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**Premier Doug Ford (right) and IMO's President Omar Farouk share an Iftar meal at the Rexdale mosque on February 21. Photo by Russell Lutchman**

## IMO Iftars unite community, signal mosque's future growth

— Two Iftar dinners hosted by the International Muslim Organisation in Rexdale on February 20 and February 21 drew together federal, provincial, municipal, police, and diaspora leaders, the events serving as a platform for spiritual connection, and for a forward gaze into the IMO's redevelopment project that will see the rebuilding of the mosque alongside a 256-unit apartment complex.

By Romeo Kaseram  
An LJI Community Report

Toronto – The IMO brought together political leaders and community members for two special Iftar dinners at the start of the holy month of Ramadan, transforming the evenings' breaking of the fast gatherings into moments of both spiritual reflection and forward-looking institutional growth.

Held at the IMO's Rexdale mosque in Etobicoke on February 20 and February 21, the events drew a full spectrum of representation from the federal, provincial and municipal governments, members of the Toronto Police Service, and the wider diaspora community.

The February 20 Iftar was hosted by John Zerucelli, Member of Parliament for Etobicoke North, who described the evening as

**See Page 15: IMO Iftars**

## Persad-Bissessar, Ali to attend select US summit

— Trinidad and Tobago's Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar and Guyana's President Irfaan Ali are among a select group of hemispheric leaders invited by US President Donald Trump to attend the March 7 'Shield of the Americas Summit' in Miami. The two are the only confirmed Caricom leaders participating in what is being framed as a US-led security and coordination initiative amid shifting regional dynamics.

Port-of-Spain – Trinidad and Tobago Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar and Guyana's President Irfaan Ali will meet US President Donald Trump on March 7 at the Shield of the Americas Summit in Miami, a gathering being positioned as a security-focused initiative aimed at strengthening cooperation across the hemisphere.

The summit is scheduled to take place at the luxury hotel, Trump National Doral Miami, beginning at noon, with just over ten countries expected to participate. International reports indicate that Latin American leaders from Argentina, Paraguay, Bolivia, El Salvador, Ecuador, and Honduras are among those invited to attend.

Ali and Persad-Bissessar confirmed their participation on the sidelines of the 50th Regular Meeting of the Caribbean Community in St Kitts and Nevis, which concluded on

February 27. They are the only two Caricom leaders confirmed to attend.

Ali told reporters in Basseterre that the meeting will focus on regional challenges and coordination with Washington.

"I have been invited to the meeting... it's a meeting dealing with security matters, it's dealing with some of the challenges in the region, and to see how we can coordinate better in relation to those challenges. And this is an engagement that has been ongoing," he said.

He added that security has been a key pillar in the growing bilateral relationship between Guyana and the US.

Persad-Bissessar's invitation was extended during bilateral talks with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio at the Caricom summit. She said discussions covered Haiti, Cuba, Venezuela and regional stability, and that further details would be shared after her meeting with President Trump.

"...[With Rubio] we talked about Haiti, we talked about Cuba, of course, we talked about the engagements with Venezuela and the way forward, and he committed on [March 7] when we meet President Trump, more details will be shared on several things that I raised with him..." she said.

Persad-Bissessar added, "All for the benefit of the people of

**See Page 20: Chosen leaders**



**TT's PM Kamla Persad-Bissessar (centre) greets a student at the opening of last week's Caricom Summit. Looking on (left to right, back row) are SVG's PM Goodwin Friday, Bahamas' PM Philip Davis, Guyana's President Dr Irfaan Ali, and Grenada's PM Dickon Mitchell. Caribbean Community photo**

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**Speakers and guests included IUPAT officials, government leaders, and members of the diplomatic corps**  
**IUPAT District Council 46 hosts first BHM celebration**

— IUPAT District Council 46 hosted its largest-ever Black History Month event on February 20 at its Toronto union hall, drawing members, elected officials, and community leaders under the theme ‘Honouring the Past. Celebrating the Present. Building the Future’. In his remarks, IUPAT’s political director Ivan Dawns reflected on Black contributions to labour and civic life, urging continued efforts to expand opportunity in the trades.

By Romeo Kaseram  
 An LJI Community Report

Toronto – The International Union of Painters and Allied Trades (IUPAT) District Council 46 marked Black History Month on February 20 with what organisers described as the union hall’s largest-ever celebration of Black achievement.

Held at the union hall on Toro Road in Toronto, the evening gathering brought together representatives from municipal, provincial, and federal levels of government, alongside union leaders and community partners.

Organised under the banner, *Honouring the Past. Celebrating the Present. Building the Future*, the event reflected both the commemorative and forward-looking dimensions of Black History Month.

Ivan Dawns, DC 46’s political director and the first Black business representative appointed within IUPAT in Canada in 2013, delivered an inspirational and enabling address. He began by acknowledging labour leaders who paved the way for greater representation in the trades, including Ken Rigmaiden, Herman Stewart, Bromley Armstrong, and Phyllis Gallimore.

“When you look at the union’s history and see how far we have come, breaking down racial barriers, I think it is a significant thing for us to celebrate,” Dawns told the gathering.

Quoting Marcus Garvey, Dawns stated, “A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin, and culture is like a tree without roots”, underscoring the importance of historical awareness as a foundation for progress.

He also addressed a question he said he was asked earlier in the day: “Why celebrate Black history?”

In response, Dawns said Black History Month exists “to recognise and educate people about the history, culture, and contributions of Black individuals because for far too long, those contributions have been ignored, minimised, or erased from



Ontario NDP leader Marit Stiles (left to right), Ivan Dawns, and MPP Tom Rakocevic at the BHM event

mainstream history”.

He highlighted several Black innovators whose work continues to shape everyday life, noting, “Garrett Morgan invented the traffic signal. Dr Gladys West was a key pioneer behind GPS technology. Jesse Russell helped develop cellular phone technology. Dr Charles Drew revolutionised the blood bank system,” he said. Additionally, “Do you know what they all have in common? They are Black – and yet many of us never learned their names in school.”

For Dawns, honouring the past is more than recounting names and milestones.

“Black history should not be just a collection of dates and names. It is the story of real people who faced injustice, overcame obstacles, and opened doors that were once closed,” he affirmed.

Dawns arrived in Canada from Jamaica in 1997, and entered the dry-wall trade shortly afterwards. As the only Black worker on many job sites in his early years, he encountered racist remarks and barriers, which have since been challenged through anti-racism initiatives and structural change within the industry.

“The position I am in is not because I am more qualified or because I worked harder than my ancestors – it is because they fought so that I could be here,” he said.

He described the evening’s theme as a call to action, declaring, “To celebrate the present is to recognise how far we have come.”

He added, “The present is proof that change is possible when people believe in themselves – and in each other.”

Looking ahead, he emphasised shared responsibility. Citing a friend’s advice, he

said, “Everyone should plant a shade tree that they will never sit under.”

And he continued, “Our ancestors planted shade trees so that we could stand here today. Now it is our turn to plant shade trees for the generations coming behind us.”

Closing his address, Dawns returned to the central theme of stewardship and responsibility, noting, “History isn’t just something we remember; it is something we are responsible for,” he said.

He added, “So let us not be the generation that just talks about history, but the one that makes it happen!”

Email [tas@torontoaryasamaj.org](mailto:tas@torontoaryasamaj.org) to reserve tickets for the event. Organisers have indicated tickets purchased in advance will be held for collection at the reception desk upon arrival.

The concert comes during a milestone year for the VCC, which is marking its 30th anniversary. As part of its observances, the organisation has issued an appeal for donations to assist with ongoing maintenance and repair of the mandir, which has served the Hindu community in the GTA for three decades.

Email donations to [tas@torontoaryasamaj.org](mailto:tas@torontoaryasamaj.org); tax-deductible receipts are issued for donations over \$20.

Donors are asked to include the name and address required for receipt processing.

In addition to the March 14 concert, the VCC will formally observe Holi today, March 4, starting at 10 am, with a programme featuring prayers, a spiritual message, chowtal singing, and traditional Holi songs.

For further information, contact Adit Kumar at 647-866-1926, consult the [display advertisement on Page 22](#), or reach out via email at [tas@torontoaryasamaj.org](mailto:tas@torontoaryasamaj.org).

**Drive away the winter blues with VCC’s Holi concert**

Toronto – If winter in the GTA has felt long and relentless, a splash of colour is on the way to interrupt the grey skies and the towering mounds of snow.

The Toronto Arya Samaj/Vedic Cultural Centre (VCC) is inviting the community to usher in the season of renewal with its annual Holi Concert on March 14 at 4345 14th Avenue in Markham with an evening designed to blend celebration, culture, and community support.

This year’s musical showcase will feature a cross-section of performers from across Ontario, bringing both popular Bollywood hits and traditional Holi favourites to the stage. Scheduled artistes include Bash Nandalall, Seema Maraj, Neetu Rambharack, Deveka Yassen, Deven Latchmana, Sudesh Naraine, Kevin Dhar, and many others.

Organisers say the concert is not only a festive gathering but also a platform to spotlight and uplift local talent within the Hindu and broader South Asian community. In a release, the VCC noted that public response “has been great so far” and encouraged patrons to secure tickets in advance.

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MP Sahota (centre) with Renée Rudder (left), and David Rudder from *Enroute 2 Success* at the screening of *The Ninth Floor*. Facebook photo

## BHM celebrated with reflection, action

**Brampton** – Black History Month was marked with reflection, celebration, and community engagement when MP Ruby Sahota joined residents across Caledon and Brampton for a full day of commemorative events highlighting Black Canadian history and achievement.

“Black History Month is a time to reflect, to learn, and to recommit ourselves to building a more just and inclusive Canada,” Sahota stated in a Facebook post, describing the day’s activities as both meaningful and energising.

As she noted, her morning began in Caledon, where she toured an exhibit spotlighting Black Canadian trailblazers, and attended a presentation by Captain (ret’d) Kevin Junor on the service and legacy of the No. 2 Construction Battalion during World War I. The battalion, composed primarily of Black Canadian soldiers, remains a powerful symbol of perseverance and patriotism in the face of discrimination.

“Black history is Canadian history,” Sahota emphasised, noting that learning about the battalion’s contributions underscored the importance of preserving and sharing these stories with future generations.

The day of celebration continued with a community screening of *The Ninth Floor*, host-

ed by *Enroute 2 Success*. The documentary revisits the 1969 Sir George Williams Affair in Montreal, a pivotal moment in Canada’s civil rights history.

Sahota described the screening as “inspiring,” adding that BHM is not only about honouring the past, but also about celebrating excellence today, and creating opportunities for the future.

Sahota later attended the 25th Annual Black History Concert in Brampton, where youth performers, veterans, artists, and community leaders were recognised for their contributions. The evening celebrated resilience, creativity, and cultural legacy.

“It was a joy to recognise the contributions of youth, veterans, artists, and community leaders, and to celebrate the resilience, creativity, and legacy of Black Canadians,” Sahota said, calling the day “a truly inspiring experience of learning, reflection, and connection with our vibrant community.”

Reaffirming her commitment, Sahota concluded saying she remains focused on advancing equity, confronting systemic barriers, and ensuring that every young person, regardless of background, can see themselves reflected in leadership and opportunity.



Last month the Office of Salma Zahid marked 30 years of Black History Month at the Latvian Centre in Toronto, honouring Black brilliance across generations from trailblazers who paved the way to emerging voices shaping the next generation (photo above). Reflecting on the gathering, MP Zahid shared: “What a Black History Month celebration! Today we honoured the past and celebrated what is yet to come. The future is bright!” She also highlighted Black excellence in athletics (photo below) with the 2nd Annual Black Leaders in Sports Day on Parliament Hill, hosted by the Inclusion in Canadian Sports Network. Facebook photos



MP Juanita Nathan (left) attended the Liberal Black Caucus History Month event last month to mark the contributions, leadership, and resilience of Black Canadians. In a post, she noted it “was inspiring to hear from community leaders and witness the richness of their cultures, traditions, and achievements”, adding that moments like these “remind us of the progress made and the continued work needed to advance equity, inclusion, and opportunity for all”. Facebook photo

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Editorial

Caricom solidarity

The remarks made by Trinidad and Tobago's Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar at the 50th Meeting of Caricom Heads of Government on February 24 in Basseterre have rippled well beyond our Caribbean homelands and here into the diaspora.

While reaffirming that Trinidad and Tobago remains "vested" in Caricom, her declaration that this nation will no longer be bound to the region's political ideologies, foreign policy positions, or security frameworks has unsettled many of us in the diaspora.

From Scarborough to Brampton, Mississauga to Markham, our families that remain closely tethered to the region are watching carefully, painfully aware through our collective histories that public fractures among leaders can carry consequences far beyond the summit floor.

No responsible government can be faulted for prioritising sovereignty or national security. Trinidad and Tobago faces serious challenges: transnational crime, illegal firearms and narcotics trafficking, and the destabilising spill-over effects from Venezuela's ongoing crises.

Persad-Bissessar's warning that crime linked to illicit cross-border flows has cost hundreds of lives resonates with diaspora families whose relatives in the homeland daily navigate these harsh realities. Nor can the social and economic pressures of irregular migration be dismissed.

Yet Caricom was never designed to dilute sovereignty. It was built on the principle that small states, acting together, are stronger than when acting alone. For more than five decades, it has provided collective diplomatic weight, economic integration, and security cooperation precisely because individual nations lack the scale to confront global powers independently.

What is troubling to us abroad is not disagreement, but its public escalation. Persad-Bissessar's criticism of Caricom's alleged "silence" during threats from Venezuela, her public gratitude to the US military for security support, and her characterisation of the unfortunate Brent Thomas affair as a "kidnapping" rightly drew swift responses from regional leaders.

Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley rejected Persad-Bissessar's kidnapping characterisation as inaccurate. Grenada's Prime Minister Dickon Mitchell pointed to Caricom's mediation efforts, while Dominica's Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit urged that disputes be resolved privately, preserving regional unity.

For our diaspora in the GTA, these exchanges are not abstract diplomacy, but impact directly on our daily lives. We send remittances and barrels, invest in property, fund scholarships, and advocate for Caribbean interests in Ottawa and at Queen's Park. Stability in the region underpins confidence at home and abroad. Public discord risks unsettling investor perception, and reinforces external narratives of fragility at a time when collective advocacy on trade, climate, and regional security remains vital.

As the media in Trinidad and Tobago have noted, Caricom has never been a monolith. Member states have always pursued distinct foreign policies while cooperating on shared interests. Trinidad and Tobago has long been a pillar in Caricom, contributing energy resources, financial strength, and strategic leadership. In return, it has benefited from regional markets and collective diplomatic leverage.

Sovereignty and solidarity need not be opposing forces. For small states navigating today's turbulent geopolitical climate, these are complementary tools.

What is required now is steady dialogue and renewed reassurance. Legitimate security concerns must be addressed, and Caricom must demonstrate responsiveness when member states face threats. At the same time, local frustrations must not evolve into regional disengagement.

From our winter streets, we look to our homelands as stakeholders, not spectators. Our ties to the Caribbean are economic, "navel-string" familial, emotional, and enduring. Unity is not sentimental; it is a strategic connectivity.

In an increasingly volatile global order, a divided Caribbean navigating a fracturing world alone would be perilous. Repairing strained relationships is, therefore, not optional, but essential for our homelands' survival.

Visible differences among us softened by our shared values

A Hindu, a Muslim, and a Christian enter a room. For many Indo-Caribbean families, this is a familiar reality. We are bound together by shared culture: food, music, traditions, and language; yet the Indo-Caribbean community is richly diverse in religious faith.

This diversity is not a fault line; it is a defining strength shaped by generations of migration, resilience, and coexistence.

The Holy season is upon us, a time not only for reflection, but also for celebration of the Indo-Caribbean community's unique pluralism.

Muslims are observing Ramadan; many Christians have entered Lent; and Hindus are celebrating Phagwah (also known as Holi), all sacred periods grounded in renewal, discipline, and spiritual growth.

Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, is observed through fasting, prayer, charity, and reflection. From dawn to sunset, Muslims abstain from food and drink to cultivate self-discipline, deepen empathy for those in need, and strengthen their relationship with God.

It is widely regarded as a time of devotion and community, when families gather at sunset, mosques fill with worshippers, and generosity is amplified.

Lent is a 40-day season leading to Easter marked by prayer, fasting, and repentance. It invites Christians to reflect, grow spiritually, and renew their faith.

For many Christians, it is a period of humility, discipline, and preparation; a chance to practise compassion, forgiveness, and intentional living.

Holi is a vibrant Hindu festival celebrating spring, love, and the triumph of good over evil. Known for its colourful powders, music, and joyful gatherings, it commemorates stories such as that of Prahlad and Holika.

For Hindus, it is a time of forgiveness, renewal, unity, and strengthening bonds across generations and communities.

Our differences may be visible, but they are softened by the values we share. Community sits at the heart of our observances; and these observances, in turn, help define our community.

Many of us raised in households that practise one of these faiths learn early the importance of respecting others. Some among us grow up with parents, relatives, and extended family



Ryan Singh

members of different religions, making interfaith understanding not theoretical, but lived, especially around dinner tables, at weddings, and during celebrations.

This interconnectedness allows us to experience, appreciate, and learn from one another's beliefs. It has long been embedded in who we are.

In countries where Indo-Caribbean communities took root, such as Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, and Suriname, it is common to see a mosque, mandir, and church standing within close proximity, sometimes even side by side.

This is not unusual in Canada today, but this visible expression of interfaith respect was established generations earlier in the Caribbean, where pluralism was not merely encouraged, but was essential.

Our ancestors learned to live, work, celebrate, and mourn together despite differences, shaping a culture rooted in coexistence.

In a world that often highlights division, the Indo-Caribbean experience reminds us what unity can look like. Faiths may differ, rituals may vary, and holy days may fall on different dates, but the underlying values: compassion, humility, gratitude, and love, remain strikingly alike.

This is the beauty of our culture, born from the struggles and sacrifices of ancestors who arrived in the Caribbean as indentured labourers, and who built community on unfamiliar soil.

Understanding what makes us different matters, but recognising how those differences can unite us is what makes our community truly remarkable.

Recently, the Indo-Caribbean Canadian Association hosted an Iftar gathering. Despite volunteers and attendees representing Hindu, Christian, Muslim, and non-religious backgrounds, everyone shared in the moment with warmth and respect.

The joy that filled the room was a reminder of something that our world could use more of through genuine fellowship.

Rather than division or conflict, mutual respect guided by curiosity, and a willingness to learn from one another, have the power to bring people together.

Our Indo-Caribbean community is fortunate. As we continue to grow, bridges form easily when understanding and appreciation lead the way.

Boyhood sugar extraction leaves bitter taste in memory

Some weekends I buy a cup of machine-pressed sugar canes at the Flea Market; a quick transaction with the point-of-sale scanner on my phone, and the vendor effortlessly turns away to attend to a waiting customer.

The first sip from the paper cup is always transcendental, lifting me away from the electronic transactional chatter of modern-day debit payment machines; instead, a payload of sensations unfolds from my youthful past, taking me back to my boyhood, to those moments when there was no other sweetness like sticks of sugar canes chewed at dusk under a tropical evening sky bleeding out its light.

Right away I recall the fibrous, stubborn, defiant sweetness wrestled with the teeth straight from the stalk, the juice overjoyed to leave its containment along the length of sugar cane, running down fingers to elbows, drip, drip, dripping to the ground to cohere into solid beads of dust.

That sweetness began in Ma's hands. I can still see her seated by the gap of our adobe hut, that modest, liminal Caribbean corridor between the front yard and the outside world, bent forward slightly, her sharp *gilpin* flashing in the softer evening's orange now thickening into a deeper plumage of blood-red as the day took flight.

She would shave the sheath off the sugar cane with the silver, razor-edge of her *gilpin*, effortlessly lifting off thin strips so the white core emerged clean and pristine as a peeled cassava. Peel, turn, slice; peel, spin, flip like a baton, slice. It was a rhythm not of Ma's back-breaking labour in the cane fields, but a labour of love, a sticky treat for her "well-behaved" grandson.

Or so her body language spoke to the wonderment in my eyes, disarming the suspicion engendered by my precociousness; despite me knowing her swift carving out of the sheath from this stick of sugar cane was less a reward for being "a good boy"; perhaps more an instrument, with its intersections of joints alternating with sugary-sweetness, more a yardstick that plumbed the depths of her unconditional love for her one and only grandson; or maybe, just maybe, a lesson for my later life.

I accepted wholeheartedly this improvised, transient narrative of my newly-acquired virtue, patiently standing cautiously out of the way from the rasping back-and-forth of her *gilpin*. Immobile and theatrical in my role as "a good boy", I stood attentive and deferential as a choir boy, one dusty foot on the instep of the other, until she had joined the knots off this sugary snack with a deft circularity of her blade, smoothly sectioning it into graspable, bite-sized wands.

And when I bit down, the world quickly narrowed to the magic of sweetness; sugar and sun flowed generously from the fibres. I chewed, salivated, and savoured until my tender facial muscles

protested, the stalk, reduced to its fibrous, dry husk, quickly spat out, myself then reaching with voracious entitlement for another.

Around us, the evening was thickening. Smoke was rising from kitchens where *chulhas* were crackling with the weight of soot-blackened pots. In the distance, the cane fields were aflame, vociferous with the raging red of dragons in flight in a darkening sky; behind us, two giant chimneys were busy with the language of the empire's commerce, emitting smoke signals that mapped out the path the harvested canes would take the next day in its journey to the sugar factory.

The sugar canes were always there; as a child, I felt these fields were eternal, all-compassing, the empire's universe self-contained; this, as I understood later, being Stephen Hawking's response to the question about the dimension of the universe, and what is north of the North Pole.

It came to that time late in the year, when wave after wave rolled in on this ocean of sugar canes, bringing the tall and stately golden-tasselled flowers that bent ever so slightly with the winnowing wind.

We walked hand in hand in this time of tremendous ripening to the top of our hill, the December air sweet and sharp, to watch the majestic sway of greenery crowned with golden arrows as it stretched across the entirety of the empire's universe.

On our way home, Ma broke off a stalk at the root with a bare foot; a glance over her shoulder, she walked nonchalantly away, leaning heavily, the cane now a cane, a deception against surveillance: a young boy assisting an old lady with a walking stick.

I felt no sense that Ma appropriating a stalk of sugar cane as a sugary treat for her "well-behaved" grandson was a purloining of empire's property; it was neither intrusion nor appropriation.

Instead, the sugar canes always felt communal, just like rain or a village rumour, whether both arrived as a drizzle, or as a downpour stultifying the neighbourhood with lightning, thunder, and a flood of gossip.

But Ma knew; in her act of elevating a stalk from commodity to gift, in leaning on it as a cane dislodged from empire's grasp, making it an instrument lifted out of the commons, she was not only being defiant, but at the same time was paying it forward.

Daily she toiled in those soul-killing fields, her back bent in a geometry of tasks, her *gilpin's* output countable and verifiable as rows of canes. I was too young to know the sugar I drained from the purloined stalks flourished under Ma's hard labour; not yet knowing that while sugar was building fortunes abroad, it was a crime for Ma's calloused palms to take away a single stalk.

Yet she did; today, in the aftertaste in that Flea Market cup of pressed sugar cane is the knowledge acquired by a boy, who biting into a piece of the homeland, tasted early its bitter history.

Romeo Kaseram



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

# Documentary a legacy to remind Guyana of its struggles for freedom

Dear Editor,

*The Terror and the Time*, which was written by the late great Dr Rupert Roopnarine, should be included as compulsory material in the history syllabus in all of our schools in Guyana. It is a great account that showcases the history and the impact that our founders have had on our country.

It is also a clear reminder of what we as a nation have gone through to gain our independence and freedom. The struggles of our people, which are clearly portrayed in this documentary, should always be remembered and be a guide to those in government.

As a nation, which overcame oppression and colonialism, we must remember that there is no place for leaders who embrace the ways of our past oppressors. There is no place for those who exploit the have-nots to enrich those few who already have more than their share.

As a people we have come too far to continue to struggle unnecessarily in a land of plenty. We have sacrificed too much to have those seeking the approval of our previous oppressors continue to rob the poor and give away our patrimony and resources. We saw it during the time of dictatorship and betrayal, and we see it now during this period of plenty.



Dr Rupert Roopnarine

The resources of our homeland are for the benefit of all Guyanese. We must not put our fellow countrymen and countrywomen in debt so they can provide for their families. We must not restrict access to opportunities, and most importantly we must not allow strangers to come into our land and exploit us.

For years our citizens have spoken up concerning the exploitation occurring in the extractive sector. Our gold is primarily benefiting those from abroad, and so is our oil and bauxite. In this land of plenty every Guyanese should be able to wear gold in safety and dignity. Every Guyanese should be able to easily afford gasoline and the safe by products of the oil and gas sector.

Every Guyanese should be able to see the bauxite of our nation converted into value-added products that are used in the construction of their homes, and in the construction of our roads.

We do not need more of the have-and-have-not mentality that has plagued our land with exploitation since the time of Christopher Columbus.

Humility and contentment must take root, and greed must

be uprooted. Those who prefer greed and a quick buck must be rejected at the polls, and those who seek justice and equality must be embraced.

This will help each of us securely build a dignified, successful and lasting future for our families without others being sidelined and unable to do the same. Success is not only for the few to access, but a right that should be available to all.

My fellow Guyanese, we are upon a path that has come to a crossroad. One leads to an ever-increasing gap between the few who have, and the masses who do not. The other leads to shared prosperity, where each man, woman, and child has equal access to the opportunity to safely prosper. A path where our nation's resources and strength are used to build our nation first and foremost. Where the ways of the oppressors are rejected and neglected. Where the ways of cooperation and camaraderie are embraced and used to build mutual success. We must as a people decide which path we will take.

Understanding and remembering our past, and the struggles that have got us this far, will help every Guyanese make the best choice for his or her future. For this our nation should always be grateful to Dr Roopnarine and his team that were able to capture the spirit of our fight for independence and freedom in the documentary, *The Terror and the Time*. May he Rest in Peace.

Jamil Changle, Guyana, via email.

## Call for togetherness, aspiration, and vision in TT

Dear Editor,

May the same togetherness and unity we saw in Trinidad and Tobago during the recently-concluded Carnival season become a part of our society. If we are going to rise, we must come together, having the same vision, aspiration, and willing power.

I encourage leaders to strive to bring the Caribbean together, learning to work with each other, showing love and respect. I believe that our economy can be turned around, crime can seriously decrease, and we can deal with the social ills that plague us, the daily injustices facing many, and the lack of basic things in life that many among us are experiencing.

Change can come about. You may think that is only a dream in the sky, but many around the world had a dream, and it did come into a reality. As a people, we must want to see Trinidad and Tobago turn around in a positive way. It

begins with our leaders, our politicians in the government and the Opposition leading the way, with all organisations and citizens doing their part.

One of the biggest setbacks right now is not just money but the inability to work with each other, allowing pride, ego, and party politics to keep us fighting each other. We must get rid of these demons of destruction, or else we will remain where we are as a people.

We must see beyond ethnicity and the class divide; this is not taking us anywhere as a people. The faster we close ranks and realise the great need to face all our challenges as a united force, the quicker we can have a turnaround in all those areas that are desperately needed in sweet Trinidad and Tobago.

Let us make Trinidad and Tobago a better place for all – "together we aspire, together we achieve."

Arnold Gopeesingh, Trinidad and Tobago, via email.

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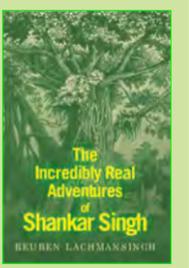
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PM Kamla Persad-Bissessar (centre) at Maha Shivratri celebrations last month  
**Watershed 2026 for spiritual, moral revival**

Dear Editor,  
 For far too long, the prevailing political culture and national psyche in Trinidad and Tobago has been split, with each side harbouring deep resentment and suspicion of the other. The strength of our country has been down-trodden. Racial and religious division has been fomented for political and personal gain. But take note. The soul of Trinidad and Tobago is demanding a revival of moral and spiritual values. It is demanding a clearing away of the racial, political, and religious bigotry and hatred that have smothered the nation for far too long. Let not the spiritual significance and lessons of the juxtaposition of the festivals of Carnival and *Maha Shivratri* be lost on us. Let us celebrate life. Let us celebrate the blessing of religious tolerance and racial harmony that constitute the essence of what Trinidad and

Tobago represents. For far too long, the divine beauty of the twinning of our islands, the harmonious co-existence of the races, creeds, and cultures have been overlooked and under-appreciated, even sacrificed in an orgy of barely disguised mutual hatred and self-harm. For far too long, the blessing that we so desperately crave has been lavished on us, but treated with scant courtesy by all and sundry. Let 2026 be a watershed. Let our African ancestors sing and sway; let the blue energy of our Hindu deities imbue our spiritual awakening. Let our Christian, Muslim, and all the rest of our brothers and sisters, revel in the essence of what Trinidad and Tobago represents: harmony in diversity; the very purpose of all life. Ase. Om Shanti. Amen. As-salaamu alaikum.  
**Winston Drayton, Trinidad and Tobago, via email.**

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# Sanctions, politics, and law collide in Mohamed extradition saga

Plagued by a multitude of personal, legal, constitutional, and political challenges, the extradition case involving Azruddin Mohamed and his father Nazar Mohamed has been dragging on for several months now, with no end in sight. The potential for an appeal could add months to the wait for an outcome.

What seemed to be a straightforward extradition case has become one of the most consequential legal battles in Guyana's recent history. It blends allegations of large scale financial crime, constitutional challenges, political tension, and questions about the integrity of Guyana's extradition framework.

Incidentally, Azruddin Mohamed, newly-elected Opposition Leader and head of the We Invest in Nationhood party, and his father, Nazar "Shell" Mohamed, face an 11 count US Federal indictment for alleged wire fraud, mail fraud, money laundering, and involvement in a gold smuggling scheme valued at over US \$50 million. The US formally requested their extradition after unsealing an indictment by an American grand jury in Florida.

US prosecutors, through diplomatic channels, allege that the Mohameds operated a sophisticated gold smuggling and financial fraud network. The indictment paints a picture of a family empire built on illicit flows of gold, cash, and influence.

The Mohameds were previously sanctioned in June 2024 by the US Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control, adding international pressure and elevating the political stakes.

Defense attorney for the Mohameds argued that several of the alleged offenses are not extraditable under Guyanese law or the Guyana-US extradition treaty.

They also highlight inconsistencies in how extradition request was processed, pointing to another case, Ronley Floyd Bynoe, where the Authority to Proceed took months, not hours. Bynoe did not challenge the extradition proceedings. The question that then arose was: Why the urgency for the Mohameds?

In their extradition defence, the Mohameds have argued that the Minister of Home Affairs acted with political bias when issuing the Authority to Proceed (ATP) – an essential step enabling extradition hearings. They claimed the ruling administration targeted them because Azruddin Mohamed became a political rival after his party won 16 seats in the National Assembly.

The High Court dismissed the bias claim, ruling that the Minister's role is *executive*, not judicial, and, therefore, not subject to the same bias standards.

Incidentally, Azruddin Mohamed entered politics after the extradition process had already begun, weakening their argument of political persecution.

The defense argued that amendments to the Fugitives Offenders Act (2009) undermined constitutional protections such as judicial independence, personal liberty, equality before the law, and the right to a fair hearing. They also argued that the Minister's power to issue the ATP improperly inserted executive influence into a judicial process.

The court upheld the most challenged sections of the Act. It struck down one subsection as unconstitutional, but ruled that its removal does not affect the ongoing extradition proceedings. However, it affirmed that magistrates retain independent authority to determine whether the legal threshold for extradition was met. The ruling removed a major barrier to extradition, though the defense plans to appeal.

The Mohameds' lawyers then sought a stay of the magistrate's committal hearings, arguing that the appeal on the ATP must be resolved

first, as without a stay, the extradition hearing could conclude before the Appeal is heard, causing irreversible harm.

They warned of a "real risk of injustice" if the proceedings continue at the pace set by the magistrate and US prosecutors. The extradition matter remains active in the magistrates' court, with delays drawing criticism from the Attorney General.

In the background, the Mohamed family and the PPP/Civic leadership is best understood as a long standing, mutually beneficial alignment between a powerful business empire and a dominant political party.

According to press reports, Azruddin himself stated in Parliament that he and his family financially supported the PPP/Civic during its years in Opposition, particularly between 2015 and 2020. He described this support as substantial, saying the PPP/Civic "benefited the most from my business" during that period.

This was the first time such a claim was made formally in the National Assembly, though it had long circulated informally in political and business circles. The PPP/Civic leadership, including General Secretary Bharrat Jagdeo, was present when the statement was made, but did not publicly respond.

These disclosures suggest a relationship built on financial patronage from the Mohamed business network, political access to senior PPP/Civic figures, and mutual benefit during the PPP/Civic's time out of office.

The Mohameds' business footprint, namely gold trading, construction, logistics, and large scale imports, naturally placed them in frequent contact with government agencies. One example is Azruddin Mohamed's claim that President Irfaan Ali was aware of his difficulties with the Guyana Revenue Authority regarding the importation of a Lamborghini, and that he sought the President's assistance.

This does not prove wrongdoing, but illustrates direct communication channels between the family and the highest levels of government, a level of access not typical for ordinary citizens, and a longstanding familiarity between the Mohameds and the PPP/Civic leadership. Such interactions reinforce the perception of a close working relationship.

The dynamic changed dramatically after the US Treasury sanctioned the Mohameds in 2024, and later unsealed an 11 count indictment. The PPP/Civic government has since taken a more formal, procedural stance, allowing extradition proceedings to move forward.

This shift has created political tension. The Mohameds and their supporters argue they are being targeted now that Azruddin has entered electoral politics. Critics of the PPP/Civic argue the government is distancing itself to avoid being tainted by association.

The PPP/Civic leadership has remained largely silent on Mohamed's claim of having bankrolled the party. The silence is notable because the claim was made publicly, on the parliamentary record, and in the presence of senior PPP/Civic figures.

Some Opposition aligned outlets frame the government's actions as a smokescreen to distract from alleged US scrutiny of PPP/Civic officials. These claims are politically charged, and come from partisan sources, but they reflect how the Mohamed-PPP/Civic relationship is being interpreted in the broader political arena.

This narrative suggests the Mohameds were once useful allies to the PPP/Civic; their legal troubles now make them politically inconvenient; and the government may be creating distance to protect itself.

When the PPP/Civic returned to government in 2020, the relationship appeared to strengthen.

The Mohameds' business interests expanded into new, high value sectors, most notably oil and gas logistics.

Key developments include: the Mohameds partnered in a consortium awarded a major ExxonMobil shore base contract, despite US intelligence warnings to Exxon about the family's alleged involvement in money laundering, drug trafficking, and gold smuggling. US intelligence reports described the Mohameds as having close ties to Guyana's president and cabinet members, reflecting their elevated political access during this period.

The family's business footprint expanded dramatically, suggesting confidence in their political environment. No public friction existed between the PPP/Civic and the Mohameds, and the family continued to operate as a major economic player.

This period represents the peak of the relationship: the PPP/Civic was back in office, the Mohameds were thriving commercially, and both sides appeared to benefit from the alignment.

Such arrangements are not unusual in Guyana's political economy, where major business families often maintain ties across party lines. Mohamed himself said he assisted both major parties.

The reality is that the US has taken a firm stance on transnational financial crime in the region. Guyana's willingness to proceed with the extradition, despite political sensitivities, signals a commitment to international cooperation, and a desire to maintain strong diplomatic and economic ties with the US.

At its core, the case exposes a tension between law enforcement imperatives and political optics. Mohamed's arrest came just weeks after his party secured 16 parliamentary seats, positioning him as the next Leader of the Opposition. That timing alone has fueled suspicion among supporters that the extradi-

tion request is being weaponised. Yet the facts complicate that narrative: the US sanctions and criminal allegations pre-date his political rise, and the High Court has repeatedly rejected claims of political interference.

Still, the case has revealed procedural friction. The Attorney General has publicly criticised delays in the magistrates' court, while the defense insists that the volume and complexity of US documents require time for proper review. These competing pressures, speed versus thoroughness, are shaping public perception of fairness.

Ultimately, the Mohamed extradition saga is less about one man and more about the credibility of Guyana's governance. Whether the courts ultimately commit him for extradition or not, the process will signal to the world how Guyana balances sovereignty, international cooperation, and the rule of law at a moment when its global profile is rapidly rising.

For now, the extradition hearings continue. Appeals loom. The political temperature rises with every court date.

Three outcomes remain possible: Azruddin is committed for extradition, triggering a final ministerial decision; he wins on appeal, halting the process; or the case drags on, becoming a long term political and legal saga.

What is certain is that Guyana is watching, not just the fate of one man, but the performance of its institutions under the brightest spotlight they have faced in years.

...

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



Dwarka Lakhan



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# Regional heads highlight integration, security, action at Caricom meeting

— Caribbean leaders convened in St Kitts and Nevis for the 50th Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of Caricom, reaffirming the value of regional integration while urging faster, more coordinated responses to security threats, climate risks, economic volatility, and humanitarian concerns. Addresses by Chair Dr Terrance Drew, Secretary-General Dr Carla Barnett, and outgoing Chair Andrew Holness highlighted institutional reform, resilience-building and the need to translate long-standing commitments into measurable action.

**Basseterre** – Caribbean leaders gathered in Basseterre, St Kitts and Nevis from February 24-27 for the 50th Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of Caricom under the theme Beyond Words: Action Today for a Thriving, Sustainable Caricom.

The meeting was chaired by Dr Terrance Drew, Prime Minister of St Kitts and Nevis, who assumed the rotating chairmanship of the Community on January 1. The event saw addresses by Dr Drew, outgoing Chair and Prime Minister of Jamaica Andrew Holness, and Caricom Secretary-General Dr Carla Barnett, alongside other regional leaders and invited guests.

From February 25 to 27, leaders and heads of delegations met at the St. Kitts Marriott to consider pressing global and hemispheric developments and their impact on regional priorities. Deliberations included the Caricom Single Market and Economy (CSME), climate change and climate financing, food and nutrition security, regional security, transportation, reparations, and foreign and community relations.

Among the Special Guests were His Excellency Adel al-Jubeir, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia, and Dr George Elombi, President and Chairman of the Board of Directors of Afreximbank.

In her opening remarks at the Sixteenth Special Meeting of the Community Council of Ministers, Secretary-General Barnett underscored the Council's central role in advancing regional integration.

The Council, Caricom's second-highest decision-making body, convened at the start of what she described as a "remarkably busy" year. She noted that 2026 would require the Community to accelerate its work strategically while deepening collaboration with stakeholders and external partners.

"This is our commitment, as we work collectively to improve



**Caricom Secretary-General Dr Carla Barnett delivers her opening address at the Caricom meeting**

the welfare and well-being of the people of our Community, and build a sustainable future for generations to come," Barnett stated.

She emphasised the importance of finalising the Secretariat's 2026 Work Programme and Budget and preparing matters for consideration by the Conference of Heads of Government, in keeping with obligations under the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas.

The Council considered advancing the CSME, including trade and the free movement of certain aviation personnel, engagement on possible new members, a coordinated regional approach to industrial development, and reparations.

Given what she described as the "current global environment", Barnett said careful assessment of policy directions presented to Heads of Government was especially significant.

In his feature address, Drew reflected on the Caribbean's historical journey and the impact of collective action through

Caricom.

"Accordingly, a world without Caricom would be culturally poorer, intellectually diminished and spiritually less vibrant," he declared, adding "Just imagine a world without Caricom. It definitely would not be the same."

Drew described integration as a deliberate response to shared historical challenges, stating, "Our integration was neither accidental nor causal", and characterising the Treaty of Chaguaramas as "a declaration of Caribbean confidence".

Referencing institutions such as the Caribbean Public Health Agency, the Regional Security System, the Caribbean Examinations Council, and the Caribbean Development Bank, he argued that regional coordination has delivered tangible benefits.

"By ourselves, many of our states could not have achieved what togetherness has made possible," Drew affirmed, adding that in a global order marked by supply chain instability, climate shocks, energy volatility and geopolitical uncertainty, unity strengthens resilience.

Outgoing Chair Holness framed the 50th Meeting as a moment for honest reflection.

"The question before us, therefore, is not whether Caricom can endure – for we have and we will – but whether it can deliver for our people with urgency and relevance in a rapidly changing world," he said.

Holness identified organised criminal networks as a shared regional challenge and referenced Jamaica's leadership in advancing the Montego Bay Declaration on Transnational Organised Crime and Gangs, emphasising intelligence sharing and joint operations.

Addressing humanitarian concerns in Cuba, he stated: "Humanitarian suffering serves no one... it must be clear that a prolonged crisis in Cuba will not remain confined to Cuba. It will affect migration, security, and economic stability across the Caribbean basin."

He also called for a shift from reactive disaster response to systemic preparedness, recalling the devastation of Hurricane Melissa and the solidarity shown by Caricom partners in Jamaica's recovery.

"If our economies are to scale, we must scale our ambitions. If our voice is to carry weight, we must speak with coherence – recognising that unity does not require uniformity," Holness said.

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TT's PM Persad-Bissessar arrives at the summit



Regional leaders at the Conference of Caricom's Heads of Government during its 50th Regular Meeting

## Friday says Caricom essential, urges faster action

— In his maiden address to the Conference of Heads of Government, Prime Minister Dr Godwin Friday of St Vincent and the Grenadines acknowledged long-standing frustrations over the slow pace of regional integration, but insisted that Caricom remains indispensable to the Caribbean's survival and progress. Speaking at the 50th Regular Meeting in St Kitts and Nevis, he urged leaders to quicken the pace of reform, deepen public engagement, and confront global instability through strengthened unity.

...

**Basseterre** – Prime Minister of St Vincent and the Grenadines Dr Godwin Friday delivered his first address to the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community during its 50th Regular Meeting on February 24 in St Kitts and Nevis.

Friday, whose New Democratic Party assumed office following general elections on November 27, 2025, marking the first change of government in nearly 25 years, introduced himself as “a new face at this Conference”, acknowledging both his recent mandate and his willingness to contribute fresh perspective.

“As a new head of government... I may have much to learn about the way things are done in this body,” he said, adding that being new to the forum might allow him to approach regional challenges “unfettered by the trials and frustrations of the past”.

In a candid reflection on the history of regionalism, Friday acknowledged that discussion of Caricom often begins with frustration over what he described as the “agonisingly slow pace of forward movement” and the “illusiveness of unity and collective action”.

He noted that over the years, tensions among member states have led to disagreements, stalled meetings, and public scepticism, at times prompting critics to refer to the organisation as “Carigone” rather than Caricom.

“Yet here we are,” Friday observed, adding, “Caricom survives; the spirit of regional integration persists, and indeed grows.”

Tracing the arc of Caribbean integration from the Closer Union Conference of 1949, through the West Indian Federation, to CARIFTA and ultimately Caricom, he argued that despite setbacks and criticism, the integration movement has endured for the simple reason of necessity.



PM Goodwin Friday delivers his maiden address

“And those who ask why, the answer is simple: because we need it! And we all know this,” he said.

He added that even amid internal disagreements, member states continue to support and reshape the organisation, driven not only by shared history and culture, but by recognition that collective action remains the best strategic option.

“If the OECS and Caricom (or similar organisations) were not around today, we would feel their absence and set about working to create them,” he stated.

Friday warned that the global environment is becoming increasingly unpredictable, with shifting international rules and mounting political and economic pressures.

“International rules and practices that we have become used to over the years have changed in troubling ways,” he said, adding that Caribbean states must tread cautiously and rely more heavily on one another to advance their individual and collective interests.

“In the current global realities, we need each other more than ever,” he said, further declaring, “If we do not continue to strive together, and pool our limited power and resources, we cannot hope to withstand the increasing political and economic headwinds and deliver better living standards for our people.”

He described persistence in regionalism as “the best way,” urging leaders to strengthen their resolve despite challenges.

While affirming Caricom's achievements, Friday stressed the importance of communicating those gains more effectively to citizens across the Caribbean region.

“Let us never be so discouraged by our shortcomings that we fail to see just how much we have accomplished over the years,” he said, calling for greater visibility of incremental progress to enhance the organisation's credibility and relevance.

He argued that regional integration must not only be “about” citizens, but also undertaken “with them,” underscoring the need for broader public engagement.

Looking ahead, Friday identified key areas requiring sustained attention, including poverty reduction and prosperity creation, removing obstacles to commerce, including currency-related barriers, closing workforce skills gaps, climate change and resilience financing, and promoting peace and security in Haiti and the wider Region.

He concluded with an appeal for accelerated action.

“But, please let us quicken the pace,” Friday said, adding, “The road ahead may be arduous and full of obstacles, but it is a viable path, made even more certain when we decide to walk together.”



Suriname's President Jennifer Geerlings-Simon



St Kitts and Nevis' PM Dr Terrance Drew



Guyana's President Dr Irfaan Ali (centre)



Jamaica's PM Andrew Holness (left)

## Grace Foods investing in communities

— Grace Foods Canada Inc. marked Black History Month with a significant corporate social responsibility initiative, contributing more than \$20,000 in product and financial support to the University of Toronto's 2026 Black History Month Luncheon and establishing a \$5,000 student bursary in honour of former Board Chair Dr Mary Anne Chambers.

**Toronto** – Grace Foods Canada Inc. continued strengthening its commitment to community advancement last week, sponsoring the 2026 Black History Month Luncheon hosted by the University of Toronto with more than \$15,000 in product support, and a \$5,000 contribution toward a student bursary.

The luncheon, held on February 26 and organised annually by the university's Division of University Advancement, brought together students, faculty, alumni, and community leaders to celebrate the achievements and contributions of Black communities across Canada.

The event featured distinguished speakers, live performances, and a renewed call to expand opportunity through education.

In addition to supplying food products for meal preparation at the event,

Grace Foods Canada provided branded gift bags and VIP baskets for attendees, underscoring what the company described as a holistic approach to partnership and presence.

The \$5,000 bursary donation was made in honour of Dr Mary Anne Chambers, recently retired Chair of the Board of Grace Foods Canada Inc., recognising her longstanding leadership and advocacy for education and mentorship.

As the company noted, the tribute aligns with Chambers' enduring commitment to expanding access to higher education, and creating pathways for student success.

"Black History Month is an opportunity to

recognise the leadership, resilience, and impact of Black communities while reaffirming our responsibility to create equitable opportunities for future generations," said Nimal Amitirigala, President of Grace Foods Canada Inc.

Amitirigala added, "Education expands access and drives long-term change. By supporting this bursary, we are investing directly in students and helping remove financial barriers to academic success."

Through its sponsorship, the company reaffirmed its broader support for Black communities across Canada, including members of the Caribbean diaspora, a community closely linked to the company's own heritage. As the company noted, investing in education remains one of the most meaningful ways to create sustainable, generational impact.

Grace Foods Canada Inc. is the Canadian food subsidiary of the GraceKennedy Group, one of the Caribbean's largest and most diversified corporate entities. Founded in Jamaica in 1922 as a small trading establishment and wharf operator, GraceKennedy has grown into a network of approximately 60 subsidiaries and associated companies operating across the Caribbean, North and Central America, and the UK.

In Canada, Grace Foods distributes a range of multicultural food brands, including its globally recognised Grace brand, which has brought Caribbean flavours to Canadian households for more than four decades. Grace and LaFe products are available in major grocery retailers and independent family-owned stores here in the GTA, and throughout Canada.

As the company concluded, its Black History Month initiative reflects an ongoing corporate philosophy recognised for its pairing of commercial success with community stewardship, and for its translating of heritage into meaningful, measurable action.



**Dr Mary Anne Chambers**

## City's BHM celebration honours stalwart Sadu

**Toronto** – In a ceremony marked by celebration and reflection, Olivia Chow presented the Key to the City to Dr Itah Sadu on February 24 during the Mayor's Black History Month Reception, honouring a lifetime devoted to storytelling, cultural leadership, and community building.

"Toronto is strengthened by leaders like Dr Itah Sadu who dedicate their lives to culture, storytelling and community. As an award-winning storyteller, author and leader, she has spent decades strengthening our city and elevating Black voices while enriching Toronto's literary life. On behalf of the people of Toronto, I am proud to present her with the Key to the City," Mayor Chow stated in a release by The City of Toronto.

Sadu is an acclaimed children's author and educator who has long affirmed through her work that Black children belong "in every story, every space and every future". Her books, school visits, and community engagements have helped shape generations of young readers, encouraging pride, imagination, and belonging.

She is the co-owner of *A Different Booklist*, an iconic Toronto bookstore specialising in African and Caribbean Canadian literature. For decades, the bookstore has served as a cultural hub and gathering space rooted in

and serving Toronto's Black community, and is considered as a site of knowledge where ideas are exchanged, histories preserved, and new voices nurtured.

Sadu also serves as Managing Director of the Blackhurst Cultural Centre, known as The People's Residence. The centre stands as a beacon for the stories, achievements, and cultural heritage of Canadians of African and Caribbean descent.

Through programming, exhibitions and community dialogue, The People's Residence continues to house opportunities for youth, artists, and families across the GTA.

"I am extremely honoured to be receiving the Key to the City from Mayor Olivia Chow. The City's generous gesture will be a reminder that my contribution as a builder and leader in Toronto's Black community has inspired Torontonians," Sadu stated.

She added, "I am especially grateful to be accepting the Key to the City during Black History Month, a time that both celebrates the achievements of Black people and acknowledges the ongoing racism and systemic barriers they face. I am also very proud of helping to build spaces across the city, such as the Blackhurst Cultural Centre, which provide opportunities for artistic and cultural expression."



**Dr Itah Sadu (left) is presented with a Key to the City by Mayor Olivia Chow. City of Toronto photo**



## Ask Jay...

Please send your questions to [TheBrij@TheBrij.com](mailto:TheBrij@TheBrij.com) or call: 416-418-2745

### WHY ONTARIO'S HOUSING MARKET CAN'T IGNORE US TARIFFS IN 2026

Rising construction costs, weakened job security, and hesitant first-time buyers reveal how global trade tensions are reshaping Ontario's real estate.

I have noticed that when people discuss Ontario's housing market, the conversation almost always centres on interest rates. Another factor, US tariffs, also influences the housing industry. Tariffs reduce consumer confidence, increase construction costs, impact employment, and ultimately, decrease housing demand.

We have observed that when trade conflicts occur, Ontario's resale activity, especially housing, declines significantly. This aligns with reports from Canada's major banks, which show that when trade tensions increase, people tend to delay home purchases. CMH's outlook for 2026 predicts modest economic growth at best, and highlights global trade risks as a main reason momentum might stall, particularly in Ontario.

Toronto Dominion and Royal Bank of Canada have highlighted that ongoing trade tensions with the US are affecting hiring, wage growth, and overtime, which directly affect housing demand. Southern Ontario, closely tied to manufacturing and exports, is the first to feel the effects of tariff hikes. Buyers uncertain about their job security are delaying home purchases. Investors are less optimistic, and due to losses from a declining market, are not in a hurry to expand their portfolios. Sellers sensing weaker demand will lower their prices to sell their homes.

Steel, machinery, and specialised building components are vital inputs for housing. Tariffs on these materials increase capital costs. When costs rise and profit margins shrink, developers feel the effects immediately, leading to projects slowing down or being completely shelved.

Rising construction costs increase home prices, which does not solve the current affordability issue. Fewer new developments now mean fewer homes will be completed later, even with ongoing population growth. As a result, demand for housing will rise in the near future, even in a "cooling" market.

In 2026, Ontario's housing market is expected to stay sluggish, with higher inventory levels. Prices will either level off, or drop slightly. The tariff risk did not cause the issue, but it is enough to upset the balance. When the market falls, lenders become more cautious, making home financing harder and reducing consumer confidence.

Many believe tariffs are solely about trade, and housing is solely about homes. The reality is that housing also involves consumer confidence, costs, and cash flow, and tariffs impact all three. This year, Ontario's housing market will be influenced by affordability challenges, cautious buyers, limited construction, and an economy facing global uncertainty.

In real estate, prices usually rise when a first-time buyer makes the initial move by purchasing a condo or entry-level townhome. This purchase encourages more transactions, creating momentum in the market. In the GTA, tariffs are affecting the labour market, especially among first-time buyers. Many first-time buyers work in sectors closely linked to trade and exports, such as manufacturing, logistics, warehousing, transportation, and auto supply chains. It is expected that Ontario could lose more than 100,000 jobs in 2026 due to tariffs disrupting trade with the US, as businesses reduce production, investment, and exports.

A report from the Royal Bank showed that homebuyer confidence fell sharply after tariff announcements, not only because people feared job losses, but also because they were uncertain about what the future holds. In the GTA, where housing prices are already high and down-payments are tight, this decline in confidence acts as a market-wide brake. Such hesitation results in delayed purchases, and when first-time condo sales slow, the domino effect ripples into the entire market.

Ontario's economy faces these pressures because over three-quarters of its exports go to the US – from automobiles and auto parts to steel and aluminum, sectors that are directly affected by tariffs. Auto plants are reducing shifts and cutting jobs because production levels linked to US trade have declined.

First-time buyers are the foundation of Ontario's housing market, and fewer buyers mean slower sales and lower prices. Tariffs are not the main cause of Ontario's housing collapse, but it is the straw that breaks the camel's back.

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Raising of Guyana's national flag. Facebook photos  
**Flag-raising in Scarborough**

**Toronto** – The Guyanese diaspora and friends of Guyana from across the GTA converged in the Rotunda of the Scarborough Civic Centre on February 22 to commemorate Guyana's 56th anniversary as a Republic with a Flag Raising Ceremony and Cultural Fusion celebration.

The event was organised by the Guyana Consulate in Toronto, and began with a Canadian Land Acknowledgment delivered by Geoff Daybutch, an Indigenous Canadian national. The ceremony continued with the hoisting of the Golden Arrowhead by members of the Guyana Ex-Soldiers Association of Canada.

Inter-faith prayers underscored Guyana's religious diversity. Pastor Andrew Eastman of the Grace Life Centre, Pandit Vidyarthi Sriram, Senior Pandit of the Vedic Cultural Centre, and Imam Jabbar Ally of the United Muslim Association in Toronto each offered blessings.

The cultural segment reflected Guyana's multicultural heritage. Vijay Singh performed popular Bollywood selections, accompanied by Rajiv Kumarjit on the tabla. Guests were also treated to steel pan renditions by Toronto-based Guyanese artiste Roy McCrea, known as D'Jango-Jango Pan Gyah.

The Singh Sisters, Suhana, Sumeera and Sunaya, were also on stage alongside their brother, and performed a medley of Indian, national, and patriotic songs accompanied by Rishabh Ramessar on keyboard, and Siddharth Ramotar on tabla.

In his address, Honorary Consul Mani Singh highlighted the ethnic and religious diversity of the diaspora in attendance, noting that the fusion of cultures, dialects and cuisines shaping modern Guyana emerged from six races living in harmony for decades both before and after the colonial era, despite differences of opinion at times.

Singh also pointed to the contemporary and unprecedented period in Guyana's history, marked by rapid economic expansion and major infrastructural development.

"Guyana has become the fastest growing economy on planet earth, and with the massive transformation currently taking place, including 12 spanking new modern hospitals planned, with at least three already in operation, and the others expected to be commissioned in the coming months," he said.

Singh updated members of the diaspora on government investments in healthcare, education, housing and physical infrastructure, as well as efforts to modernise the national economy. Also, he noted initiatives aimed at digitisation, including the transformation toward a digital economy to facilitate financial transactions and interaction with government agencies.



Honorary Consul Singh addresses the gathering

## Saint Lucian diaspora urged to move forward together

— In an evocative and patriotic message to the diaspora, Saint Lucia's Consul General Henry Mangal spoke to his nation's theme for its 47th year of Independence, 'Douvan Ansanm: Nourishing Our People, Strengthening Our Nation', during a Thanksgiving Church Service held on February 15 at the St Elizabeth of Hungary Roman Catholic Church in Toronto.

By Romeo Kaseram  
An LJI Community Report

**Toronto** — Seven days before Saint Lucia marked 47 years as an independent nation on February 22, members of the diaspora gathered in prayer, gratitude, and quiet pride inside St Elizabeth of Hungary Roman Catholic Church in Toronto.

Addressing congregants on February 15 at the Thanksgiving Service, Consul General Henry Mangal extended Independence greetings to Saint Lucians across Canada, and highlighted a slate of corollary celebrations that have since taken place in Calgary, Edmonton, Montreal, Ottawa, and Toronto.

"In seven days' time, our country, Saint Lucia, will celebrate 47 years of Independence. And so I wish all Saint Lucians in Canada a happy Independence," he said, noting that the Consulate and community organisations were working collaboratively to stage events that allow nationals to "proclaim and display their love of country, Saint Lucia's achievements, its culture, and beauty".

This year's Independence theme, *Douvan Ansanm*, framed the address. CG Mangal explained that whether interpreted literally or figuratively, the theme centred on equipping Saint Lucians "physically and mentally", so that every citizen, regardless of age, profession, class, or station in life, can contribute meaningfully to national development.

However, his message carried particular resonance for the diaspora here in Canada.

"... Saint Lucians in Canada, you have been blessed with the opportunity of a better life for yourselves and your family, and you must show appreciation for this opportunity," Mangal said.

He added, "By being the best Saint Lucian you can be up here, always ensure that you enhance the reputation of our people by being hardworking, law-abiding, positive, productive, professional, and excellent in your endeavours."

He urged nationals abroad not only to excel personally, but to "pave the way" for those at home who aspire to similar opportunities.

Faith and values formed a central pillar of the celebration.



CG Hopkin (right) at the flag-raising

## Toronto celebrates Grenada's Independence anniversary

**Toronto** – Earlier last month, Grenada's flag rose proudly in Toronto as members of the its diaspora gathered alongside diplomats and representatives from across the Caribbean and beyond to mark the nation's 52nd anniversary of Independence.

The flag-raising saw in attendance officials from the City of Toronto and diplomatic representatives from the US, Guyana, The Bahamas, Barbados, Bangladesh, Cuba, Saint Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Russia, St Kitts and Nevis, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, and the Eastern Caribbean Liaison Service – OECS Farm Workers Program.

Their presence underscored the breadth of Grenada's international friendships, and the enduring ties between the home-

land and its global family. Gathering in thanksgiving, CG Mangal reflected on Christian principles of love and respect; a love for God, neighbour, and humanity; respect for parents, elders, authority; and the dignity of every person.

"It is in this spirit of Christian reverence and renewal that we celebrate our 47th anniversary of Independence in Canada," he said.

The service also underscored the breadth of Caribbean solidarity in Toronto. Among those acknowledged were Consul General Anthony Branker of Barbados; Trade and Investment Commissioner Frances Del Sol of Dominica; Consul General Jerry Hopkin of Grenada; Consul General Simone Young of Trinidad and Tobago; Deputy Director Amber Wang of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office; Honorary Consul of the

Republic of Guyana Mani Singh; Head of the Eastern Caribbean Liaison Services Olaf Fontenelle; and Honorary Consul General of St Kitts and Nevis John Allen.

CG Mangal also recognised Edwin Pascal of the Eastern Caribbean Liaison Services, who carried the flag during the ceremony, and paid tribute to Honorary Consul for Haiti, Dr Eric Pierre.

The Thanksgiving service was enriched by Caribbean liturgical music and cultural contributions, and while the atmosphere was celebratory, CG Mangal's address repeatedly returned to the idea of commitment.

"Saint Lucians have a reputation for excellence and international achievement, which all of us have a responsibility to uphold," he said.

In highlighting that reputation, Mangal pointed to global icons

whose accomplishments have elevated the island's name: Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott; cricket World Cup-winning captain Darren Sammy; batting standout Johnson Charles; Olympic 100 metres champion Julien Alfred; and Carifta sprint double sensation, Jady Emmanuel.

Yet he emphasised that nation-building is not reserved for laureates and athletes.

"Each of us in our own lives has to model the same discipline and diligence which took them to the top," he said.

Closing his address, CG Mangal invoked the eternal resonance of Sandra Lorde's timeless refrain, *Saint Lucians Unite*, urging collective effort in building and nourishing the nation.

"So as Saint Lucians in Canada, as we celebrate 47 years of nationhood, let us unite and continue to contribute to the development of our country," he said, adding, "Let us do so in whatever small way we can individually, but also in a more focused and concerted effort collectively."



CG Henry Mangal (right) with CG Simone Young at the February 15 thanksgiving service. TT Consulate Facebook photo



Guests at the flag-raising. Facebook photos



Guests and IMO officials at the Iftar events. Photos by Russell Lutchman

## IMO's Ramadan Iftar gatherings signal mosque's next renewal chapter

From Page 1

emblematic of the neighbourhood's character.

"Grateful to join Muslims, neighbours, and community leaders for Iftar at [the IMO] in Etobicoke North," Zerucelli later posted online.

"During Ramadan, a time of reflection, generosity, and community, people from different organisations and faiths came together to share a meal, listen to one another, and strengthen the bonds that make our neighbourhood so special. This is the spirit of Etobicoke North: diverse, welcoming, and united," he said, adding, "Ramadan Mubarak to all who are observing."

While the February 20 evening underscored interfaith unity, the following February 21 gathering carried additional significance.

Addressing over 600 attendees, Khalid Baksh, lawyer for the IMO and coordinator of its redevelopment project, spoke to the ongoing plans to rebuild the existing Masjid and construct a 256-unit apartment building on the property.

"In addition to rebuilding the Masjid, we

will be building an apartment block of 256 units," Baksh said, explaining that the residential complex would be situated along Rexdale Boulevard and the opposite side of the current parking area, while the mosque itself would be rebuilt on the southeast corner of the lot.

He further informed the gathering that construction is expected to begin this summer, subject to final processes, and that the congregation will relocate to a temporary facility in the area for an estimated two to three years during the build.

Baksh added that revenue generated from the apartment block would support community programs and resources, positioning the project as both spiritual renewal and long-term institutional sustainability.

He further stated that the rebuilt mosque will maintain existing prayer capacity and include a multipurpose hall for Iftars, weddings and gatherings, as well as facilities to serve for ritual purification, and lifecycle needs from birth to funeral rites.

Municipal validation of the project came from Vince Crisanti, Councillor for Etobicoke North – Ward 1, who confirmed that zoning approvals had been secured, and described the housing component as a "purpose-built rental".

"We need housing in Yorkville North. We need rental housing," Crisanti said, noting that he had worked closely with the city and provincial officials to advance the application, and that the project is now moving through the permit stage.

He characterised the development as a significant step in addressing housing demand, while supporting the growth of the local Muslim community.

The February 21 Iftar was attended by Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario, along with Graham McGregor, Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism, Mohamed Firin, MPP for York South-Weston, Toronto Police Superintendent Ron Taverner, and members of 23 Division. Also in attendance were Guyana's Honorary Consul Mani Singh; and former

Honorary Consul Danny Doobay.

In his remarks, IMO President Omar Farouk welcomed the eminent delegation, and reflected on longstanding ties between his organisation and provincial leaders, describing the gathering as one rooted in shared values of compassion, wisdom, and community engagement.

In his address, Ford spoke of his family's longstanding connections within Etobicoke, and expressed appreciation for the Muslim community's contributions across sectors including business, healthcare, and public service. He described the IMO as a place he has visited many times, and extended Ramadan greetings to community members observing the holy month.

Across both evenings, volunteers and executive members of the IMO worked tirelessly to make the events a success, with the Guyana Consulate General for Toronto's Honorary Consul Singh later describing the dinner as sumptuous and plentiful for the approximately 600 faithful and guests.

With files by Russell Lutchman



Photos by Ramesh Ramkalawan



## Celebrating Maha Shivaratri 2026

By Swamiji Bhajananda

Maha Shivaratri was observed at the Canada Sevashram Sangha in North York on February 15 with the continuous chanting of *Dhooms* and *Bhajans*. Maha Shivaratri 2026 offered another opportunity to connect with Bhagwan Shiva for His grace and blessings, leading to a life of peace and prosperity.

Shivaratri signifies the festival of worshipping Lord Shiva, the object of life, virtue, divinity and final liberation. During the Golden age of *Satya Yuga*, man was very religious and consequently, very happy. But the happiness of the world was threatened by the forces of unrighteousness, which were also present at that time.

Devotees observe a fast and offer prayers throughout the night on Shivaratri. Lord Shiva is worshipped in the form of *Shiva Lingam*, which symbolises the power behind the creation. Offerings of *Behl* leaves are made to the *Lingam*. *Behl* leaves are very sacred as it is said, Lakshmi resides in them too. Aspirants or devotees repeat the *Panchakshara Mantra*, Om *Namah Shivaya*.

He who utters the names of Shiva, during Shivaratri with perfect devotion and concentration, is freed from all sins, and rises to

*Sattvic Bhakti* or devotion. He is liberated from the wheel of births and deaths. As devotees assembled in their respective mandirs or temples to worship Lord Shiva, the worshipper says in his prayer, *I worship the jewel of my Self, the Shiva residing in the Lotus of my heart. I bathe him with the water of my pure mind brought from the river of faith and devotion. I worship Him with the fragrant flowers of Samadhi. O Lord! You are my Self. My Pranas are your servants. My body is your Temple. My actions in this world are your Sadhana – worship. My sleep is your Samadhi. My walk is your circumambulation. My speech is your prayer. Thus, do I offer all that I am to You.*

In our religious tradition, Lord Shiva is represented as an aspect of the Almighty God. He presents before us the ideal of supreme renunciation born of Divine Realisation, and the wisdom of existence in its completeness. This is the source of *Vairagya* or renunciation. As we know, Maha Shivaratri is the great night consecrated to Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva is the God of Love. His grace is boundless. He is the Saviour and Guru.

He is the *Beloved of Uma*. He is *Satyam, Sivam, Subham, Sundaram, Kantam*. He is the Supreme Light that shines in your heart.





CG Young delivers her address at the BHM event. Photos by Hinano Beekhoo

## TT 50-Plus BHM celebration cites elders as the architects of tomorrow

Toronto – The Trinidad and Tobago 50-Plus & Seniors Association marked Black History Month with a vibrant celebration at the Taibu Community Health Centre in Scarborough on February 22, bringing together members of the diaspora to honour heritage, resilience, and the enduring contributions of Black Canadians with roots in Trinidad and Tobago.

The gathering reflected both pride and purpose, as seniors, community leaders, and friends united to celebrate this year's national theme, marking 30 years since the official recognition of Black History Month in Canada, and honouring, "Black brilliance across generations, from nation builders to tomorrow's visionaries".

Delivering the main address, Consul General Simone Young of the Trinidad and Tobago Consulate General in Toronto commended the association for its steadfast commitment to service and mentorship within the diaspora.

"As you celebrate Black History Month, it is an absolute pleasure to be here... this year Canada is marking the 30th anniversary of the official declaration of Black History Month under the theme, *30 Years of Black History Month honouring Black Brilliance Across Generations, From Nation Builders to Tomorrow's Visionaries*," she said.

CG Young paid special tribute to the 50-Plus and Seniors Association, describing its members as pillars of both their adopted and ancestral homelands.

"...Trinidad and Tobago 50-Plus and Senior Association... you are indeed among the adopted country nation-builders. Yes, by virtue of your membership in the Trinidad and Tobago diaspora here in Ontario, you have also built and continue to build your homeland

Trinidad and Tobago," she stated.

She noted that through "the values, skills, and resources" they have generously passed on to younger generations, "whether in Toronto or Tabaquite, Barataria or Bowmanville, Scarborough, Tobago, or Scarborough, Toronto", members have helped shape the next wave of leaders and visionaries.

"Indeed, then, you epitomise Black brilliance across generations in every way, shape, and form," she declared.

CG Young also applauded the association's spirit of continued engagement, emphasising that retirement has not meant retreat.

"And I salute you for not resting on your laurels, as you are so obviously entitled to in this stage in your life. But instead, you wake up every day determined... to contribute; determined to give back; and determined to pay it forward," she said.

In her closing remarks, Young echoed the enduring message articulated by Dr Jean Augustine, reminding the audience that, "Black history is not just for Black people; Black history is Canadian history".

She further invoked the words of Martin Luther King Jr., urging continued perseverance and collective responsibility.

"It is, therefore, incumbent upon all of us to continue working towards a society, a country, and a world, that is freer, fairer, and more equitable for our children, and for their children. For in the words of the legendary Dr Martin Luther King, 'If you can't fly, then run. If you can't run, then walk. If you can't walk, then crawl. But whatever you do, you have to keep moving.' And 50-Plus, from where I stand, this is what you are simply always doing – you just keep on moving."

With files by Hinano Beekhoo



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# Not Royalty's finest hour: A tale of entitlement, greed, and moral collapse

By Dhanpaul Narine

The Biblical quote asks, "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" The profit amounts to nought if the person's status, wealth, and power are used for greed and the pursuit of personal pleasure. The rich fool who thinks he has it all, loses his soul, from which there is no compensation.

Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor (formerly Prince Andrew) had it all, from the silver spoon, to the limos, private jets, women, and the secluded beaches of Epstein's Island. And it could have continued in a country where royalty is viewed with a certain degree of ambivalence.

Many in Britain have long concluded that the family, or The Firm, is dysfunctional and does not represent the aspirations of the working class. The public had had to endure the abdication of a King who insisted on marrying an American divorcee. The marriage of Princess Diana to Prince Charles was seen as a breath of fresh air, and Britain was awash with celebrations and street parties. But the bubble had to burst.

Charles carried on with Camilla as usual. Once Diana had given him the heir and a spare, he turned his full attention to Camilla.

Diana described her marriage as "crowded" in her *BBC* interview. The country took sympathy on her as the Royal Family did what it does best: it regrouped, sent exclusives to selected media houses, and acted as if it was business as usual.

Diana knew the game too. She had her writers produce books and articles that described a Buckingham Palace that was out to get her. The rock of The Firm was Queen Elizabeth II, but Her Majesty had little time to listen to the woes of Diana. The Princess found attention elsewhere, and matters came to a head in the most shocking way.

Dodi Fayed and Princess Diana perished in a car crash in Paris. Buckingham Palace refused to fly the flag at half-mast for "that woman", hoping that the tragedy would blow over. But the Queen did not bargain for the outpouring of public sympathy. She was seen as heartless, while Diana was acknowledged as the "People's Princess".

It took a while for the Royal Family to recover from this dent in their reputation. The Queen did much to repair the damage by presenting to the nation a close-knit family that was not perfect, but was prepared to move with the times.

The grandchildren, notably Prince William and Prince Harry, arranged for marquee events to be held at Buckingham Palace to bring the crown closer to the people. A number of concerts were held, and the Queen's Jubilee celebrations attracted a worldwide audience. The marriage of Prince William to Catherine added stability to the family. William showed that he was a family person with the temperament to advance the goals of The Firm. Indeed, the family was on such a firm footing that the Queen gave her blessing to the marriage of Prince Harry to Megan Markle, an American divorcee of mixed ancestry.

As is well known, after the glamour and splendor of the horse and carriage, Harry and Megan split with the Royal family to pursue their own interests in California. This did not go down well. The Queen, in particular, wanted Harry and Megan to take on more responsibility to promote the family.

But Megan was not in the mood to compete with Catherine, or anyone else, and preferred to distance her family from the Palace. This led to bad publicity for Harry and Megan at the hands of the British media. Megan went on record with Oprah Winfrey to give her side of the story, in which she accused the Palace of racism.

One of the oft-repeated words in the vocabulary of the Palace is "duty". The Royals are reminded throughout modern history that they have a duty to the public. They must carry themselves with class and decorum; they can weep in private, but the public expects to see the stiff upper-lip, and commitment to "duty".

Over the years, the Royals have given their names to various organisations and charities. King Charles popularised the *Prince's Trust*. Princess Anne was *President of Save the Children*, and is currently the Chancellor of the University of London. Diana brought attention to the landmine crisis, while William is patron of a number of charities, and Prince Harry is known as the founder of the *Invictus Games*. The point is that the chari-



ties keep the Royals busy, and give them a sense of purpose. The same could hardly be said of the former Prince Andrew and his wife Sarah Ferguson.

Andrew carried on an affair with the socialite Koo Stark before he met Sarah Ferguson. The Queen approved of the relationship, and then withdrew her consent. Andrew had endeared himself to the public with his service in the Falklands War, and his profile rose as a result. The marriage to Sarah Ferguson took place in 1986, and Diana was one of the matchmakers.

Lacking in formal academic skills, but with the blessings of the Palace, the couple used their position of entitlement to throw their weight about. The parties at the Palace were regular, loud, and ostentatious. Andrew used the staff of the Queen's household, often without her knowledge.

Royal watchers said that Andrew became overbearing, boorish, and arrogant. His intemperance was well known by insiders, but people kept quiet as it was considered bad form to rock the boat. What happened in the Palace stayed in the Palace. Andrew was self-indulgent, entitled and enabled, but he was a royal and the public looked the other way.

Why does any of this matter? The culture of excess could have gone on unchecked, and passed off as a quirk of royal extravagance. But at a time when money was getting scarce and the people looked to the Royals for accountability, the decline in Andrew's fortunes became a mirror-image of what was wrong with British society.

There are those who trace Andrew's sense of entitlement to the Queen. The arrivals of Prince Charles and Princess Anne caught a young Elizabeth II still learning the formalities and rituals of Royalty. Prince Philip fought many a battle to bring the monarchy closer to the people. The coronation in 1953 was televised and broke all viewing records. This added to the popularity of the monarchy, but it gave little time for Elizabeth II to raise Charles and Anne. By the time Andrew and Edward arrived, she was better prepared for motherhood.

Andrew became a favourite of his mother who protected him. He became the Duke of York, his wife Sarah a Duchess, and with the cottages and ranks that these titles brought. As time passed, recklessness became normal, and greed took over. The royal wall of silence and diplomatic evasiveness from the Palace insulated Andrew and provided comfort. It also set the stage for Andrew's downfall, and it would come from the unlikeliest of places.

Ghislaine Maxwell is the daughter of the late Robert Maxwell, one time owner of the *Mirror* newspaper in London, and New York's *Daily Mail*. According to reports, Ghislaine was in a dark place after the disappearance of her father off his yacht. She was introduced through mutual friends to Jeffrey Epstein in 1991.

This was the start of a relationship that would span several years, and involve some of the world's most powerful people. It is alleged that Ghislaine has received more than \$30 million from Epstein for her services. She was able to offer Epstein 'A' list connections in the world of politics, entertainment, and business.

The *Epstein Files* show that some of the most influential

persons were in the company of Epstein. While he courted the rich and the powerful, there was a sordid side to his life that Ghislaine knew and understood: it was Epstein's desire for underage girls.

Over the years, there were reports that many underage girls were abused at the hands of Epstein and his associates. According to one of the victims, "Ghislaine Maxwell knew exactly that she was delivering me to the home of a predator. She is a master manipulator of human emotion and environment."

The master manipulator knew the weaknesses of the rich and the powerful, and how to use the victims to lure the big fish into Epstein's net. One such person was the former Prince Andrew.

Epstein and Andrew met in 1999. Their friendship grew, and two years later there was the infamous picture with Andrew, Virginia Giuffre, and Ghislaine Maxwell. There is more than one allegation by Giuffre that she was trafficked by Epstein and Maxwell to have sex with Andrew.

Other victims have come forward, and have testified that Maxwell allegedly trafficked them to Epstein's Island, and other places, to have sex with Epstein and his guests. By the summer of 2000, Epstein was a permanent fixture in the Royal establishment, facilitated by Andrew.

For example, Epstein was at Windsor Castle, Sandringham, and Royal Ascot, and in December, Andrew threw a shooting weekend with Maxwell and Epstein in attendance.

The relationship continued, and in 2006, Epstein attended the 18th birthday party of Princess Beatrice, Andrew's daughter. Eight days after the party, Epstein was arrested in Palm Beach for soliciting prostitution. He was sentenced to jail in 2008, but Andrew's association with him did not end. They were seen in Central Park in 2010, and Andrew was reportedly a guest of honour at a party arranged by Epstein.

Andrew appeared in a 2019 *BBC Newsnight* interview to set the record straight, but it did him more harm than good. For example, he claimed that he ceased all contact with Epstein in 2010, but the recently released emails in the *Epstein Files* showed a constant stream of contacts. In February 2011, Andrew promised Epstein that, "We will play some more soon!!!!"

Epstein was arrested in 2019 on sex trafficking charges. It is reported that he committed suicide on August 10, 2019. But Epstein's ghost would not go away peacefully. There has been one investigation after another into his business affairs, and the fallout has touched people in high places.

In January 2022, matters came to a head at Buckingham Palace. Queen Elizabeth II stripped Andrew of a number of titles that included the use of "His Royal Highness". King Charles III has shown that he intends to run a Palace that is accountable and transparent. In October 2025, Andrew was asked to surrender the lease on the Royal Lodge. The former Prince would now be known as Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor.

There are questions as to the source of his finances. He was appointed as the government's trade representative in 2001. It is alleged that Andrew used his role to get personal access to the privileged, and that "it was a time when greed took precedence for him".

The latest act in this tale of greed and entitlement occurred in February 2026, when Andrew was arrested for "misconduct in public office". It was the first time a senior British royal was arrested in 400 years.

There are a number of questions that arise from Andrew's relationship with Epstein. How is it that Epstein was able to use his influence to attract the rich and powerful into his orbit? The obvious answer is his wealth; but with money came the abuse of minors.

How is it that no one was aware of this abuse, which went on for years? There are many powerful figures that are mentioned in the *Epstein Files*, but none will say they know of the abuse of minors.

The victims have suffered greatly. They need the support of the community. The redacted copies in the *Epstein Files* have protected the rich and powerful. All the files should be released, and let the world be the judge of the sins of people we hold in high esteem.

# Dr Kumar lived a life of healing, leadership, and community devotion

— Dr Ganraj Kumar, physician, cardiologist, political advocate, and community leader, passed away peacefully on February 23 at the age of 91, surrounded by his loved ones. A respected figure in both Guyana and Canada, Dr Kumar's life was defined by service to medicine, to democracy, faith, and family.

...

**Dr Ganraj Kumar**  
December 9, 1934 – February 23, 2026  
By Romeo Kaseram

An LJI Community Report

Born in Georgetown, Guyana, to Sarswatee and Rajkumar, Dr Ganraj Kumar's early years foreshadowed a life of discipline and purpose. He pursued medicine at McGill University, earning his medical degree in 1957, before completing his Internal Medicine Residency at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, where he served as Chief Resident – an early indication of the leadership qualities that would characterise his entire medical career.

In 1967, he returned to Guyana, bringing his training and conviction back to the country of his birth. As Secretary of the Guyana Medical Association, Dr Kumar lobbied successfully for legislation mandating compulsory immunisations, believing firmly that preventive care was not simply medical policy but moral obligation.

During his practice, he became acutely aware of the prevalence of heart disease among East Indians, and undertook efforts to educate patients and communities on prevention and early intervention, a commitment that would define his professional focus for decades.

Beyond medicine, Dr Kumar also stepped into the turbulent political landscape of 1970s Guyana. Working through the Liberator Party, he advocated for equity and a fair electoral process at a time when democratic norms were under severe strain.

Following Dr Kumar's passing, *Stabroek News* recalled his role in challenging the People's National Congress during the widely criticised 1973 general elections. It was a voice for fairplay and justice that remained unwavering over the years, and which was invoked once again during the political turbulence following

the 2020 General Elections in Guyana.

As *Stabroek News* recounted, Dr Kumar wrote, "In a democracy the right to vote is sacred. Evil machinations of the electoral system must not be allowed to triumph, and those who seek to subvert the system must not be rewarded."

His poignant and visionary words reflected a lifelong conviction that healing a nation required a similar integrity as healing a patient.

In 1984, Dr Kumar migrated to Canada, continuing his medical vocation with the same quiet intensity that had marked his years in Guyana. From 1984 to 1989, he practiced at McKellar General Hospital in Thunder Bay, Ontario. In 1989, he moved to Owen Sound, joining the Grey Bruce Regional Health Center. There, he became well-known not only for clinical excellence, but for institutional leadership, serving as Chief of Medicine from 1992 to 1995.

A specialist deeply engaged in cardiac care, Dr Kumar focused particularly on Acute Coronary Syndrome. He served as the local site principal investigator in numerous cardiac clinical trials, contributing to advancements in treatment and patient outcomes. He founded and led a monthly Heart Failure Clinic, and regularly held outreach clinics in Meaford, Ontario, ensuring access to care beyond urban centres.

In recognition of his commitment to excellence in internal medicine and cardiac care, he was granted a Fellowship of the American College of Physicians in 2001, an honour reflecting both his expertise and professional standing.

At age 74, in 2008, Dr Kumar relinquished his hospital-based practice and relocated to Markham. Yet retirement did not diminish his calling. As a consultant in clinic-based settings across Markham, Scarborough, Etobicoke, and Brampton, he continued treating cardiac patients, interpreting Holter monitors, and performing resting and stress echocardiograms.

Patients and colleagues alike valued his kind-

ness, meticulous attention to detail, and genuine interest in the person behind the diagnosis.

However, Dr Kumar's life was not confined to hospital corridors and a humanitarian bedside manner. Later in life, he became an avid gardener, cultivating a wide array of vegetables that family and friends eagerly anticipated each season. The harvest from his garden was shared generously, a quiet extension of the generosity he practiced in medicine.

He also embraced music with enthusiasm, taking singing lessons and composing songs for birthdays and religious gatherings. His performances, often filled with humour and warmth, brought joy to family celebrations and community events. His oratorical skills were equally in demand; whether at family functions or religious gatherings, he spoke eruditely, with clarity, conviction, and a storyteller's cadence.

His grandchildren will remember his playfulness, his famous back massages, and his keen interest in their aspirations and achievements. For extended family and friends, he was a trusted advisor whose medical insight was sought with confidence and gratitude.

Dr Kumar's faith and community involvement were central to his identity. In Guyana, he played a pivotal role in the Arya Samaj movement, serving for many years as Senior Vice President of the Guyana Central Arya Samaj. He was instrumental in the erection of the Central Vedic Mandir and Headquarters at Premniranjan Place, Prashad Nagar in Georgetown.

Consequently, following his passing, the Executive and Members of the Georgetown

Arya Samaj mourned his loss, stating, "It is with profound sadness that we announce the passing of Dr Ganraj Kumar, Cardiologist and Community Leader..." while extending sincere condolences to his family.

His passing was also noted in Guyana by the *Stabroek News*, which recognised both his medical accomplishments and his political activism. Even in later years, living abroad, Dr Kumar remained engaged and connected with developments in his homeland, maintaining an abiding concern for democratic integrity and Guyana's well-being.

Following Dr Kumar's passing, the family extended deep gratitude to the healthcare teams at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, St Michael's Hospital, Markham Stouffville Hospital (Oak Valley Health), and the University Health Network for their compassionate care. While too numerous to mention, physicians who played significant roles in his care included Doctors Calvin Law, Yoo-Joung Ko, Yee Ung, Gary May, Morvin Cunningham, and Nisha Fernandes.

Dr Kumar is survived by his loving wife, Diawantee Kumar; his children, Vikram (Aarti), Reshma, and Vikaash (Jasmine); his cherished grandchildren, Kadan, Arianna, Vijay, and Janvi; and his siblings, Dharampal and Gautam. He was predeceased by his daughter, Kamlini, his sister Lillawatee, and his brother, Nirbal.

Dr Kumar's life was marked by steadfast principle and steady compassion. He healed hearts in clinics and hospitals, defended democratic values in public life, nurtured faith in community spaces, and cultivated love within his family.

His legacy is exemplary, and endures in the patients he treated, the institutions he strengthened, the causes he championed, and now, in the generations that are carrying forward his example.



Dr Ganraj Kumar

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# Music with a mission as Shiv Sewa Sangh presents Sangeet Ki Kahani 4

— Shiv Sewa Sangh Mandir & Cultural Center is appealing to our community for support as it prepares to host its upcoming Sangeet Ki Kahani 4 fund-raiser concert on April 18, with proceeds aimed at securing a new, street-level space to better accommodate its devotees, notably seniors with mobility challenges.

By Romeo Kaseram  
An LJI Community Report  
Scarborough – For many families across in the GTA, the Shiv Sewa Sangh Mandir & Cultural Center has long been a place of worship, reflection, and togetherness, one where our traditions are preserved, friendships are formed, and generations gather in prayer and service.

As the Shiv Sewa Sangh family continues to grow and evolve, the mandir is now seeking our community's support to help ensure that this spiritual home remains welcoming and accessible to all who walk through its doors.

Founded on March 5, 2000, by the late Savo Nowlackhia, the Scarborough-based mandir has for more than two decades served worshippers and visitors from across the GTA, including Whitby, Brampton, and Mississauga. As a registered non-profit charity, it has provided religious, cultural, and social services primarily to the Scarborough community, while welcoming families from across the GTA.

According to its website, the mandir offers a safe and inclusive environment to “practice your religion free of judgement, engage in cultural events, and participate in the many services offered”. Its dedicated leadership describes the space as “exceptionally welcoming”, and deeply family-oriented.

The temple's mission “has always been to educate as many people as we can on the Hindu way of life, our Culture and Heritage, the importance of service to our community, and to embrace multiculturalism by appreciating other religions and cultures”.

Central to that mission is an emphasis on youth develop-



Devotees at Maha Shivratri observances last month at Shiv Sewa Sangh. Photo by Hinano Beekhoo

ment. Shiv Seva Sangh affirms that it “particularly pay[s] attention to the care of our youth devotees by thoroughly educating them on the Hindu religion, as well as ensuring that they have all the resources they need to prosper in life”.

Programs include simplified in-house scripture presentations and initiatives designed to build confidence, self-respect, and respect for others. The mandir pledges to support young people “with open arms, open hearts, and open minds”.

Beyond religious observance, Shiv Sewa Sangh Mandir has maintained a strong record of community service. The temple donates non-perishable food items to the Daily Bread Food Bank twice each year, and ensures meals are provided at the conclusion of religious and cultural events.

“We contribute non-perishable items ... because we are eager to aid in any way that we can,” the mandir notes, underscoring its broader commitment to children, young adults, and seniors alike.

Yet despite its long-standing service, the mandir now faces a significant accessibility challenge. Currently housed in the basement of a commercial building at Midland Avenue and Eglinton Avenue East in Scarborough, the space does not have elevator access.

“It is becoming extremely difficult and challenging as more

and more senior members are unable to attend the mandir's *sat-sang* sessions because there is no elevator to the basement; also, due to their disabilities, they are unable to walk down the stairs,” a release from the mandir states.

As a result, it hopes to acquire a street-level unit that would allow all devotees, particularly seniors and those with disabilities, to participate fully in worship and community activities.

“Our continued work of serving our community relies mostly on the donations received from our members, most of whom are seniors,” the mandir explains.

It adds, “Therefore, with the help of generous individuals and busi-

nesses, we are reaching out to those who are willing to donate to our cause so that we can continue to reach out to, and build, our community.”

To support this effort, the mandir will host **Sangeet Ki Kahani 4** on April 18 beginning at 5 p.m. at the Vedic Cultural Center, 4345 14th Avenue in Markham. Organisers note that the previous installment of the concert series was a success, and anticipate strong attendance again.

“Our last concert was sold out, and this concert is anticipated to be a sold out one as well. Please call us to reserve your ticket,” the release states.

The initiative is being led the mandir's by President Nadira Raghunandan-Dyal, who has been an active member and volunteer since 2010, and previously served five years as treasurer. Treasurer Raymond Lutchmansingh has been part of the mandir's volunteer team since March 2000, while Secretary Noreen Balkaran has served in her role since 2014, and has volunteered with the mandir since 2012.

**Shiv Sewa Sangh Mandir & Cultural Center is located at 2555 Eglinton Avenue East, Unit B, in Scarborough.** Additional information, and ticket reservations, can be made by calling **416-261-0281**.



Radha Krishna Mandir in Cambridge is getting set for its opening following observance of Maha Shivaratri



# Radha Krishna Mandir holds soft opening with Maha Shivratri celebration

Cambridge – Radha Krishna Mandir & Cultural Centre marked the soft opening of its new Mandir at 85 Boxwood Drive on the sacred occasion of Maha Shivaratri. The auspicious celebration welcomed over 2,000 devotees throughout the 24 hours from Region of Waterloo and nearby cities, as families and individuals gathered in prayer, devotion, and unity to commemorate this long-awaited milestone.

Maha Shivaratri, one of the most sacred observances in the Hindu calendar, provided a profoundly meaningful backdrop for the opening. Devotees participated in darshan, sacred abhishekam ceremonies, Bhajans, and offerings in the Mandir's new prayer hall, filling the space with spiritual energy and gratitude.

The facility has been designed to meet both spiritual and Hindu community needs. The Mandir features a spacious and serene main prayer hall for daily worship and major festivals, along with dedicated areas for deity installations and ceremonial rituals. In addition, the centre includes a multi-purpose cultural hall to host religious functions, weddings, and community gatherings, as well as classrooms for Bal Vihar, youth programs, and

language instruction.

Meeting rooms support community initiatives and volunteer coordination, while a fully equipped kitchen and dining facilities allow for the preparation and serving of prasadam and large-scale community events. Expanded parking and improved accessibility ensure that devotees of all ages can comfortably participate in programs and celebrations.

As the Mandir continues its spiritual journey, preparations are now underway for the upcoming Sthapana (consecration and installation) of the sacred murtis. This significant ceremony will formally establish the divine presence within the Mandir. Devotees who wish to participate in this historic and spiritually uplifting occasion can sponsor a murti and register online.

While the Mandir has opened its doors for worship, there is still work to be completed as part of the final phase of the project. The centre invites community members and well-wishers to continue supporting this sacred initiative through donations. Contributions of any amount will help finalise construction, enhance facilities, and ensure the Mandir can fully serve the

growing community for generations to come.

“This day is truly historic for our Hindu community,” said President Dwarka Persaud. “After years of unwavering faith, sacrifice, and collective effort, we are blessed to open the doors of our new Mandir on the holy occasion of Maha Shivaratri. This sacred space belongs to every devotee who believed in the vision and supported the journey.”

He added, “As we prepare for the Sthapana of our murtis and complete the remaining work, we invite everyone to take part in this sacred mission and help us build a lasting spiritual legacy.”

Plans are also underway for a Grand Opening Celebration later this year, which will include formal ceremonies, cultural performances, and special guests to officially commemorate the completion of the project.

The Radha Krishna Mandir & Cultural Centre has extended heartfelt gratitude to its volunteers, donors, and well-wishers whose dedication made this milestone possible. The community warmly welcomes all residents to visit and experience the spiritual and cultural programs offered at the Mandir.



Indira Rampersad

## Chosen leaders for US summit

### From Page 1

Trinidad and Tobago. Whatever we do is for the benefit, security, trade, prosperity, and of course, safety.”

Costa Rica's President Rodrigo Chaves described the initiative as one designed “to shield Latin America from dangers such as narco-trafficking and targeted killings,” noting that President Trump had invited a small group of leaders to Florida.

Paraguay's President Santiago Peña confirmed via social media that he had accepted the invitation, describing the summit as an opportunity to strengthen cooperation in favour of “security and stability”.

Among other reported attendees are Argentina's Javier Milei and El Salvador's Nayib Bukele.

International media have reported that planning for the summit followed the January capture of former Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro by US forces, a development that has intensified discussion around regional security and political stability. While neither Caribbean leader directly linked their participation to that development, both emphasised coordination and security cooperation in their public remarks.

There has been no confirmation that other Caribbean heads of government will attend.

In Trinidad and Tobago, political scientist Dr. Bishnu Ragoonath described the March 7 invitation as “a win for Kamla Persad-Bissessar”, noting that her administration has been overtly supportive of the US.

“It is a win for Kamla Persad-Bissessar, in that she has given unequivocal support to the US, and this is the way that the US is now seemingly ensuring that she remains in the US' corner,” he said.

Ragoonath pointed to Guyana's exponential oil and gas growth as a factor elevating this nation's and the region's strategic importance, noting that “Guyana with that oil boom is critical to the Americas”.

However, he also cautioned that the durability of US political dynamics could influence longer-term outcomes, referencing the shifting political landscape for the upcoming American electoral cycles as a factor to watch.

Political analyst Dr Hamid Ghany described the development as a “mega development” and “a feather in the Prime Minister's cap”, arguing that it could open doors to favourable outcomes in energy and security cooperation.

“This is a mega development and the country will prosper from it,” Ghany said.

He drew parallels with the 1980s, when Caribbean leaders such as Barbados' Tom Adams, Jamaica's Edward Seaga, and Dominica's Eugenia Charles maintained strong relationships with US President Ronald Reagan during periods of regional instability.

Ghany said Persad-Bissessar was “reviving a tradition that brought stability to this region”, and characterised her stance alongside Guyana in response to tensions involving Venezuela as “bold and decisive”.

He argued that renewed engagement with Washington could reinforce regional security frameworks and energy cooperation at a time of geopolitical uncertainty.

Also, political analyst Dr Indira Rampersad said the invitation was not surprising, noting that Persad-Bissessar had been among a select group of leaders granted private discussions with Rubio at the Caricom summit.

“These two have been on good terms with the US, but they also have very strong trading ties with the US, in that ExxonMobil is drilling for oil in both countries,” Rampersad said.

She suggested that trade, energy, and crime would likely be central to the discussions.

“Those are issues that she needs assistance with: the economy and crime,” Rampersad said, adding that cooperation on security could help address robberies, kidnappings, and other criminal activities, even as Trinidad and Tobago's murder rate has declined.

# TT govt signals security shift at Caricom

— In her address on February 24 at Caricom's 50th Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government in Basseterre, Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar outlined a sovereignty-focused approach to Trinidad and Tobago's foreign and security policy, affirming commitment to regional cooperation while signalling that national circumstances will guide key strategic decisions.

...

**Port-of-Spain** – Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar delivered a wide-ranging address to regional leaders in Basseterre on February 24, emphasising Trinidad and Tobago's continued engagement with Caricom even as she underscored the need for greater national autonomy in matters of security and foreign affairs.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the 50th Regular Meeting, Persad-Bissessar said her government remains “vested” in Caricom and respects the sovereign right of each member state to determine its own policies.

However, at the same time, she indicated that Trinidad and Tobago would craft its foreign and security strategies in keeping with what she described as her nation's unique security challenges.

“We cannot bind ourselves to the same political ideologies, to the same foreign issues, and the same security policies of the entire Caricom,” she said, adding that national realities require flexibility in approach.

Her address marked her first Caricom meeting since returning to office following the April 2025 general election.

A central theme of her presentation was domestic security. She outlined the scale of violent crime in Trinidad and Tobago, recalling that in 2024 the country recorded 623 murders. She revealed that approximately 40 percent of these murders were gang-related and linked to narcotics and firearms smuggled from Venezuela.

Persad-Bissessar noted that in 2025 her administration shifted its policy approach, classifying drug cartels and gangs as violent terrorist organisations. She credited enhanced cooperation with the US for contributing to a 42 percent reduction in murders, amounting to 257 fewer killings.

“Thanks again to President Trump and thanks again to Secretary Marco Rubio. I thank them and the US military for the cooperation, and what they shared with us for national security matters,” she said, referring to US President Donald Trump and US Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

She acknowledged that while regional solidarity remains important, not all Caricom states face identical levels of criminal activity, or possess the same scale of security infrastructure.

“Some of us, the crime is so bad, I cannot depend on just my military, my protective services,” she said, adding that the US partnership had yielded measurable results.

She added, “In Trinidad, there's a saying, ‘Who vex loss’. But we gained from that military help, and I will welcome them again.”

Her remarks framed the cooperation as a practical response to immediate national concerns, rather than a departure from regional engagement.

Persad-Bissessar also revisited tensions that emerged in 2025 when both Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana faced what she described as threats from the former Nicolás Maduro regime in Venezuela.

She recalled publicly affirming that if Guyana were touched, Trinidad and Tobago would stand with its neighbour, and noted that Trinidad and Tobago itself had also faced threats.

“So, how can it be when that regime was threatening violence to two Caricom member states, there was no voice from the Caricom?” she wondered.

Her comments were framed as a call for more visible and unified regional responses in moments of external pressure. She questioned how the Caribbean could be considered a “zone of peace” if member states felt exposed to security risks without collective backing.

Persad-Bissessar also addressed what she characterised as cross-border political engagement during recent elections in the region.

“When, in the last election, you sent your missives, you

sent your people from your party to openly campaign against another political party ... I'm sorry I have to share this, but it hurt me a lot when I saw it transpired,” she said.

She emphasised that cooperation among governments should not blur the lines between state-to-state relations and party-to-party activities.

“So Caricom governments, if we are to hug up each other and cooperate, it cannot be that last week you sent your political persons, not technocrats, to campaign. I don't think that is right because today I will have to face you,” she added.

While candid in tone, her remarks suggested a desire for clearer boundaries to preserve mutual trust within the bloc.

As she delivered her remarks, observers noted visible signs of unease among some regional leaders seated in the front row. A few shifted in their chairs, folded their arms or glanced down at their cellular phones, as Persad-Bissessar moved through the more striking and candid sections of her address.

Persad-Bissessar also revisited the 2022 incident involving Trinidad and Tobago national Brent Thomas, who was detained in Barbados and returned to Trinidad aboard a military aircraft without formal extradition proceedings. A High Court judge in Trinidad and Tobago later ruled the action to be an unlawful abduction, and both governments accepted liability for constitutional breaches.

“In October 2022, the then-sitting Trinidad and Tobago government coordinated the kidnapping of a Trinidad citizen from another Caricom state,” she said, noting, “Our Supreme Court has ruled that he was kidnapped.”

She explained that as Opposition Leader at the time, she wrote to the Caricom Secretariat seeking clarification but has not yet received a response. In the presence of Caricom Secretary-General Carla Barnett, Persad-Bissessar said, “I wrote to the secretariat of the Caricom asking what happened? ... To date, that was 2022, I have not had a response.”

With Caricom Secretary-General Carla Barnett in the front row, Persad-Bissessar suggested that the lack of reply could reflect poor management or lax accountability, or that “one ceases to be recognised by the Secretariat as a member citizen of Caricom when not in government.”

The matter raised broader questions about transparency and responsiveness within regional

institutions, she suggested.

Turning briefly to regional positions on Cuba, Persad-Bissessar raised questions about consistency in democratic advocacy.

“Every leader here participated in democratic elections in our respective countries,” she said, adding, “Why do some Caricom governments and political parties believe that they should have the right to contest democratic elections, but Cuban citizens should not have the right to do the same?”

Her comments reflected a wider discussion about governance standards and political freedoms within and beyond the region.

While outlining areas of concern, Persad-Bissessar reaffirmed Trinidad and Tobago's support for the principle of full and free movement within Caricom.

However, she said Trinidad and Tobago faces significant pressures associated with illegal migration, with tens of thousands of undocumented migrants placing strain on public services and finances.

“We remain committed to the principle of full and free movement,” she said, adding, “But we have to deal with the illegal ones that I already have in my country.”

Her remarks highlighted the balance her government seeks between regional integration and domestic capacity.

Despite the pointed observations in her address, Persad-Bissessar concluded by reaffirming Trinidad and Tobago's commitment to constructive regional partnership.

She also invited member states to encourage their nationals to access educational opportunities at The UWI South Campus when academic programmes begin in September 2026, and announced that the Couva Children's Hospital has been reopened to all Caricom citizens.

Going forward, she said, Trinidad and Tobago will continue to work within Caricom structures while retaining the flexibility to respond to national security and policy priorities as they arise.



PM Kamla Persad-Bissessar delivers her Caricom address last week in Basseterre



President Irfaan Ali (left to right), PM Dickon Mitchell, and PM Roosevelt Skerit. SKN government photo

## Regional leaders address Persad-Bissessar's critique

— Caribbean leaders have defended Caricom's cohesion and consultative character following pointed criticisms by Trinidad and Tobago's Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar at the 50th Regular Meeting of Heads of Government in Basseterre. While acknowledging differences over foreign policy and regional sovereignty, several prime ministers reaffirmed Caricom's record of diplomacy, its principle of mutual defence, and the need to preserve unity amid diverging national positions.

...

**Basseterre** – Caribbean leaders have moved to defend Caricom's integrity and cohesion following criticisms by Trinidad and Tobago Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar at the opening of the 50th Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government in Basseterre, St Kitts and Nevis.

Persad-Bissessar's address questioned the bloc's posture on regional sovereignty, defended Trinidad and Tobago's support of US operations targeting Venezuela, raised concerns about alleged political interference in regional elections, and faulted the Caricom Secretariat over its response to the kidnapping of Trinidad and Tobago national Brent Thomas.

Ahead of the February 26 leaders' retreat in Nevis, several prime ministers responded publicly, underscoring Caricom's record of diplomacy and reiterating the importance of unity amid differences.

In his response, Grenada Prime Minister Dickon Mitchell pointed to Caricom's role in helping to ease tensions between Guyana and Venezuela, particularly during recent border disputes.

"I think certainly Caricom played a significant role in dropping the temperature between Guyana and Venezuela. And I think we appreciate that Guyana is the seat of Caricom. So, I think the record speaks for itself in terms of the role of Caricom in defending and supporting Guyana, and ensuring that we pursue an opportunity for discussion and dialogue," Mitchell said.

On concerns about Trinidad and Tobago's foreign policy position, Mitchell reaffirmed the principle of mutual defence among member states.

"In the case of the complaints about Trinidad and Tobago, our view is, and I think this is consistent, is that we certainly always will protect a Caricom member from any perceived threats made by any country against them to their sovereignty, or to their security. And I think that is the position. But, you know, sometimes you could never answer what someone else is thinking, or their view of something else."

Mitchell's remarks reflected a broader effort among leaders to balance respect for national sovereignty with regional solidarity.

Jamaica's Prime Minister Andrew Holness echoed the view that Caricom was neither a political nor economic union, and that member states retain autonomy in shaping foreign policy.

"You appreciate some members of Caricom are not part of, for example, the Caribbean single market. For example, The Bahamas, which from day one carved that out. So, I think it is important for us to appreciate that in the absence of political union, and the absence of economic union, that countries are free to pursue their own foreign policy."

Holness' comments underscored the structural reality of the regional body, one built on cooperation rather than supranational authority.

Saint Lucia Prime Minister Philip J. Pierre acknowledged that consensus on foreign policy has historically been elusive within Caricom, but expressed hope that disagreements would not weaken the bloc.

"What I'm hoping for... is that Caricom does not get frac-

tured on any issue. That is what I'm hoping for. But I have no control over any other government. We are all independent countries and we take our own path."

His remarks reflected a shared concern among leaders that diverging geopolitical alignments could test Caricom's cohesion.

Meanwhile, Dominica's Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerit cautioned against public sparring among regional leaders, noting that disagreements within Caricom are not new, but are typically resolved behind closed doors.

"I have been around for some time, and if you do your research, you would have never seen me engaging in any sparring across the Caribbean Sea. I have never believed in this. I have never engaged in this. I do not think that is the right approach to take," he said.

Skerit also acknowledged that internal debates can become intense.

"Within Caricom, we have had very fiery exchanges in closed doors. And we have been able to resolve those issues after heads have been cooled... Every country has a sovereign right to express themselves in a manner that suits their own national interest and the interest of their citizens... I have no difficulty with that. But sometimes there are things that could be said in different spaces at different times."

Responding to Persad-Bissessar's allegation that regional leaders have allowed ministers to participate in other countries' elections, which she labelled political interference, Skerit argued that cross-border political support has long been embedded in Caribbean political culture.

"I am not aware of any political party in the Caribbean, none, that has not involved itself in support of a party in a particular country. None. In recent times, in past times, and certainly in future times," he said.

He further declared, "There is no political party in the Caribbean, from Jamaica all the way down, that has not provided support, one political party or the other, in another country; there is none. And he who is without sin must cast the first stone. And I do not think anybody can cast the stone in the Caribbean when it comes to that particular matter."

However, he stressed that partisan alliances should not undermine state-to-state relations.

"I have been a long-standing friend and colleague of Dr Ralph Gonsalves, but I will work very well with Prime Minister Friday. He is the Prime Minister of St Vincent and the Grenadines. I think we have to have the maturity to rise above some local politics and recognise that we are on the international stage."

However, former SVG Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves offered the sharpest critique, expressing concern that regional unity was being eroded by leaders seeking closer alignment with external powers.

He described Persad-Bissessar's address as "dangerous" and later as "downright dangerous", arguing that her position signalled a departure from Caricom's long-standing independent posture in favour of alignment with US interests.

According to Gonsalves, when engaging high-level US officials, Caricom heads risk speaking at "cross purposes" if a unified regional position is not maintained. He warned this was a dynamic that could weaken the bloc's collective bargaining power.

He reiterated that Caricom must remain a "zone of peace", and serve as an interlocutor for Cuba and Venezuela, cautioning against shifts away from traditional regional solidarity.



Ralph Gonsalves

## Leaders clash over 'kidnapping' claim

**Bridgetown** – A public exchange between two Caribbean prime ministers over a 2022 cross-border arrest has reignited debate about regional law enforcement practices and the implementation of the Caricom Arrest Warrant framework.

Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley last week described as a "scurrilous lie and defamatory in the extreme" remarks by Trinidad and Tobago Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar characterising the 2022 arrest of Trinidad and Tobago national Brent Thomas in Barbados as a "kidnapping".

The issue resurfaced during the February 24 opening of the Caricom summit in St Kitts and Nevis, where Persad-Bissessar addressed regional leaders and referred directly to the Thomas incident. He had been arrested at a hotel in Barbados in 2022 and returned to Trinidad and Tobago without formal extradition proceedings being initiated.

In response, Mottley, speaking to state-owned CBC TV in Barbados late last week, rejected the use of the term "kidnapping", stating that arrest warrants had been presented.

"To describe it as a kidnapping is a most unfortunate term because arrest warrants were presented by the Trinidad police to the Barbados police. As to what happened, we don't know because we don't get involved in operational matters," she said.

Mottley added that her administration was unaware of the operational details at the time.

"As it transpired, we, in fact, knew nothing about it. It is only when this matter became a public issue that we then had to

launch an investigation into what transpired, and it was clear that the Trinidad and Tobago police, as has been the practice for decades in this region, would have supplied an arrest warrant which the Barbados police would have acted upon."

She further stated: "To describe it as kidnapping, or to suggest that any member of Cabinet or any member of the permanent secretary class or government of Barbados is involved in kidnapping is a scurrilous lie and defamatory in the extreme. We all know what transpired, and it is regrettable that it happened."

Following Mottley's remarks, regional media reported that Persad-Bissessar indicated she did not take offence at her counterpart's response.

According to Persad-Bissessar, Mottley "simply explained her position from her government's side in a clear and cogent manner. [Mottley] repeated what her former AG Dale Marshall said in their Parliament in 2023 regarding the Brent Thomas case. I don't see anything wrong with that."

The legal dimension of the matter was addressed in Trinidad and Tobago, where a High Court judge ruled that Thomas' removal from Barbados constituted an "unlawful abduction". The Trinidad and Tobago government subsequently issued an apology, and both countries accepted liability for breaches of constitutional rights arising from the incident.

At the heart of the dispute lies a longstanding regional practice of executing arrest warrants between Caricom states without invoking formal extradition procedures.

Mottley acknowledged that such informal cooperation had operated for decades, but said reform was necessary.

"We understood at the time and we said, our Attorney General said at the time, that the formal process of extradition, which we do extra-regionally with other countries, has not, and was not practiced in the region among ourselves by any country in the region. And therefore, to that extent, we acknowledge that we need to be able to change how we operate," she said.

She pointed to the Caricom Arrest Warrant initiative as the corrective mechanism.

"That is why the Caricom arrest warrant is being pursued. That is why legislation has to be passed in every Caricom country to be able to facilitate that Caricom Arrest Warrant. We also have, for example, as I said, the ministerial statements to Parliament from both the former attorney general in 2023 and the former attorney general of Trinidad and Tobago."

The Caricom Arrest Warrant Treaty came into force at the regional level in 2018 after sufficient ratifications. However, it becomes legally enforceable within each member state only after domestic legislation is enacted.

Guyana, Saint Lucia, and Antigua and Barbuda have passed the necessary local laws to operationalise the system. Trinidad and Tobago has ratified the treaty but has not yet enacted the required domestic legislation.



Mia Mottley



Adnan Sami and Amitabh Bachchan



Katrina Kaif, Vicky Kaushal and family



Varun Dhawan and wife Natasha Dalal



Sami and Bachchan celebrating Holi

## Bollywood's stars coated in celebratory powder mark magic of Holi

The arrival of spring each year sees India turning the page from winter to warmth, the air beginning to hum with anticipation with the changing season. Gulal powders begin to be stacked in market stalls, laughter spills over into courtyards, and somewhere in the swirl of saffron, fuchsia, and emerald, the world begins to recover from the privations of winter.

Holi is not merely a festival in India; instead, it is a mood, a memory, a movie scene waiting to happen. And nowhere does it blossom more spectacularly, and with more colour than in Bollywood.

This year, composer-singer Adnan Sami reached into his photo archives to share a personal slice of that cinematic magic. On social media, he posted photographs of himself celebrating Holi with the legendary Amitabh Bachchan, both of them joyfully drenched in colour, dancing amid clouds of powdered pigment.

The images, exuberant and unguarded, captured not just the party, but a more profound tradition in Bollywood's enduring embrace of Holi, both a spectacle and an enduring sentiment.

Sami and Bachchan had once collaborated on the hit song *Kabhi Nahi* from Sami's album *Tera Chehra*. Years later, those Holi snapshots reveal a harmony different and similarly uplifting from the music, in a friendship set to rhythm, with vibrant colours enhancing their chemistry and camaraderie.

Across the industry, the festival has yet again gripped the film fraternity. This week, actors and filmmakers opened their homes and their hearts, sharing glimpses of intimate celebrations. Kareena Kapoor Khan, Bobby Deol, Neha Dhupia, Kriti Sanon, Varun Dhawan, Katrina Kaif, Akshay Kumar, Ajay Devgn and Randeep Hooda were among those who sent festive greetings to fans.

The frames were familiar: friends laughing, families gathered in sunlit gardens, faces streaked with pinks and purples in festivities revealing

familial tones both public and personal.

At its heart, Holi marks the arrival of spring and the harvest season. Rooted in Hindu mythology, it symbolises the triumph of good over evil. In India, it begins with *Holika Dahan*, the ritual lighting of a bonfire that represents the burning away of darkness.

The following day, swaths of colour take over streets, homes, temples, film sets, with greetings of tossed powders, playful squirts of water, and unrestrained delight.

For Bollywood, Holi has long been more than a calendar event. It has also served as a narrative device, emotional catalyst, and a visual feast.

Directors have turned it into confession and confrontation, flirtation and forgiveness. Music composers have scored it with beats that linger long after the coloured powders have been washed away from the streets by rain. The result is a tapestry of cinematic moments that define the festival for millions who love Bollywood across the world.

### Silsila (1981)

Few sequences are as iconic as *Rang Barse*. In *Silsila*, Amitabh Bachchan's spirited performance blends festive abandon with emotional undercurrents. The song is playful, provocative, and layered with tension, a Holi scene that transcended cinema to become a cultural ritual in its own right.

### Nadiya Ke Paar (1982)

Set against the simplicity of rural India, *Jogi Ji Wah Jogi Ji* captures the teasing, laughter, and earthy rhythms of village Holi. The film celebrates community, with elders watching from *charpoys*, youths darting through lanes, grounding the festival in folk tradition and shared belonging.

### Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani (2013)

Modern, kinetic, and unapologetically youthful, *Balam Pichkari* pulses with friendship and freedom. Ranbir Kapoor and Deepika Padukone dance through a kaleidoscope of colour, transforming Holi into a rite of passage for a new generation.

### Sholay (1975)

Even in a tale of bandits and vengeance, Holi finds space. *Holi Ke Din* gathers the villagers of Ramgarh in rare unity and joy. The moment is brief but luminous, a reminder that colour can puncture even the darkest narrative.

### Mohabbatein (2000)

Led by Shah Rukh Khan, the song *Soni Soni* turns Holi into a gentle rebellion. Within the rigid walls of tradition, colour becomes liberation, allowing characters to voice emotions long suppressed.

### Baghban (2003)

*Hori Khele Raghuvvera* celebrates enduring love and familial warmth. With Amitabh Bachchan and Hema Malini, the sequence underscores Holi's quieter virtues of respect, togetherness, and the poetry of shared years.

### Waqt: The Race Against Time (2005)

Playful and contemporary, *Do Me A Favour Let's Play Holi* captures flirtation and laughter. Priyanka Chopra joins Akshay Kumar in a celebration that mirrors today's vibrant Holi parties

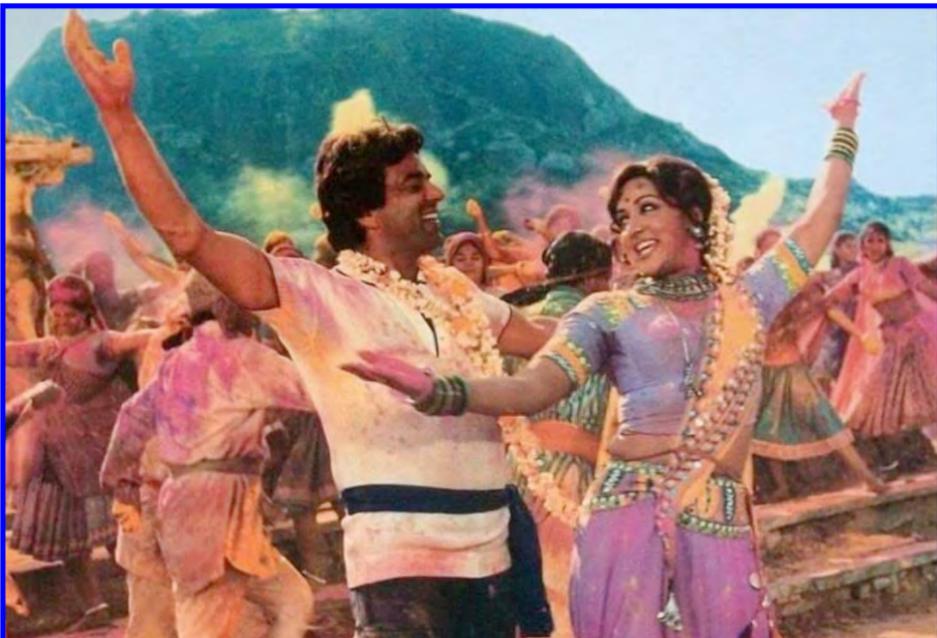
for their energy, urbanity, and effervescence.

### Badrinath Ki Dulhania (2017)

In its high-voltage title track, *Varun Dhawan* and *Alia Bhatt* embody a new era of public festivity as tradition is reimagined with modern choreography and unapologetic spectacle.

From black-and-white nostalgia to streaming-era vibrancy, Holi in Bollywood remains an emotional equaliser. It levels hierarchies, blurs grudges, and invites confession under a sky dusted pink. It is cinema's most democratic moment, where heroes and villagers, rebels and romantics, elders, and *ingénues* all stand equally stained by colour.

This week as Bollywood stars are posting their Holi greetings and photos, their faces streaked, with laughter unfiltered and spontaneous, the celebration of this leveling festival reminds audiences why it endures on screen and off. In every splash of crimson and cascade of blue lies a story of renewal. In every dance step, a declaration that joy, like colour, is meant to be shared and evenly dispersed.



Holi scene from the movie *Sholay*

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# Beyond pitch and boundary, time for us to rally again to conquer cancer

— As cricket season returns to the GTA, our Caribbean diaspora is once again being called to transform our passion for the game into life-saving impact at the Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation's Cricket to Conquer Cancer on May 30, 2026, at Celebration Square in Mississauga.

For so many of us in the GTA, especially within our Caribbean and South Asian diaspora, cricket is more than just a sport. It is part of our culture. It is a shared inheritance of skill, patience, and camaraderie passed from generation to generation. It is leather striking willow in schoolyards and parks, weekend leagues under summer skies, and long conversations about historic centuries that defined eras.

Now, our beloved game is once again taking on a new purpose.

Come May 30, 2026, the **Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation will host its second annual Cricket to Conquer Cancer event** at Celebration Square. Co-ed teams made up of rookies, ringers, celebrities and players of all ages and skill levels will come together to once again raise funds for life-saving cancer research.

When you register to play, you are going to bat for everyone who has been affected by this disease. With two in five Canadians being diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime, this is one game where we all have to pitch in; one tournament in which we all need to play.

Cricket is a sport loved around the world. It has a rich history and can be played in many formats. On May 30, it will unfold in a vibrant street cricket format in the heart of Mississauga, transforming one of the GTA's most visible public squares into a field of collective purpose.

Each team will fall into one of two divisions: corporate or community. Building a corporate team is the ultimate employee engagement activity, a way to bond with colleagues and challenge others in your industry to suit up for a worthy cause. Creating a community team is the perfect opportunity to bring together family members, friends, classmates, and neighbours.

On Match Day, teams will be paired based on the skill levels they identify. All players are welcome, regardless of experience.

Here is cricket stripped to its inclusive essence. You do not need first-class credentials. You do not need a perfect cover drive. You need only the willingness to show up. And when you do, you will be joining what has become Canada's largest street cricket fund-raiser, rallying teams across the country in support of world-class cancer research at the PMCF.

As with last year, the message of hope is already shining brightly from the PMCF: "Carry the Fire. We burn brighter together".

By joining the cricket tournament, participants help create brighter tomorrows for cancer patients everywhere. Indeed, fund-raising efforts "Carry The Fire" for a new generation of patients counting on PMCF's trailblazing work to transform what it means to be diagnosed with cancer.

As the PMCF's website notes, cancer is complex. It is not a single disease, but a group of hundreds influenced by lifestyle, environment, and genetics. It presents immense challenges. Yet the belief at PMCF is that through collaborative research, intensive training and engaged philanthropy, it can be overcome together.

PMCF's renowned team of doctors, researchers and scientists are united in a quest to "Carry the Fire" for patients who depend on world-leading advances in early detection, innovative treatments, and comprehensive support. The goal is clear, which is to deliver the best outcomes and experiences so cancer patients worldwide can live longer and better lives free from the fear of cancer.

The mission is anchored in three priorities. Early detection to prevent cancer before it happens. Early detection significantly increases the likelihood of successful treatment, with cure rates improving five to tenfold for some cancers. PMCF aims to reduce late-stage diagnoses, develop prevention programs, create more accurate detection methods and transform screening research so more patients can live longer, healthier lives.

Then there are innovative treatments with better, more tailored therapies. PMCF is positioning itself as Canada's hub for the most innovative interventions available, leading the development of targeted treatments such as theranostics and advanced immunotherapies, next-generation surgical robotics and more precise cancer medicines.

These approaches have the potential to replace traditional chemotherapy and ease the physical challenges associated with cancer care.



Participants at last year's PMCF Cricket to Conquer Cancer tournament. PMCF supplied photos



And there is comprehensive support in addressing the full range of patient needs. Cancer brings fear, anxiety, and loneliness, not only to patients, but to loved ones. New models of care ensure that everyone affected is supported throughout the journey. These compassionate approaches aim not only to help patients survive, but to thrive beyond diagnosis.

This is where cricket's lesson of collective effort intersects with science's demand for collaboration. Just as a team builds pressure through disciplined overs, research advances through shared resolve and sustained support.

PMCF's 2025 Cricket Impact Report demonstrates what is possible when community passion meets philanthropic purpose.

As it notes, "In 2025, we hosted Canada's first-ever street cricket fund-raiser: over 500 participants, 40 teams, thousands

of spectators, and 160 volunteers helped us make history."

Additionally, "We all raised a bat and raised hope for cancer patients here in Canada and around the world by raising \$1.16 million in The Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation Cricket event."

It declared, "Together, we Carry The Fire for a world free from the fear of cancer."

All funds raised were directed to the PMCF's highest priority needs. By focusing on those priorities, it states, "...[We] can make the largest impact exactly where it is needed most."

The report further emphasises that with donor support, PMCF is advancing early detection methods, pioneering innovative treatments, and expanding comprehensive support models to improve outcomes for cancer patients in Canada and around the world.

Early detection initiatives are developing new diagnostic approaches so cancer can be identified as early as possible, potentially eliminating the need for invasive treatments. Innovative treatment research has translated into "new, kinder and more effective treatments", with emphasis on therapies tailored to the unique needs of each patient. Comprehensive support efforts are building compassionate models of care within one of the most research-intensive ecosystems anywhere.

The results speak clearly in 500 participants; 40 teams; 160 volunteers, and \$1.16 million raised.

Such an outcome was more than a symbolic impact, but notable for being measurable progress.

Also in PMCF's 2025 Cricket Impact Report, Dr Miyo Yamashita, President & CEO, expressed her appreciation "with great gratitude".

"Your support of The Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation Cricket event helped The Princess Margaret's most pressing funding needs across cancer research, care, and education. You ignited discoveries in early detection with the goal of preventing cancer from taking hold," she stated.

She emphasised that donor contributions also helped speed the development of innovative, individualised therapies, opening new frontiers in precision medicine and reshaping how cancer is treated.

Dr Yamashita further highlighted that meaningful cancer care extends beyond physical treatment, underscoring the importance of addressing the emotional and psychological well-being of patients and their loved ones.

Also, by supporting the event, participants joined a committed community of philanthropic champions committed to "Carry the Fire", ensuring that patients not only survive cancer, but are given the opportunity to thrive beyond diagnosis.

Describing the current phase of research and innovation as a defining juncture, she pointed to growing momentum fueled by philanthropic support, one that allows researchers and clinicians to envision a future where people no longer live in fear of cancer.

The moment was "pivotal", Dr Yamashita, said, adding, "Thanks to your support, we can now imagine a world free from the fear of cancer."

Her message was confirmation of what emerged with help from our diaspora's participation last year, which is that when our community shows up, progress accelerates.

For our Caribbean diaspora, and for members in the South Asian community, cricket has always transcended boundaries, helping to level playing fields. It is a shared legacy built on discipline, resilience, and heart.

Cricket to Conquer Cancer reminds us of cricket's greatest lesson: the power of collective effort.

Like a strong team building pressure through tight spells, our diaspora has consistently risen to challenges. The PMCF has long embodied that same resolve, accelerating advancements that ripple across the globe.

Now is the moment for our diaspora to show up with purpose, with the same reverence we give our cricket heroes, the same patience we show in a tense chase, and the same pride we feel when a good innings is played for a worthy cause.

Whether as players, donors, or supporters from the boundary, every role is vital. Every contribution counts.

Come May 30, 2026, Celebration Square will once again become a place where sport and service meet. Where culture fuels compassion; where passion becomes progress.

Once again it is time to step up; to form your team, and join this thrilling tournament to conquer cancer.

Time for us to take a stand at the wicket to bat together as a cricket team, converting every over, every run, and productive partnerships to build a big score together in our collective drive to conquer cancer.

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