procedure is a barrier that prevents many from receiving consistent care, particularly in rural communities. For these dialysis patients, a ride in this ambulance could mean the difference between serious health implications and improving their quality of life.

“In a place like Guyana, an ambulance like this is very much needed,” said Dr Surianarayanan Rammohan, a vascular surgeon affiliated with the Voice of Vedas.

Addressing the great humanitarian gesture by York Region, he declared, “What you have done is an example of true global community... a testament to the compassion and the cooperation that you have extended all these years.”

Regional and municipal officials affirmed that this partnership embodies York Region’s mission to support both local and global communities.

As Jeremy Watts, Chief (A), York Region Paramedic Services, noted, “Today, we celebrate the importance of partnerships and our commitment and dedication to providing emergency medical care and resources to our regional communities and beyond. Since 2014, York Regional Council has donated 15 decommissioned ambulances – each one a second life in service of others. This ambulance has served our communities in York Region, and will continue to make a difference in the new communities it will serve.”

Also, Chris Spearen, General Manager (A), York Region Paramedic and Seniors Services, noted, “We honour the tireless efforts of Dr Doobay, Roy Doobay, and the many dedicated supporters at Voice of Vedas Global Outreach, whose compassion extends far beyond our borders. Though retired from service, this ambulance continues its mission – delivering hope and critical care to communities in Guyana. This act of giving reflects the true spirit of paramedicine: compassion without borders.”

It was soon evident to the gathering that the ceremony had picked up momentum early, shifting gears from what was an

administrative decision to decommission a vehicle, to then take it into cruise control as a powerful story of how public service, and public servants, can positively impact the narratives in saving lives both near and abroad.

City of Richmond Hill’s Mayor David West was cognisant of this emerging humanitarian linkage, stating, “On the happy occasion of the donation of a decommissioned York Region ambulance, it was a privilege to gather and celebrate this generous gift which will provide health services support to socio-economically disadvantaged people in Guyana. Thank you to the many York Region staff who collaborated to achieve this successful outcome.”

He added, “I would like to recognise the passion and commitment of the Doobay Gafoor Medical and Research Centre, the Global Care Outreach organisation, Dr Doobay and Roy Doobay in particular, who through their tireless advocacy have been responsible for tremendous results, benefiting countless people globally, and truly fulfilling the mandate of spreading compassion, and providing support regardless of race, age, religion, or gender.”

Mayor West’s underscoring of our distinctly generous Canadian ethos was similarly articulated by Dr Ravi Doobay, an ICU physician at Southlake Health, who declared, “This is what Canada is all about. It’s about helping others, and helping others of different faiths, so this is a wonderful moment.”

In his address, Roy also embraced the momentum in these words, urging the gathering forward with his typical warmth and gentle humour, stating, “Let us keep this kindness rolling – one good deed (and maybe one ambulance) at a time.” It was an apt metaphor, which in its gentle roll, will always run smoothly fuelled by the spirit of generosity.

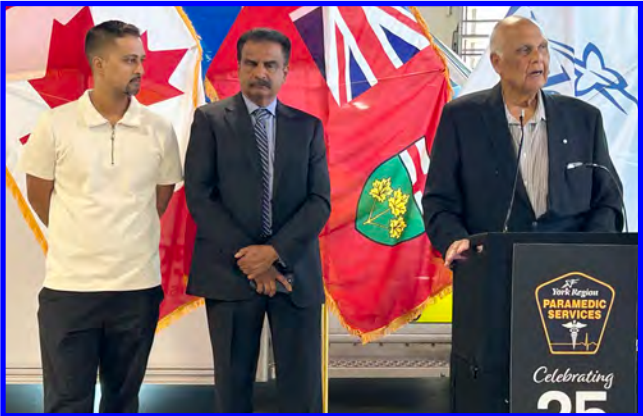
Once its flashing lights and blaring sirens bounced off buildings along our bustling city streets, but soon this ambulance will be journeying along quiet Guyanese roads, purposefully carrying not just patients, but a powerful promise of compassionate care that has traveled from our distant Canadian landscape, to where it will make a tangible difference in health and lives half a world away.



Mani Singh, Honorary Consul at the Consulate General for Guyana in Toronto (centre) attaches a Golden Arrowhead pin to York Region’s Jeremy Watts (left); Roy Doobay (right) with the ambulance’s keys



Jeremy Watts (from left, front row); Lisa Gonsalves, Commissioner, Community and Health Services, York Region; and Chris Spearen; Dr Doobay (front) and Roy Doobay are ready to respond in the ambulance



Dr Ravi Doobay, ICU physician at Southlake Health (left to right), and vascular surgeon Dr Surianarayanan Rammohan, listen to Dr Doobay during the ambulance handover ceremony



York Region’s Fleet Team that prepared the ambulance for the handover, and also facilitated the decals



Distinguished guests appreciate the gentle humour being delivered by Roy Doobay during his address



VOV leaders, distinguished guests, and York Region officers alongside the donated ambulance





Pt Laikram in photo above; at left, Lotus Funeral's Kamal Bhardwaj. Photos by Hinano Beekhoo



Pt Laikram extends invitation to visit Shiva Mandir

Scarborough – Shiva Mandir and Cultural Organisation hosted its annual Ganga and Shiva Puja at Morningside Park in Scarborough on July 20, drawing a vibrant gathering of devotees, volunteers, performers, and community guests.

In his address to the assembled gathering, Pandit Laikram Tiwari extended a heartfelt welcome to all devotees to visit the mandir's new location at 3001 Markham Road, Unit 22, in Scarborough.

"If you haven't gone to the new mandir yet, then we will love to see you," he said, inviting the community to embrace the spiritual space.

Pandit Laikram also reflected on the significance of the event's Morningside location, sharing an anecdotal moment of gratitude and pride in the mandir's journey over the past two years.

"Two years ago, I stood right here under this tent when we did Ganga Puja. And I said that we are working towards buying a unit. And we did not want to rent... We wanted to own it."

He added that the successful acquisition came through a blessed alignment of vision, community, and opportunity: "The right time, the right people, and the right circumstances. Shiva Mandir is not a group of people who are here. It is all of you. So we did it!"

Among the guests in attendance was Kamal Bhardwaj, owner and President of Lotus Funeral and Cremation Centre, who expressed his profound appreciation for the event and to those who contributed to its success.

"It is just amazing to see the people that come out each and every year to support the temple, to support Panditji, and to all the volunteers, and all the dancers and singers, groups... [what] an amazing job you all do," he said.

Bhardwaj added, "I'm just privileged to be part of this... it is very important that we all give back as much as we can... thank you for what you do for the community, and thank you for supporting me as well."





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# 2025 CARNIVAL SEASON EVENTS

## JULY 31



## AUG 02



## AUG 1-2



## AUG 03



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Attending the Junior Carnival Parade on July 19 were above left, Jennifer Hirlehey, TCC's Executive Chair; and in photo at right, (left to right), bandleader Louis Saldanha, Toronto Mayor Olivia Chow, and Hirlehey. *Photos by Russell Lutchman*

**Ready for Toronto Caribbean Carnival 2025!**

— Toronto is once again humming, growing vibrant with the colour, rhythm, and energy of our Caribbean islands as the 2025 Toronto Caribbean Carnival wakes up the city. With the Grand Parade scheduled for August 2, a slate of cultural events, from calypso to steelpan competitions, has already started to transform Toronto into a festive hub of Caribbean pride, pageantry, and originality.

...

**Toronto** – The energy, colour, and creativity assembled at Neilson Park on July 19 for the Junior Carnival Parade were promising indicators of what is ahead for the city as Toronto Caribbean Carnival 2025 shifts into high gear.

Last weekend's inclusive event welcomed toddlers through teens, the young masqueraders numbering in the hundreds. Ten participating mas bands proudly paraded on Scarborough's streets dressed in dazzling costumes to the cheers of families and supporters.

With around 50 to 200 participants in each band, the parade offered a family-friendly celebration of our Caribbean heritage. The Junior Carnival Parade has been a fixture since 1977, continuing its legacy of fostering cultural engagement among younger generations.

Of course, the Junior Carnival Parade is a foretaste of Carnival's *entrée*, the Grand Parade, which is scheduled for August 2 at Exhibition Place. The full-day celebration, from 8:00 am to 8:00 pm, is again expected to draw tens of thousands of spectators, and will feature a vibrant procession of costumed mas play-

ers, dancers, and live steelband music, to the acclaim of partying, enthusiastic onlookers.

The Grand Parade traditionally coincides with the Civic Holiday weekend and August 1 Emancipation Day commemorations, anchoring its significance in both celebration, reflection, and history.

As our city moves toward the August 2 grand party, several events along the way will spotlight our rich Caribbean artistic heritage.

On July 26, the Organisation of Calypso Performing Artists (OCPA) will present its *Kaiso 365* competition for the coveted Calypso Monarch title. The event takes place at the Hungarian House, 141 Sunrise Avenue, North York.

On July 31, Lamport Stadium, located at 1155 King Street West, will host the King and Queen Showcase, where mas bands unveil their elaborate costume creations. The evening includes cultural performances and appearances by surprise guest artists.

Steelpan enthusiasts will gather at Lamport Stadium again on August 1 for the *Panorama: Keepin' Pan Alive* showcase, continuing the celebration of pan music as an integral and original expression of our Caribbean identity.

Running parallel to these key events, Carnival Village at Sankofa Square (Yonge and Dundas) will be the site to visit come August 1 to August 2. From 10:00 am to 6:00 pm each day, the Square will come alive with storytelling, dancing, and musical performances, offering a downtown cultural experience that is accessible to all.





# Queens Book Fair celebrates achievers at Indo-Caribbean heritage 2025

By Dhanpaul Narine

The 2025 Indo-Caribbean heritage event was celebrated in style at the Queens Book Fair. The program was held at the Queens Public Library, Richmond Hill Branch, in New York. A packed library saw a variety of performances. It included speeches, poems, and a skit that traced the journey of Indian immigrants from India to the Caribbean.

One of the highlights of the afternoon was the award of certificates and citations to two outstanding Indo-Caribbeans in the New York area. They were Mala Panday, Principal of the Young Women's Leadership School in Queens, and Ralph Clement, Deputy Inspector and Captain of the 103 Precinct, also in Queens, New York. Moderator of the event was Vesna Naidoo-Chinsammy, a distinguished attorney.

Messages were received from His Excellency Michael Brotherson, Guyana's Consul General to New York. His representative Ms Ramotar wished the Book Fair well on behalf of the Consul General. Ashook Ramsaran, Consultant to the Book Fair, was most generous with the layout and in the printing of the programs.

The Queens Book Fair started eight years ago, the aim of which is to promote literacy, especially among the youths. Over the years, students and their parents have gravitated to the events, and the presentations have become a showpiece in the community. The Book Fair has done programs on Black history, phenomenal women; women as trailblazers; poetry, pride and passion; and Indo-Caribbean Heritage, among others.

They have always drawn sizeable crowds, with parent participation as well. Many in the community say that the Book Fair offers an alternative to the surfeit of other forms of entertainment by opening up an avenue whereby the arts and literature could be celebrated.

The Indo-Caribbean heritage program began with a welcome by this writer, who happens to be the Director. He thanked the Queens Library for its generosity, as well as Ramsaran for his contribution.

Sherry Algreto, Chairperson of Community Board 9, also welcomed the audience, and pointed out that Indo-Caribbean observance was important, since many young persons in the community need to know their history. Moderator Vesna Naidoo-Chinsammy expanded on this theme. She traced the migration of Indians to the Caribbean and their second journey to North America, and the challenges that they faced in the new society.

The theme of migration proved to be popular. Ariana Narine traced the arrival of Indians to Trinidad and Tobago. She argued that even though immigration from India ended in 1917, the legacy of migration continues to be felt in the twin-island republic.

Apart from Indian names such as Fyzabad and Barrackpore, there is a strong presence of Indian culture in Trinidad. In politics, Indians have held top positions in the government with Basdeo Panday and Kamla Persad-Bissessar becoming Prime Ministers.

The Office and Continuing Education in Queens has long provided adult education for free. The Book Fair was honoured to have Principal Sabrina Fleming, whose programs have enabled countless adults to better themselves through General Education Development and other classes. Many Indo-Caribbeans have benefitted from these programs and have gone on to get better jobs in the New York area, or to further their studies at various colleges.

Fleming outlined some of the free programs that are offered by the OACE, and urged adults to take advantage of them. Samantha Ortiz-Fleming read a poem called *Roots* on the importance of maintaining one's heritage, and it was well-received.

She was followed by Lionel Narine who spoke about why the *kiskadee* sings. The lady (Ajie) in the logie gets up to cook for her cane-cutter husband who finds the rum shops with



his friends. But Ajie decided to visit the cane fields and bring her husband home, away from the friends. Alcohol consumption is a problem on the sugar estates, and more intervention is needed to point out the ills, and to restrict its damaging effects.

A flurry of poems and speeches followed. Recognition was given to the life and times of Basdeo Panday, former Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago by Arun Whyte, and Chan Santokhi, former President of Suriname by Tejpaal Sooknanand. Lolita Singh volunteered to read a poem by Haimnauth Ramkirath that brought back memories of kite flying in Guyana and the Caribbean.

Then came the presentations by sisters Veena and Shreya Bedasie. Veena was at the first Book Fair in 2018 and has been a regular presenter. She has grown into a brilliant student with an ambition to pursue medical studies. Veena emphasised the strong connection with India that many Indo-Caribbeans share.

She said that "in the context of one's identity, it can be said that you can take me out of India, but you cannot take India out of me."

Shreya Bedasie asked the important question about one's nationality. Indo-Caribbeans can feel a sense of displacement at times, and Shreya's presentation dealt with this most adequately. The Queens Book Fair would like to thank her dad Anil for his steadfast support for all things that are related to literacy.

The stage was set for the skit on Indo-Caribbean heritage that was coordinated by Radhika Olarte and her team. The Radhvin group re-created the *Kala Pani* journey from India to the Caribbean and the perseverance of the Indians to practice their culture. The dialogue was appropriate, and Ervin Appadu and Shanta excelled with the scenes and chanting from the *Ramayana*.

Emily and her brother Joseph Algreto did not disappoint. They read a beautiful poem on the triumph of the human spirit that went down well with the audience. Anish Sugrim did a wonderful job in explaining the various festivals that were brought by Indians to the Caribbean, and New York.

A favourite of the Book Fair is Albert Jurczynski, the former Mayor of Schenectady.



In photo, (above, left to right), Principal Mala Panday, Queens Book Fair Director; Dhanpaul Narine; and Deputy Inspector NYPD, Ralph Clement; Panday and Clement were recognised as outstanding Indo-Caribbeans. Top left, Ervin Appadu (left) and Radhika Olarte perform in *Kala Pani* skit; and in photo at left, Community Board 9 Chairperson Sherry Algreto (left) with Ty Hankerson, who is the newly-elected City Councilman for District 28, Queens, New York.

He pointed out that Indo-Caribbeans are the largest ethnic group in the city, and that their contribution is valued.

Karissa Jagbeer has a lot to celebrate as she is on the principal's list in her school. She is known to write her own speeches and poems. Her presentation looked at the problem of adjustment, and it was done with confidence.

The main event was the honouring of two outstanding Indo-Caribbeans. They were Mala Panday and Ralph Clement. Mala

Panday has a distinguished record as an educator. She is Principal of the Young Women's Leadership School in Queens, New York. It is an all-girls school run by the Department of Education and many of its graduates articulate to top universities. There is a wait list to get into the school.

Ralph Clement's story is legendary. He stowed away from Canada into New York, and did odd jobs before joining the Police Department. He worked his way up the ranks and today he is the Deputy Inspector and Captain of the 103rd precinct in Queens, New York.

Both Mala Panday and Ralph Clement are Guyanese. They received a number of awards for their service from various elected officials. The presentation ceremony was coordinated by Sherry Algreto, who is a livewire from Trinidad and Tobago!

Ralph Tamesh, President of the Indo-Caribbean Federation, outlined the many programs his organisation has planned for the rest of the year. It held a most successful event in June 2025.

Arianna Vee spoke about her family history that had common themes with many in the audience.

There were other presentations that rounded off the day. Rohana Chetram spoke about the importance of learning Indo-Caribbean history. There is certainly a need for this to be taught at colleges and schools in the area.

The newly-elected Councilman for District 28 in Queens is Ty Hankerson. He congratulated the Book Fair for its eighth anniversary and read a poem from Mahadai Das, *They Came in Ships*. The councilman was accompanied by Rohan Narine, who doubled up as a photographer.

Queens Book Fair thanks the Queens Library, Richmond Hill Branch, for its support and to all that attended. The moderator Vesna Naidoo-Chinsammy was outstanding. The next offering of the Book Fair is in September 2025.

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# Triple play Guyana Prize for Literature win for author Ken Puddicombe

— In a landmark literary moment for Guyana and our diaspora, Brampton-based author Kenneth Puddicombe has captured two Guyana Prize for Literature awards for 2024 for Non-Fiction and Drama; along with his award for Fiction at last year's event, this stellar achievement makes him a first in three consecutive and distinct categories in the Prize's history.

**Toronto** – Author and publisher Kenneth Puddicombe made history earlier this month as the first author to win the Guyana Prize for Literature in two major categories, Non-Fiction, and Drama for 2024; he is also the winner in the Fiction category, which was awarded for 2023.

At the 2025 Guyana Prize for Literature ceremony held on July 4, Puddicombe emerged as a double winner, receiving top honours in the Non-Fiction category for his *Pages from a Notebook: Slices of Life Along the Road to Writing* (Middle Road, Toronto, 2024), and in the Drama category for his play *The Last Straw*. He previously won the Fiction Prize for *Down Independence Boulevard and Other Stories*.

The acquisitions set a new Guyana and diasporic record, making him the first writer to win in two different categories in a single year, and the only author to have ever secured first place in three distinct literary fields.

Last week Puddicombe reflected on his three wins. His literary career, until recently, had been grounded in fiction, he stated. He admitted that both 2024 submissions, his first attempts in Non-Fiction and Drama, were entered with modest expectations.

“My literary pursuit, so far, has been in the world of fiction,” he explained. “I won the Guyana Prize for Literature 2022 in this category, for my book *Down Independence Boulevard and Other Stories*. Both submissions for the 2024 Prize were my first venture in these two categories: Non-Fiction and Drama, and I had a low expectation that it would come out to much. You can understand then, why I was quite pleasantly surprised when I heard that I was on the short list!”

The news of his double win left him in awe. Moments following the announcement, he recalled wife, Rohini, saying, “You must be on Cloud Nine” following the surprise announcements.

“To a large extent, I still am. It has been the culmination of a life-long dedication to writing, and now Drama and Non-Fiction can be added to my achievements.”

A marquee event, the 2024 Guyana Prize for Literature Awards event was held on July 4 in the Atlantic Conference Centre of the Pegasus Hotel in Georgetown. It was attended by writers, dignitaries, cultural leaders, and many others. The ceremony was chaired by Al Creighton, who has served as Secretary

Jimmy stood at the large picture window, watching the hearse leave. The chatter behind him from shrouded and hooded strangers made him feel out of place in the large home he was about to inherit if the Lord of the Manor, who was lying in a coma, became deceased.

Jimmy had found himself in the manor as a result of his search for relatives on a DNA website after his mom had passed away a year earlier. She had kept him isolated from the rest of the world in the little village in El Salaval. Jimmy's mom had forbidden him from asking about or mentioning his father. She had never spoken of her origins or why she had moved to this most remote part of the world with her newborn infant, and no one asked.

After his mom had passed away with her heavily-guarded secret, Jimmy used the Internet to solve the mystery that had haunted him since childhood.

Jimmy's first contact with the estate's legal representatives had created more questions than answers. They had scuttled him onto a flight to rush him to his mom's deathbed, but she had died before they had arrived at the manor.

Jimmy's head swirled with confusion. How could Lady Huckstead be his mother when he had already buried his mom?

He turned around and stared at the mingling mourners whispering to each other. The upside-down red crosses hanging from coarse black chains around their necks worried him. The occasional glance with a nod and a smile at him seemed forced and sinister.

Pretending to ask for directions to the bathroom, Jimmy slipped away in search of Lord Huckstead, who had been paralysed by a stroke for the past ten years.

He found the stairs and climbed them, heart pounding, pausing and glancing behind after each step creaked under his weight.

The master bedroom door at the top of the stairs unlocked itself and swung open a few inches, allowing Jimmy a glimpse inside. He gasped when a soft snore drew his attention to the centre of an extra-large four-poster bed in the middle of the



Ken Puddicombe at the event earlier this month

and Administrator of the Prize's Management Council since its early years. The awards were conferred by Guyana's Prime Minister Mark Phillips.

Back in Brampton last week, Puddicombe described the event as exciting, glamorous, and encouraging for all Guyanese writers, and for upcoming poets, authors, and playwrights.

“It was ...a gala, seemingly with no expenses spared in an attempt to showcase Guyana's literary achievements. The awards were handed out by Prime Minister Mark Phillips. The Guyana government recognises the importance of developing and supporting the arts in all means possible.”

Administered by a jury of renowned experts, including poets, fiction and non-fiction writers, and playwrights, since its 2022 reincarnation the Guyana Prize for Literature has now grown to become the country's most prestigious platform for celebrating literary excellence.

The award ceremony was part of the four-day literary festival that saw the gathering hosted at Castellani House from July 4 to July 6. Alongside readings from all prize winners, it featured workshops led by renowned and global literary figures, among them Dr David Dabydeen, Dr Kei Miller, and Dr Maria Kaladeen.



A section of the audience at the Pegasus Hotel

For Puddicombe, the literary festival extended beyond celebration, the author describing it as a bridge between generations of writers.

“The organisers did more than just recognise seasoned writers and playwrights,” he noted, adding “They have set the stage for developing a burgeoning youth complement that will continue the tradition into the future.”

He singled out the efforts of the Ministry of Culture and Sports and the government of Guyana for their role in delivering what he called “a well-orchestrated event”, and credited Creighton Jr as “a major factor in this achievement”.

Before retiring to focus on his writing, Puddicombe worked as a professional accountant and served in controllership roles across Canada's private sector. He migrated to Canada from Guyana in 1971, and now makes Brampton his home, where he lives with his family.

His curiosity about human behaviour, what he describes as “people-watching”, has long informed his writing, which has appeared in newspapers and literary journals.

Travelling is another of his passions. He is steadily covering all five continents, having already explored parts of South East Asia, South America, and Europe.

## The Supernatural Estranged

room. Lord Huckstead, bald head and long flowing white beard on his bony body, lay on his back, struggling to breathe. His wide-open, unseeing eyes stared at the ceiling.

The door swung further open, inviting Jimmy to enter. He stepped inside and jumped when the door closed behind him with a thud. A chilly wind swirled around like a twister, wrapping him in its embrace.

“Get out!” A loud raspy voice whispered in his ear. The foul breath of rotted flesh touched his cheek and burned his nostrils. “They have just discovered that you are missing.”

“What's happening?” Jimmy heard his voice in his head even though his lips never moved.

“They have to sacrifice you because of a pledge.” Jimmy heard the key turn in the lock on the inside of the door. “This will buy you some time, but they will break the door down. They must carry out the ritualistic sacrifice tonight for me to live forever.”

“They're here.” Jimmy's heart raced when he heard the squeak of the first step.

“Get out now!” The window opened, and the bedsheet covering Lord Huckstead slid off his body and started to twirl into a rope. It tied itself onto the centre post of the window and dropped an end into the garden below. “Go before they run around the grounds outside in search of you!” His voice softened. “I love your mother and cannot live without her. You must live so that I can die to be with her.” A tear accompanied the feeble, shaky smile that crossed his face.

The first bang on the door broke Jimmy out of his paralysis. He sprang over to the window and grabbed the rope. He heard them running back down the stairs after they yelled that he would try to escape through the window. His palms burned



Kamil Ali

from the friction of sliding down the bedsheet.

Jimmy sprinted into the woods behind the mansion, with his hands covering his head against the sudden hailstorm from dark clouds that pounded him. He came to a country lane at the edge of the property. He crossed over to the other side where the sun shone brightly. The storm was limited to the property line of the mansion.

A visit to the library a day later revealed that Jimmy was the only child of Lord and Lady Huckstead who belonged to a cult. She had pledged the life of her firstborn to achieve wealth, power, and immortality. Her reward was catching the eye of the handsome young Lord of the manor, who fell hopelessly in love with her.

Nine months after their marriage, their newborn vanished without a trace, putting his parents' chances for immortality at risk. Because they did not fulfill their oath to the cult, Lady Huckstead had died from cancer, and Lord Huckstead was stricken by a stroke.

Lady Huckstead had an estranged twin sister who, with the secret financial help of Lord Huckstead, had disappeared at the same time as the baby. Extended searches had failed to locate the aunt, who had sacrificed her lifestyle to protect and raise her nephew against the death wish imposed on him by his ambitious and selfish mother.

Jimmy switched to the news and read about the lightning strike that burned the mansion to the ground, trapping the 'mourners' within its walls. Everyone perished in the fire.

He returned to his village to live with the people who loved him and to the precious memories of the woman who was more than a mother to him. He thanked his father, whose love for his son had sacrificed his chance for eternal life by saving him not once, but twice.

With a tear in his eye, Jimmy closed the DNA website and the old chapter in his life. A new beginning of a simple life in his little village awaited him.



# From Calcutta to Caroni - Indian cinema and the Caribbean converge

— Bimal Roy's classic film, *Do Bigha Zamin* (1953), vividly captures a Bengal farmer's desperate fight for land and dignity, echoing powerfully in the lived experiences of Caribbean descendants of Indian indentureship. This Bollywood narrative reveals striking parallels of displacement, struggle, and resilience within our Indo-Caribbean diaspora.

...

By Romeo Kaseram

## An LJI Series on the Caribbean Diaspora

On a dusty, unforgiving road, Shambhu Mahato and his family walk away from their lost two acres, leaving behind not just the soil that moments before had slipped through his fingers, but their dreams, dignity, and hope.

This haunting scene is from Bimal Roy's masterpiece, *Do Bigha Zamin*, and resonates profoundly even today with Indo-Caribbean families in places like Albion, Caroni, and Rose Hall, communities separated by oceans, yet bound by the shared scars of dispossession.

Bollywood, so cherished by our Caribbean grandparents and parents in Guyana and Trinidad, spoke intimately to them: not through lavish dance or extravagant melodrama, but through the familiar ache of land unjustly taken, dreams relentlessly deferred, and dignity fought for quietly, but fiercely.

In 1953, just six years after India emerged from British rule, acclaimed filmmaker Roy released *Do Bigha Zamin*. It was an era of immense optimism for a young, newly-independent nation: the oppressive *zamindari* landholding system was being dismantled, and promises of fairness and prosperity were in the air.

Yet, amid these hopeful changes lingered the shadow of exploitation, vividly captured in the story of Shambhu Mahato, a peasant farmer in Bengal desperately fighting to retain his small piece of ancestral land, two *bighas*, roughly equivalent to a couple of acres. It is land he tilled lovingly, sustaining his family through years of poverty and hardship. But this same plot becomes the tragic ground upon which the old feudal order violently collides with the ruthless ambitions of a modernising India.

As film historian and scholar Amrit Gangar incisively notes, *Do Bigha Zamin* "is an allegory of the persistence of feudal structures in postcolonial India". Roy's film unveils the bitter irony of a new 'People's Mill', symbolising progress and national growth, which, in cruel contrast, requires the eviction of poor, powerless villagers. It exposes the harsh truth hidden behind bright promises: progress, for some, often comes at the expense of dignity and livelihood for many.

This cinematic depiction resonates deeply with the historical experiences of our Indo-Caribbean communities. Beginning in 1838, shortly after emancipation had ended African slavery in the Caribbean four years earlier, the British introduced indentureship from India, a separate, exploitative labour system involving contracts of five years, renewable upon expiry.

Under these agreements, our ancestors began arriving in colonies like Trinidad and Tobago and British Guiana (now Guyana) to work primarily on sugar plantations. Crucially, at the end of their indentured contracts, they were promised five acres of land, an act meant to anchor their future and symbolise their freedom from plantation servitude.

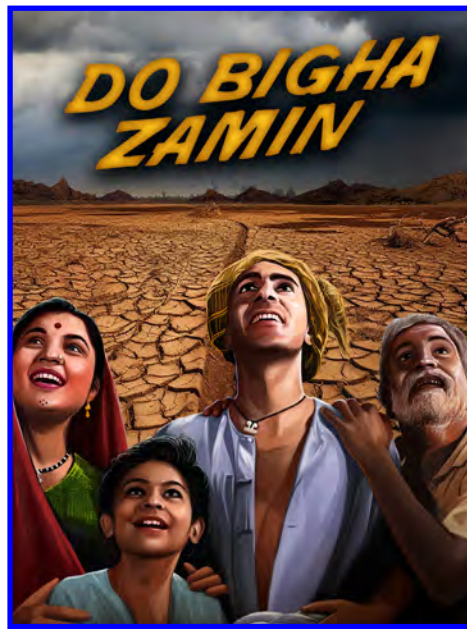
But that promise was often broken. As detailed by the University of the West Indies' *Quadrangle* website, "Planters often reneged on the promise of a parcel of land or passage back to India. Additionally, they were punished harshly, underfed, and prevented from leaving the sugar estates."

The article notes that "by 1880, over 400,000 people had already left India to become indentured labourers... [and] on arrival to the West Indies, indentured labourers realised that they were going to receive almost none of what was due".

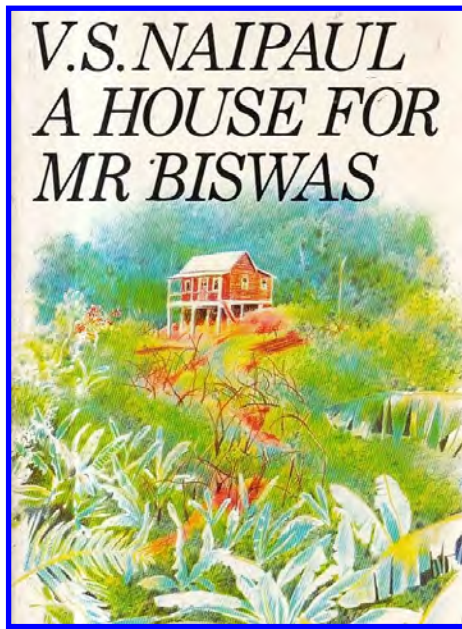
The system, as historian Radica Mahase observes, was one in which "planters and the colonial authorities in general, ensured that they had control over their labourers without appearing with whips and chains in hand". As *Quadrangle* noted, the result was that "early indentureship has been described as slavery in all but name".

This betrayal mirrors the bitter injustice faced by Shambhu in *Do Bigha Zamin*, whose year of unpaid labour is erased from the books by a deceitful *zamindar* and his clerk. With no written receipts, and no legal recourse, Shambhu is forced to prove the impossible: that he worked, that he is owed, that his dignity should count for something. The colonial Indian peasant and our Caribbean's indentured labourers, both stood before systems designed to deny them justice, even while pretending to grant them freedom.

*Do Bigha Zamin* unfolds as both a personal tragedy and a profound critique of systemic injustice, brilliantly realised through the lens of cinematic neo-realism, which is a style



Poster from Bimal Roy's classic, *Do Bigha Zamin* at left; at right is Penguin's cover of V.S. Naipaul's opus, *A House for Mr Biswas*



identified by Gangar as critical in representing the plight of the disenfranchised. Gangar highlights how Roy, influenced by Italian neo-realist masterpieces such as Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*, vividly portrays India's rural-urban divide as not merely geographic but fundamentally political. Roy's Kolkata becomes emblematic of a brutal modernity, contrasting harshly with rural Bengal's seemingly pastoral landscapes, revealing that both spaces are governed by asymmetrical power relationships.

Gangar notes, "The divide between city and country is not only physical, but qualitative, and therefore political... a divide that has to be reproduced again and again". The epistemological framework here encourages viewers, and our readers, to recognise that spaces are rarely neutral; they actively embody historical and political tensions that shape lives profoundly.

Against this rigorous academic framing, Madhulika Liddle's deeply humanising critique brings these theories vividly to life. She emphasises that Kolkata, rather than being a hopeful destination, emerges as a place where "few people have the time or inclination to help a befuddled villager looking for work – any work". She poignantly highlights specific moments that convey profound human dignity amidst despair: Shambhu's quiet determination, Kanhaiya's innocent courage, and small acts of kindness, such as the elderly rickshaw puller's assistance and the street-smart shoeshine boy's generosity.

Liddle's depiction shows how these moments serve as powerful counter-narratives, challenging the cold indifference of urban life. They illustrate an essential epistemological truth: human compassion persists even within oppressive systems, revealing quiet, often overlooked, spaces of resistance. These intersections between Gangar's spatial-political analysis and Liddle's emotional insights offer readers a holistic understanding of how *Do Bigha Zamin* functions simultaneously as a piercing critique of postcolonial capitalism, and a deeply empathetic narrative of human resilience.

The journey from one place to another, in search of resolution, shapes both the experiences depicted in *Do Bigha Zamin* and the historic movement of our ancestors as Indo-Caribbean indentured labourers. Gangar's academic insights emphasise how migration embodies a complex interplay of power, economic coercion, and spatial displacement. Similarly, our Caribbean diaspora experienced this migration as a forced yet hopeful movement towards new spaces, carrying with them aspirations of autonomy and a better future.

But this journey, whether to the city or across the ocean, often brought not relief, but further alienation. In this shared liminal space of dislocation and yearning, *Do Bigha Zamin* finds a remarkable literary parallel in V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr Biswas*. Just as Shambhu leaves his village in pursuit of economic salvation in Kolkata, Mr Biswas, born in Trinidad and descended from indentured ancestors, seeks psychological and existential relief in the purchase of a home. The house, like the *bigha* of land, becomes a metaphor for self-definition, dignity, and stability in a world determined to withhold all three.

Critics have noted how Mr Biswas is "a postcolonial subject seeking self-actualisation by claiming space", with the house representing a form of credible identity and personal sovereignty. His alienation within the Tulsi household and his fractured navigation of colonial Trinidad mirror Shambhu's bewildered encounter with the urban sprawl of Kolkata. Both protagonists confront the pain of systemic displacement, one from land, the other from self.

Liddle's depiction of Shambhu's struggle, marked by the quiet kindness of strangers, the innocence of a child, and the emotional toll on a distant wife parallels Naipaul's rendering of Mr Biswas' wife Shama and their tense, burdened domesticity. Their emotional estrangement stands beside Paro's isolated suffering

in the village, waiting for letters and listening for news. In both stories, the men are away, pursuing elusive solutions, while the women bear a different burden of waiting, worrying, and enduring absence.

Thus, the resonance between Roy's cinematic anguish and Naipaul's literary unease deepens our understanding of how Indo-Caribbean and Indian postcolonial subjects navigate fractured geographies and psychic burdens. Their journeys, though shaped by different colonial histories, move toward the same unresolved horizon: a place to belong, a future to inhabit, and a name to call their own.

These congruent stories, stitched across media and oceans, invite today's readers, especially those of us now living in the diaspora, to look closely, feel deeply, and recognise the mirrored sorrows and shared hopes embedded in these enduring narratives.

In *Do Bigha Zamin*, the story is as much Kanhaiya's as it is Shambhu's. The child's silent resilience, his wide-eyed hope, and his instinct

to help, even if it means working on the streets, mirror the quiet strength of children across the Indo-Caribbean diaspora. In countless homes across Trinidad and Guyana, boys like Kanhaiya carried water, sold mangoes in the marketplaces, or fetched water from long distances, not just to assist their families, but to assert a kind of unspoken agency in a world too often marked by adult hardship and deferred dreams.

When Kanhaiya's bundle is stolen on their first night in Kolkata, the viewer witnesses more than a simple act of theft. It is the loss of security, of rootedness, of everything familiar. For many in the Caribbean, especially those whose families lived in logies in Guyana and barracks in Trinidad, such moments of loss were not cinematic; instead, they were real. Families displaced from plantations after failed land claims, or forced into crowded squatter settlements, shared the same sense of disorientation that Shambhu and Kanhaiya feel as they navigate the brutal logic of the city.

Consider the stories that we have inherited as a diaspora – a grandfather who left the estate carrying only a *Jahaji* bundle of belongings; a grandmother who made ends meet by selling *pho-lourie* under a shop front; cousins raised by neighbours while their parents took work in town. These stories are not footnotes to indentureship; they are its afterlife. They echo in Shambhu's rickshaw, in Paro's silences, in Kanhaiya's desperate efforts to help sustain the family.

Liddle's observation that *Do Bigha Zamin* is a "series of vignettes: snapshots of life, both rural and urban" holds true in our Caribbean spaces as well. We remember the coal pots, the tin trunks, the hammocks stitched from crocus bags. These are the objects and textures of survival. The *basti* in Kolkata is not far from the settlements on the banks of the Caroni River, or the logies in Lusignan, Annandale, and Cane Grove, spaces bound not by distance, but by the shared rhythm of struggle and mutual aid.

To Caribbean viewers, the kindness of Lalu Ustad, who shares his pavement with Kanhaiya, is not a stretch of imagination. It mirrors the spirit of neighbourly generosity, where one mother's pot stretched to feed five children, or a stranger offered a lift on a donkey cart to the nearest town. In both worlds, the poor do not have much, but they offer what they can. It is here in these human exchanges where resistance is quietly nourished.

Such is the living memory of indentureship's legacy, still alive in the diaspora. And it is here that Bollywood, far from being fantasy, becomes a mirror. It holds up stories our grandparents knew instinctively to be true. Not because they read it in a book, but because they had lived it, in every footpath, marketplace, and patch of contested ricefield or sugar cane land.

In the quiet pauses between scenes, in the sigh of a father counting coins, in the footsteps of a mother returning from the cane fields, in the hush that follows a loss too old to name, *Do Bigha Zamin* still speaks to us. It speaks to us who have inherited the ache of indentureship, not through shackles, but through the silence of promised lands never granted. It speaks to children born in boroughs and suburbs, still trying to understand why their grandparents saved, built, and sacrificed with such indefatigable purpose.

It reminds us that cinema, like memory, does not need to shout to be powerful. A film like *Do Bigha Zamin*, or a text like *A House for Mr Biswas*, live on not because of spectacle, but because it dares to tell the truth of ordinary people trying to find space in an unkind world.

And so, as we watch Shambhu disappear into the city's haze, denied even a handful of earth that he once called his own, we see not just the past, but the journey that still continues. One where land is identity, promise, and inheritance. And in the end, it is all that remains, even as it is transformed.





Nawazuddin Siddiqui

Siddiqui questions Bollywood’s budget and beauty bias

In a revealing interview, Nawazuddin Siddiqui has once again spoken with striking clarity about the barriers faced by actors outside the industry’s privileged inner circle, pointing to how complexion, background, and budget constraints quietly shape the careers of many of India’s most talented performers.

In conversation with Nayandeep Rakshith, Siddiqui voiced concern about the Indian film industry’s reluctance to invest in high-budget productions led by character actors. He cited examples of legendary performers, who despite widespread critical acclaim, were never offered roles in big-budget projects.

“For example, [Naseeruddin Shah], Om Puri, Manoj, Irrfan, or other actors like us. Nobody ever made a film with budget over Rs 25 crore with actors like me,” he said.

He also emphasised the structural disparity in distribution and visibility in Bollywood.

“People want to watch our films but the screens don’t reach there. If you want to see our box office numbers, then at least give us that distribution of screens as well. Only then you’ll get to know how many people want to watch us,” Siddiqui added.

Siddiqui drew a sharp distinction between actors embraced by the public and those buoyed by internal industry networks, implying an unequal playing field tilted toward actors with

powerful connections.

“This is the reason why it’s said that there are two kinds of actors, public and industry. Even if people don’t want to watch the industry’s actor, their films are released right in front of your house. But, the actor whose film the public actually wants to see, their film is released in 200-300 screens. I get bothered,” he stated.

Reflecting on one of his most intense performances in *Raman Raghav 2.0*, directed by Anurag Kashyap, Siddiqui shared his disappointment with the film’s limited theatrical release.

“We didn’t get enough screens for *Raman Raghav*. The film released and there were very less screens at theatres. When the film released, people abused us and said what sort of film is this. The same film was appreciated when it come out on OTT. This happens with many people,” Siddiqui explained.

The 51-year-old actor also addressed societal bias regarding physical appearance, revealing that in his early days, he was often told he did not “look like an actor”.

He added, “Thankfully, the industry doesn’t think like that, but it still exists in the society. In my initial days, many people said, ‘You don’t look like an actor’. That used to make me feel bad. I am dark, still reached till here - so imagine what all I could have done if I was fair,” he said.

Johar laments no ‘multi-starrers’

Filmmaker Karan Johar recently voiced concerns over the difficulties in assembling star-studded casts for Bollywood films, highlighting escalating actor remuneration and a shift in industry dynamics that complicate collaborative projects both economically and creatively.

In a recent interview with *Bollywood Hungama*, Johar emphasised that gathering an ensemble cast akin to his iconic 2001 film *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* is now “nearly impossible”.

He illustrated the rarity of current blockbuster collaborations by pointing to *War 2*, featuring actors Hrithik Roshan and Jr. NTR, acknowledging the significant value of uniting major stars from different film industries.

Johar explained the challenges, stating that today it is difficult to unite two lead actors and actresses due to their varied strategies, ideologies, and opinions. This complexity is further intensified by the actors’ reliance on their advisors.

He described the contrast to previous industry practices, reflecting on how actors in the early 2000s approached projects with far less analysis. He recalled that Shah Rukh Khan agreed to star in *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* without reading the script, simply stating he wanted to do it because “[It’s] Karan’s film”.



Karan Johar

While Shah Rukh Khan continues to select films based on personal relationships, Johar lamented today’s actors “over-analyse, over-think, over-expect, over box-officing – and therefore, not over-achieving”.

He further addressed how even people close to him no longer consistently heed his advice, noting that after listening to him, actors frequently revert to their management teams, individual advisors, family members, or partners.

Johar described this expanded “advisory chamber” and the constant influence of social media as contributing to an information overload that ultimately clouds actors’ conviction.

He stressed the importance of returning to decisions made spontaneously and without excessive deliberation, and lamented the current industry preoccupation with individual screen time and roles, stating multi-starrers “used to be so easy”.

*Wishing the Caribbean community across the GTA and Canada a joyful Carnival – thank you for enriching our nation with your vibrant culture and enduring contributions.*

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# England's short-pitched attack sparks outrage

— England's deployment of a short-ball barrage against an injured Rishabh Pant during the third Test at Lord's has sparked outrage, with cricket legend Sunil Gavaskar denouncing the tactic as a shameful throwback to the lack of sportsmanship during the Bodyline-era.

England's aggressive short-ball assault against a clearly injured Rishabh Pant during the third Test at Lord's has drawn sharp condemnation from Indian cricket icon Sunil Gavaskar, who has called on ICC Men's Cricket Committee chairman Sourav Ganguly to urgently review the laws allowing such tactics.

Citing a lack of sportsmanship and invoking the notorious Bodyline series of 1932-1933, Gavaskar said England's strategy was unbecoming of modern cricket, and amounted to targeting an injured player.

Day 3 of the Lord's Test saw England turn to relentless short-pitched bowling, with 60 per cent of the deliveries from their seamers aimed short, specifically directed at Pant's left shoulder and upper body.

Complementing the short-pitched bowling attack, England captain Ben Stokes stationed six fielders on the leg side, aiming to provoke a miscue from Pant, who had sustained an injury to the index finger of his left hand while keeping wicket on Day 1. Despite being in obvious pain, Pant courageously batted on, contributing 74 off 112 balls in the first innings.

Pant's resistance was part of a commanding fourth-wicket stand with K.L. Rahul, who scored a century. The pair added 141 runs to guide India back into the match after trailing England's first innings total of 387.

Ravindra Jadeja chipped in with a third consecutive half-century, helping India draw level. Pant's dismissal just before lunch, a silly run-out while attempting a risky single to short cover, halted India's momentum temporarily, but his earlier contribution stood as a testament to his resilience.

In the second innings, Pant walked out to bat with India needing 135 runs with six wickets in hand. Struggling to grip the bat, he often released his injured bottom hand mid-shot.

His vulnerability was evident as he fell early on Day 5 to Jofra Archer, losing his off-stump in an effort to defend. India eventu-

ally fell 22 runs short of the 193-run target, conceding a 2-1 lead to England in the five-match series.

Despite his injury, Pant remains India's second-highest run-scorer in the series, amassing 425 runs in six innings at an average of 70.83. His grit was on full display at Lord's, and his 74-run innings was among the most hard-fought of the match.

K.L. Rahul's century anchored India's first innings fightback, while Jadeja's consistency with the bat continues to provide India with critical lower-order stability.

England's short-ball ploy, particularly the barrage of bouncers bowled from around the wicket by Stokes, was clearly aimed at exploiting Pant's compromised physical condition. Gavaskar

was quick to draw parallels to historical infractions in the game's conduct, stating, "[Fifty-six percent] of the balls bowled were short, with four fielders positioned on the boundary. To me, that is not cricket."

This tactical shift momentarily succeeded in slowing down India's scoring rate, but also attracted scathing criticism from analysts and commentators alike, especially as the approach targeted a visibly injured player who required on-field medical attention multiple times during his innings.

Gavaskar's outrage carries historical weight.

He referenced the infamous Bodyline series in which England targeted Don Bradman with short-pitched deliveries and packed leg-side fields, tactics widely condemned and later regulated.

"Now we're seeing bouncers being bowled. Just look at the field setup. This isn't cricket," an annoyed Gavaskar asserted.

He pointed out the discrepancy in how cricket authorities reacted when the West Indies dominated with pace in the 1980s, noting, "When the West Indies bowled short, they introduced a rule limiting it to just two bouncers per over. That was to curb the West Indies' strength."

Gavaskar's call for reform was directed squarely at Sourav Ganguly in his ICC capacity: "There should never be more than six fielders on the leg side... I call on him to ensure that, in the future, no more than six fielders are permitted on the leg side."

Meanwhile, India's captain Shubman Gill has said Pant "should be fine" in time for the fourth Test against England at Old Trafford, which starts today. According to Gill, scans revealed "no major injury" to the index finger of Pant's left hand.



Sunil Gavaskar



Sir Andy Roberts

## Sir Andy demands CWI resignations

West Indies cricket is once again in crisis following a humiliating second-innings collapse for 27 runs against Australia in Jamaica, the second-lowest total in Test history. Following the defeat, legendary pacer Sir Andy Roberts has called for sweeping leadership changes, demanding the resignation of Cricket West Indies President Dr Kishore Shallow, Director of Cricket Miles Bascombe, and head coach Daren Sammy.

"The Director of Cricket should walk, the President should walk, the coach should walk, first and foremost," said Roberts, speaking in Antigua last week. "How can one person have that much control over the fortunes of five million people?"

Roberts' critique zeroed in on what he views as the overreach of Daren Sammy, who serves both as head coach and selector, a dual role, which according to the former pacer, grants disproportionate influence. He added, "If they can't take responsibility, how can they resign?"

The tipping point came at Sabina Park, where West Indies suffered a major collapse in the second innings, losing three wickets in the very first over.

"I was shocked. Three wickets in the first over? Unthinkable," Roberts said.

While the scale of the defeat has drawn widespread condemnation, Roberts believes the root causes run deeper than a single match.

"Meetings won't fix this," he warned, adding, "We need proper development, starting from youth cricket with qualified coaches. The problems run much deeper."



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# Gill questions England’s sportsmanship

— Tensions flared off the field as India’s captain Shubman Gill called out England’s conduct during the Lord’s Test, questioning their commitment to the spirit of cricket while Ben Stokes defended his team’s actions.

Indian captain Shubman Gill has publicly questioned the sportsmanship of England’s behaviour during the recent Test match at Lord’s, saying several incidents fell outside “the spirit of the game”.

His comments came in response to tactics employed by England’s openers to delay play during the final minutes of Day 3, prompting broader debate around gamesmanship, over-rate penalties, and cricketing decorum.

The controversy centres around England’s deliberate slowdown at the end of the third day’s play. Gill alleged that England’s batters arrived 90 seconds late to the crease and then stretched the remaining seven minutes of the session by exploiting interruptions, citing movement behind the sightscreen and a call for physio after a hit.

“A lot of people have been talking about this so let me clear the air for once and for all,” Gill said. “The English batsmen on that day had seven minutes of play left. They were 90 seconds late to come to the crease. Not 10, not 20 – 90 seconds late.”

Gill acknowledged that all teams might look to shorten overs under pressure, but insisted that England’s method of delay was inappropriate.

“Yes... we would have also liked to play less overs, but there is a manner to do it,” he stated.

He added, “Just leading up to that event a lot of things that we thought should not have happened, they happened.”

The incident triggered a fiery response in the next innings, with Gill confronting Zak Crawley, which England interpreted as provocation.



Shubman Gill

Gill admitted his confrontation wasn’t planned: “It’s not something I’m very proud of... but you are playing a game, you are playing to win and there are a lot of emotions involved.”

England captain Ben Stokes defended his team’s approach: “At not one stage did we go over the line.” He emphasised that his side would remain assertive: “We are not going to let any team feel like they can intimidate us in any way.”

Stokes also reignited debate around the ICC’s over-rate rules, after England were fined ten percent of their match fee and docked two World Test Championship points.

“I honestly think there needs to be a real hard look at how it’s structured... Common sense would say you should look at changing how over-rates are timed in different conditions,” he said.

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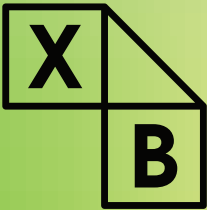
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