



ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

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BOYCOTT!

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**Sean
Bird
wins
UPP
primary**

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PM to boycott CARICOM meeting

As an indication of the strain which recent developments surrounding LIAT have caused to erstwhile cordial relations between Caribbean leaders, Antigua and Barbuda will not be represented at today's special conference of Caribbean Community (CARICOM) leaders.

At the meeting, Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley is to hand over the chairmanship of the 15-member regional grouping to her St. Vincent and the Grenadines counterpart, Dr. Ralph Gonsalves.

The Guyana-based CARICOM Secretariat had earlier this week announced that the regional leaders will host their 20th Special Meeting via video conference beginning at 10.00 am (local time) after they had agreed during their Ninth Special Meeting in April to stage the handing-over ceremony at the beginning of July.

Sources close to PM Browne have hinted that the Gaston Browne admin-

istration will not be represented at the meeting where regional leaders are expected to also address a number of procedural matters.

The Antigua and Barbuda's position is linked to the efforts to liquidate the financially strapped regional airline, LIAT, which is headquartered in St. John's. The shareholder governments are Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

"There are some regional leaders who see our regional institution, carrier, LIAT, as a "predator" and they are determined to keep their knees on its neck to prevent its regeneration," Prime Minister Brown wrote on his Facebook page.

"Their espoused values about regional integration, are incongruent with their insular actions," he wrote, adding "it is with a heavy heart that I add if this insularity hidden in intellectual subterfuge,

is allowed to continue unabated, the CARICOM and OECS (Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States) integration institutions shall wither and die".

Browne holds the view that "there is a conspiracy by a few regional leaders to stymie the resurgence of LIAT, as a new entity to provide air connectivity for the Caribbean people and to move tourists within our region".

He was perhaps making reference to an advertisement where commuters were being encouraged to travel on flights operated by "OCL Barbados LTD," and indicating "flights now available for Caribbean destinations".

The flights, which are due to begin on July 12, is promising commuters in Grenada, St. Lucia, Dominica, St. Vincent, Barbados, Guyana and Tortola, fares as low as US\$99 plus taxes and giving telephone contact numbers in St. Vincent and the Grenadines for the "One Love, One Caribbean" initiative.

DAY 7/3

Max UV Index: 12 Extreme
 Wind: E at 17 km/h
 Wind Gusts: 22 km/h
 Probability of Precipitation: 25%
 Probability of Thunderstorms: 24%
 Precipitation: 0.0 mm
 Rain: 0.0 mm
 Snow: 0.0 cm
 Ice: 0.0 mm

31 °Hi



Mostly sunny

NIGHT 7/3

Wind: E at 13 km/h
 Wind Gusts: 20 km/h
 Probability of Precipitation: 5%
 Probability of Thunderstorms: 0%
 Precipitation: 0.0 mm
 Rain: 0.0 mm
 Snow: 0.0 cm
 Ice: 0.0 mm

25 °Lo



Partly cloudy

SUNRISE/SUNSET

Sunrise AST
 5:38 AM



Sunset AST
 6:45 PM

Duration
 13:07 hr

MOONRISE/MOONSET

Moonrise AST
 5:30 PM



Moonset AST
 4:54 AM

Duration
 11:24 hr



Finding a replacement for LIAT

There's a flurry of activities across the Caribbean to find an airline or several airlines to fill the void that a liquidated LIAT will leave in regional air transport.

From Antigua and Barbuda, Prime Minister Gaston Browne, has been busy seeking ways to save LIAT or at least the name because of its huge advantage of name recognition and several route rights.

On Thursday afternoon, PM Browne wrote to his fellow heads of shareholder governments of LIAT urging them to reconsider the announced liquidation of LIAT, urging instead to reorganize the airline noting that a technical report on how this may be done is already completed.

"My Government looks forward to receiving an early response from you on the proposal for reorganisation which would not only maintain LIAT 1974's essential service to all our countries, but would also keep faith with LIAT's creditors and employees, and put in place management policies and plans to make the airline return sufficient profits not to require subsidies by governments," the PM pointed out.

Prime Minister Browne also noted that his Government remains convinced that LIAT 1974 Ltd could be reorganised for the benefit of the Caribbean's people; to continue to provide the essential bridge between the

nations of the region; to satisfy obligations, at least partially, to creditors and employees through negotiations; and to turn the airline into a leaner, more efficient service that could be profitable.

He said that in as much as LIAT 1974 Ltd, has been saddled with many challenges, its loss was \$12 million last year. "A reorganised operation, efficiently managed, could turn around to produce modest profits," he noted.

As a contingency arrangement, Prime Minister Browne told Prime Minister Mia Motley of Barbados, Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves of St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit of Dominica, that should they decide not to consider the reorganisation of LIAT 1974 Ltd, the Government of Antigua and Barbuda intends to launch LIAT 2020 Ltd as early as possible.

He said that the Antigua and Barbuda Cabinet has given the green light for officials to register the name, and therefore seek the shareholders release of the trademark to allow LIAT 2020 Ltd to be registered.

On June 29, Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves wrote to workers of LIAT advising that Directors and Shareholders will be meeting last weekend to consider the closure of the airline. Prime Minister Browne said that at the

meeting a majority decision was made to liquidate the airline with no further discussion, an occurrence to which he objected.

The Antigua and Barbuda government as well as its citizens are also watching with interest developments surrounding the St Vincent-based One Caribbean airline. The airline posted an advertisement online announcing flights to several destinations in the southern Caribbean with its fares starting from as low as US\$99.00.

The head of "One Caribbean" which has operations in Barbados, says he's open to talks with regional governments on replacing LIAT. The company's Chief Executive Officer, Reginald Adams, sees the need for collaboration among the carriers operating in the region.

"I believe that the airlines, LIAT, CAL and some of the smaller carriers, we should all come to the table and talk about who can commit to and what can be achieved. In my opinion, LIAT has some routes that were unsustainable to them; they should have approached the smaller carriers a long time ago to take up these routes with their smaller aircraft. If that had done this a long time ago, they would have been fine," he declared.

PM Browne said he is committed to ensure that LIAT doesn't fall prey to the ambitions of some in the region.

Sean Bird wins UPP primary

Station manager at ZDK, Sean Bird, and grandson of Sir V.C Bird, the Father of the Nation, has won a primary to be selected as a candidate for the opposition United Progressive Party.

In a primary contest held Thursday night at the Hope Institute to select a candidate to contest the St John's Rural East seat on behalf of the UPP, Bird beat back Vincent Cornelius by 31 to 10 votes. 41 persons voted in the primary. There were no spoilt ballots.

UPP General Secretary, Shawn Nicholas, said Bird will likely move on to be formally announced as the candidate for the constituency. "Bird has been a member of the UPP for some time now and he meets all our requirements for selection as a can-

didate," she revealed.

The UPP has been readying itself for elections with the announcement of four candidates last month. Nicholas said another four candidates will be rolled out 'in short order'.

If he is confirmed by the party's leadership as the candidate, it will be a Bird versus Bird fight as the sitting representative for the area is his cousin, Maria Bird-Browne, wife of the prime minister.

The constituency has had a long affinity with the Bird name as Sir Lester Bird, former prime minister and National Hero, represented the constituency for over thirty years.

The losing candidate in Thursday's primary, Cornelius, ran in the constituency in the last general elections as a candidate for the Democratic



Sean Bird

National Alliance. He was wooed by the UPP but fell short in the primary.

It is felt that the UPP leadership believes that the Bird versus Bird scenario gives them a better chance in the constituency.

Cabinet, PWA reach broad agreement on matters

Three executive members of the Police Welfare Association accepted an invitation to attend this week's Cabinet meeting where both sides reached consensus on a broad range of issues that were of concern to the association.

In making the announcement, Information Minister, Melford Nicholas, said while the PWA had met as a body with the prime minister (via ZOOM), the executive accepted an invitation to a meeting with

the Cabinet.

"The Cabinet confirmed a number of assurances that the prime minister gave to the association and already we can see that there's tangible evidence that the government is living up to the commitment as work is already underway at the Police Headquarters by the Public Works Department," Nicholas stated.

He noted that there are some outstanding issues but despite this the government has demonstrated

good faith in the matter.

"I believe that we have given the PWA the benefit and confidence that we will keep our word with respect to a number of improvements.

"We are not agreeable on all points but clearly, enough has been done and granted for them to leave feeling that there is consensus on the way forward," Nicholas remarked.

Additionally, the PWA requested an opportunity for regular meetings with

the prime minister and the Cabinet agreed that a system to facilitate this will be established.

Meanwhile, the week-long 'protest' action by the PWA came to an end Tuesday afternoon following the meeting with the prime minister.

The PWA raised concerns over health insurance, risk allowance, and access to house and lands in any government-sponsored development.

PM and DC Wade settle differences

There's been a 'meeting of the mind' between Prime Minister, Gaston Browne, and Deputy Commissioner of Police, Albert Wade.

The relations between the two took a turn for the worse last week when Wade addressed a meeting of the Police Welfare Association at a time when more than one hundred officers took 'industrial action' over what they say were outstanding grievances. His appearance at the PWA's 'meeting' was largely interpreted as the deputy commissioner openly supporting the junior officers who were engaged in industrial action.

Prime Minister Browne was not amused by what he described as Wade 'crossing the line' and hinted that the action was in his view 'a



Deputy Commissioner of Police, Albert Wade.

threat to national security'.

However, at Thursday's post-Cabinet press briefing, Information Minister, Melford Nicholas, announced that the two men had held a meeting prior to the Cabinet meeting. "I believe that the deputy commissioner

and the prime minister had a frank conversation and as far as the prime minister reported the deputy commissioner offered his apologies for what he considered a

slip in judgment.

According to Nicholas the prime minister accepted the apologies from Wade and he has decided that the matter is now at rest.

ABWU takes Jolly Beach matter to court

The Antigua Barbuda Workers' Union is heading to Court today on behalf of employees of Jolly Beach Resort.

It is a continuation of their claim for outstanding wage increases, unpaid retirement fund contributions and unpaid union dues.

According to the ABWU, the matter in the High Court is filed against Jolly Beach Cooperation.

In June, Jolly Beach

workers voted in favour of the Antigua and Barbuda Workers' Union negotiating on their behalf.

Jolly Beach executives were given up to 22nd June to respond to a request for information regarding severance and other benefits.

It is unclear if that request was honour, but the union is proceeding to the High Court of Justice and has retained the services of Justin Simon Q.C to handle the matter.

Tender Notice

The Antigua Public Utilities Authority is inviting tenders for the pulling and packing of utility poles. The poles will be taken from the St. John's Deep Water Harbour to the APUA Pole Yard on the Sir George Walter Highway.

Interested parties must submit closed written bids for the supply of this service and address it to:

Financial Controller
Antigua Public Utilities Authority
4th Floor ABC Building
Independence Ave.
St. John's
Antigua

Deadline for submission is July 6th, 2020.

For further Information please call 480-7175.



Two more confirmed cases as ministry gets dashboard makeover

The Ministry of Health, through their official COVID-19 dashboard, has indicated that the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Antigua and Bar-

buda has jumped from 66 to 68. According to a ministry official, the additional two cases are two hotel workers who were retested.

The dashboard, which

was accounts for the total number of confirmed cases, also states that as of July 1st there have been a total of 796 COVID tests conducted, while 19 test results are

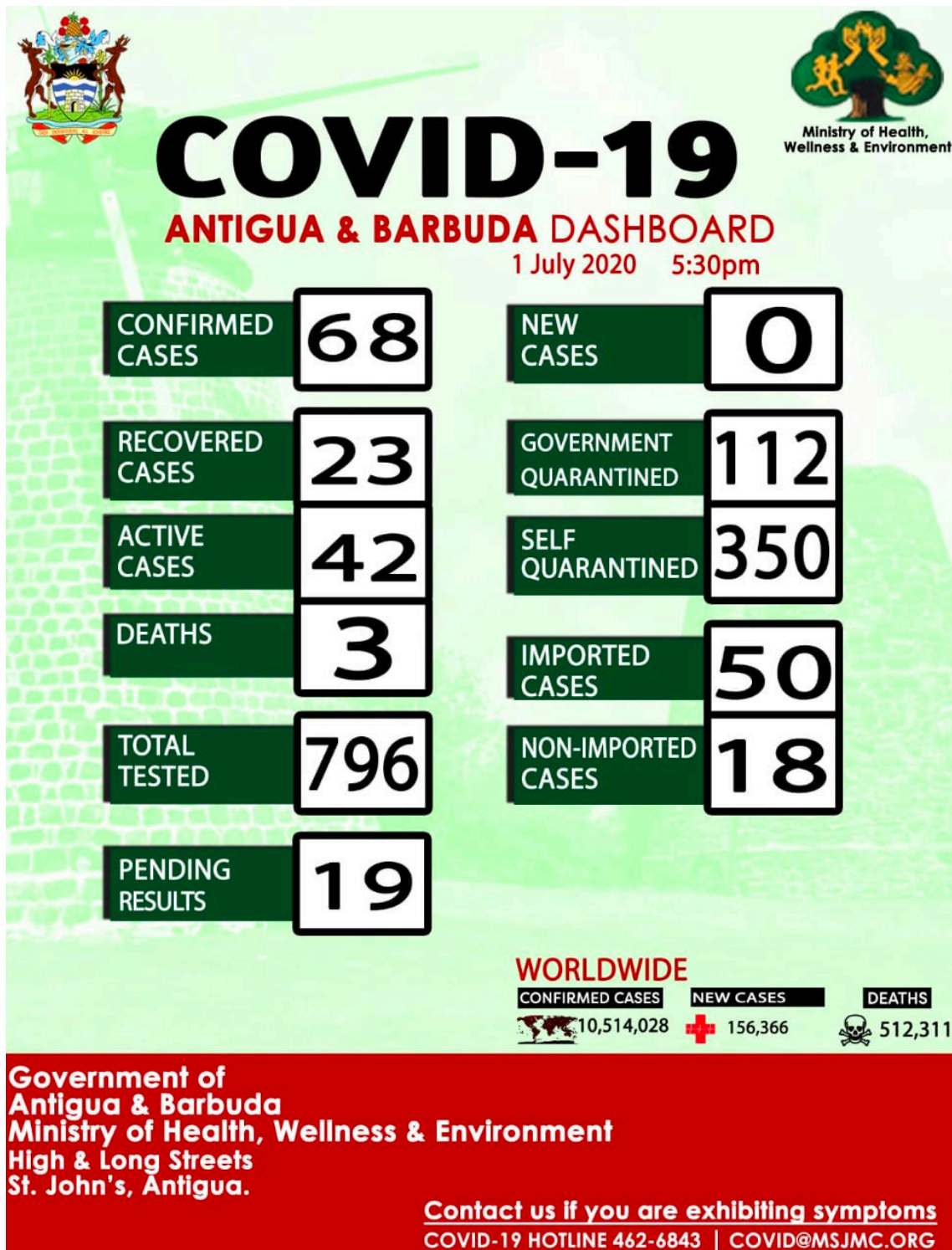
still pending. Up to press time, the results of the pending test were not revealed.

The new dashboard which was revealed on Thursday comes on the heels of Prime Minister Browne suggesting that those managing the dashboard, which is meant to update the COVID-19 information, can do a better job. However, according to sources, the previous dashboard was not a product of the Ministry of Health, but that of the state-run media entity. Nonetheless, an updated dashboard is expected sometime today sources claim.

While flights continue into the country, notes from Cabinet indicated that the Minister of Health indicated that 120 persons are in quarantine.

This number represents the number of persons in a government quarantine facility and includes students who returned from Cuba, the 39 Antigua and Barbuda nationals who arrived from the Dominican Republic last Friday and returning nationals who have arrived from the United States of America.

The notes from Cabinet noted that these 120 persons will be released from quarantine after spending 14 days and having exhibited no symptoms. However, testing may be carried out based on their health status.



Customs, Immigration receive face-shields

Several dozens crystal clear face masks/shield have been presented to two categories of frontline workers – the Customs Division and the Immigration Department.

Foreign Affairs Minister, E.P Chet Greene, made the presentation Thursday to the Comptroller of Customs, Raju Boddu, and Chief Immigration Officer, Katerina Yearwood for distribution among their staff.

Greene disclosed that the facial shields were donated to the ministry by the Antigua and Barbuda consulate in Toronto, Canada.

“We in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs feel that customs and immigration are two departments that are deserving of these shields. While we are concerned about the economy, our number one priority has also been the health and wellbeing of our citizens,” he noted.

The minister issued a ‘thank you’



to frontline staff for all the work they have been doing in this a time of crisis. “The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will continue to do whatever it can to assist these workers,” he promised.

In response, Boddu gave a commitment that his department will play



its part in implementing the government’s with respect to securing the nation’s borders.

The chief immigration officer said the shields will go into immediate use among her staff. She thanked the Canadian consulate for its thoughtful gift.

Pedestrians, Bicyclists and Motorcyclists Safety

When Crossing the Road

“Never assume the traffic will stop”

DRIVE SAFELY

ATB
Antigua and Barbuda Transport Board

A Message from Antigua and Barbuda Transport Board

Apua 47TH ANNIVERSARY

LIKE & SHARE!

FACEBOOK COMPETITION

In celebration of our 47th Anniversary, help us to get our page to **10,000** likes before **July 4th!**

Like our page and share this post for a chance to win an **Alcatel 1 Handset!**

Winner chosen at random and will be announced on our anniversary day, **July 4th at 6:00 PM.**



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Grade Six placement list goes public today

One of the most highly anticipated events in a child's life takes place today with the announcement of the students who have gained scholarships to secondary schools...and the secondary school they will attend.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology will release the secondary school placement list for Grade Six students today through all primary school principals, who will in turn provide parents or guardians with the information.

Following widespread consultation with stakeholders, the ministry took a decision at the end of April to cancel the

2020 Grade Six National Assessment, in light of the disruption brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

While making the announcement, officials revealed public secondary school placements will be made using data generated at the school level from continuous in-school assessments, specifically from class work, homework, projects and tests.

The 1,451 registered students were assigned to secondary schools through outstanding achiever placement, health and safety placement, special educational needs placement and place of residence placement.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology is advising members of the public no distribution of placement results will be carried out at the ministry's headquarters.

As it relates to Grade Six transfers, Director of Education Clare Browne maintains these will be granted only in instances of errors of placement or for health and safety reasons.

Further, parents will be required to write to the Director of Education requesting the transfer and the letter must be counter-signed by the student's primary school principal, before delivery to the secretariat of Director Clare Browne.



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REQUEST FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

25 – 30 MW LIQUEFIED NATURAL GAS POWER PLANT

The APUA is requesting Expressions of Interest (EOI) for the addition of 25 MW to 30 MW of natural gas fueled power generation capacity to be integrated to the APUA power grid. The Plant should also be able to operate on Liquefied Petroleum gas (LPG) as a secondary fuel. The proposed power generation facility will be located on the Crabbs peninsula on the island. The power generation facility site will be located a distance of less than 1/2-kilometer from fuel import facilities.

FUEL SUPPLY

Natural gas will be delivered into the power generation plant under a long-term LNG fuel supply and handling agreement. LNG fuel suppliers will own and operate all fuel handling and storage equipment and deliver natural gas to the Power Plant at a metered location on a segment of gas pipeline near the inlet of the power generation facility. The fuel supplier will employ staff to monitor, operate, and maintain LNG storage, vaporization, automated metering, and automated safety measures between the LNG storage tanks and the metered point on the power plant supply pipeline.

POWER PLANT

The power plant will consist of reciprocating engines manufactured by Wartsila, MAN, or Caterpillar and has a power generation capacity of between 7,000 kW and 11,000 kW each with a total plant capacity of between 25,000 kW and 30,000 kW. Only EOIs with consideration given to a new Power Plant with new engines and other new equipment will be accepted. The scope of work would also include substation equipment (Power transformer etc.) to accommodate the interconnection of the Power Plant to APUA's Electrical grid. APUA would assume ownership of all Interconnection Equipment after installation and will operate and maintain all these substation/Interconnection equipment throughout the life of the PPA.

Please note that EOIs will be accepted for any of three options:

- The delivery of fuel to the Plant
- The construction of the Power Plant and a PPA for a period to be agreed later
- The delivery of fuel, the construction of the Power plant and a PPA with APUA.

ELIGIBILITY

Interested party's overview of expertise and relevant experience.

Respondents should provide company's background information outlining competence and experience in relevant areas including curriculum vitae of key personnel (to be involved in the project) and featured projects or customers. The information provided should focus on Fuel delivery to similar Power Plants and the delivery of Power Plants, especially Plants with LNG being the primary fuel and LPG the secondary fuel.

Eligible countries are member countries of the CDB.

Technical Capacity – Fuel supply and Power Generation

Statement of interested party's experience relevant to delivery of fuel and construction and operation of Power Plant of similar capacity in the Caribbean, Central American, South American or relatively small markets similar to this project. Delivery of Power Plants using LNG and/or LPG would be of particular interest to the APUA. Interested parties should provide the fuel used in each of the Power Plant projects that the Company would have delivered and under what form of commercial arrangement e.g. BOOT etc.

Interested Party should present a Power generation development plan that includes Power generation equipment which includes preliminary list of main equipment manufacturers, e.g. engine manufacturer etc.

Financial Feasibility

Each proponent will provide statements and documentation that verify their ability to meet the financial requirements commensurate with the interested party's activities.

Interested Party Financial Capacity

Interested parties must provide summary information from 2019 financial statements certifying financial capacity to perform. The Financial performance of the company for the last five (5) years should also be presented.

EVALUATION OF EOIS

In the assessment of submissions, consideration will be given to technical competence, qualifications and experience (especially related experience on similar projects), financial capability and existing commitments. All information must be submitted in English. Further information may be obtained from the address listed below between 09:00 and 16:00 hours Monday to Friday.

ONE electronic copy, in Portable Document Format (PDF), and ONE hard copy of the Expressions of Interest must be submitted no later than **16:00 hours on July 31, 2020**. The submission should include the name and address of the applicant and shall be clearly marked for the three options mentioned above;

- **Expression of Interest - Delivery of LNG Fuel to 25-30MW Power Plant.**
- **Expression of Interest - Delivery of 25-30MW of LNG Power Plant.**
- **Expression of Interest - Delivery of LNG Fuel and delivery of 25-30MW Power Plant.**

FOR COMPLETE DETAILS TO PREPARE AND SUBMIT ELIGIBLE EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST PLEASE VISIT:

<http://www.apua.ag/request-for-expressions-of-interest-power-plant/>



Locally-based Dominicans to vote in DR election

More than sixteen hundred Dominican Republic citizens who are living in Antigua and Barbuda are eligible to vote in that country's presidential elections on Sunday.

Under that country's Constitution, its citizens are permitted to participate in presidential election from wherever they live in the world.

A spokesman for the DR community in St John's said arrangements are in place for the 1,654 registered voters here to participate in the elections by voting at polling stations set up here for that purpose.

"We have received permission

from the prime minister to use the Multi-Purpose Cultural Centre to set up two polling stations. Voting will take place from 7:00 am to 5:00 pm on Sunday.

The Electoral Commission in the DR has appointed two persons in Antigua to serve as agents to conduct the elections," spokesman Theo Noso has disclosed.

He explained that the small number of eligible voters relative to the size of the DR population in Antigua and Barbuda is because registration has been suspended here for over three years. "If registration had continued,

we would have had several thousands more eligible to vote in the elections," Noso further explained.

According to Noso the latest opinion polls indicate that the main opposition leader, Luis Abinader, is likely to win the elections.

The current president, Danilo Medina, is ineligible to contest the elections as his constitutional limit of two consecutive terms has expired.

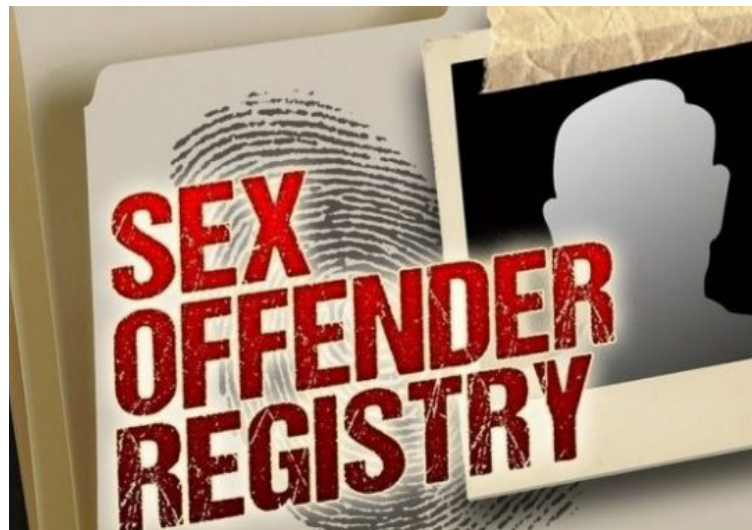
Campaigning for the elections is well underway within the Hispanic community here with posters and other election paraphernalia being distributed and mounted.

OECS to set up Sex Offender Registry

High-level discussions are taking place aimed at setting up a sex offenders' registry for the OECS.

This week, the Canadian Government funded Improved Access to Justice in the Caribbean (IMPACT Justice) Project in collaboration with Judicial Reform and Institutional Strengthening (JURIST) Project, the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court (ECSC) and the OECS Commission hosted a regional consultation via Zoom to discuss the need for a Sex Offender Register in the OECS. The meeting consisted of several legal luminaries who discussed legal framework of a regional Sex Offender Registry.

The main presenter at the regional meeting was Director of Legal Reform and Special Legal Projects,



Ministry of Legal Affairs, Adlai Smith, who explored the pros and cons of private vs public sex offender registers, possible constitutional issues which could arise and provided a comparison between the IMPACT Justice draft National Sex Offender Register legislative provisions and the provisions contained in the Trinidad and Tobago Sexual Offenc-

es (Amendment) Act, No. 19 of 2019

Chairing the meeting was Professor Velma Newton, Regional Project Director of the IMPACT Justice Project, while Her Ladyship, Dame Janice Pereira, DBE, Chief Justice of the ECSC; Dwight Lay, General Counsel of the OECS Commission and Dennis Darby, Senior Advisor to the JURIST

Project offered remarks.

This meeting was a follow up to a discussion which started in St. Kitts and Nevis in December 2019 at an IMPACT Justice Symposium for Governments of OECS Member States on a number of IMPACT Justice Model Bills. Included in the presentations made at the Symposium, were proposed revisions to the Antigua and Barbuda Sexual Offences Act, 1995, and the proposed establishment of a National Sex Offender Register. Based on the comments raised during this discussion, it was evident that further dialogue was needed on the scope of the proposed Register in light of possible issues which could arise with regard to the free movement of persons in the OECS.



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Antigua & Barbuda**

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St. John's, Antigua
Email: pmsecretariat@ab.gov.ag

Tel. (268) 460-5100
Fax. (268) 462-3225

2nd July 2020

To the Heads of Government of:

The Hon, Mia Mottley - Barbados
The Hon. Roosevelt Skerit - Dominica
The Hon Ralph Gonsalves - St Vincent and the Grenadines

Dear Colleague Heads of Government:

I write to you as the Heads of the three governments, which, along with the Government of Antigua and Barbuda, own the majority shares in LIAT 1974 Ltd.

First, I express my deep regret that, at a recent meeting of Shareholders, we were unable to agree on the importance to our regional integration project of maintaining the operations of LIAT 1974 Ltd, and to its further value as a feeder airline to transport tourists between the countries of the Caribbean. A majority decision was made to liquidate the airline with no further discussion, an occurrence to which I objected.

Second, as you are well aware, Antigua and Barbuda was a founding member of CARIFTA in 1965 which led to our present day Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM); Antigua and Barbuda was also an initiator and founding member of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) in 1981. In all cases, it was the Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party, that I now have the privilege to lead, that formed the Government when these momentous decisions were taken to strengthen our nations by collaboration within a framework of interdependence. My Government and my Party have never resiled from their commitment to regional integration even though Antigua and Barbuda is one of the least recipients of its economic benefits in trade, industrial allocation or location for regional institutions.

Indeed, despite being one of the least beneficiaries of the economic benefits of regional integration, Antigua and Barbuda opened its doors to nationals of other CARICOM countries when circumstances in their nations proved difficult for them to remain. Further, we have used our vote and our voice in the international community to stand-up for the interests of every other CARICOM country and to support strongly their desire to occupy key offices in the international community and at the United Nations, including the Security Council.

The absolute necessity of collaboration and cooperation with the member nations of our CARICOM family is, for Antigua and Barbuda, an article of faith. We know that it is no cliché to assert that we are stronger together and weaker apart. Therefore, even though we are disappointed that other shareholder governments have considered it necessary to liquidate LIAT 1974 Ltd without sympathetic consideration of the impact of this decision on Antigua and Barbuda; or, of the fact that aviation services, through LIAT's operations, represent the only tangible benefit to Antigua and Barbuda of its participation in CARICOM, our national commitment to the ideal of a strong and vibrant Caribbean Community remains.

My Government recalls that LIAT was started in 1956 as a modest operation between Antigua and Montserrat. Its moral domicile is in Antigua as are its nurturing and resilient 64-year span when it met many short-lived rivals and outlasted them, all the time providing an essential bridge between the people of our Caribbean nations that gave meaning and substance to integration for business, commerce, socialization and a Caribbean identity. Indeed, it is true to say that LIAT's challenges, including its operating losses, derived from its continuous battles to maintain aviation stability and sustainability for the Caribbean people against opportunistic rivals who abandoned the area when their ambitions to profit from it failed to materialize. We, in Antigua and Barbuda, cannot abandon LIAT. LIAT did not abandon the Caribbean people. LIAT did not fail the region, it transported the region's people safely for over 6 decades. It is those who undermined it, by encouraging transient profit-seekers in competition, that failed it.

It is also troubling to my Government that shareholder governments in LIAT 1974 Ltd would decide by majority vote, to liquidate the airline without putting in place a reorganisational plan or any arrangements for meeting obligations to creditors and employees. Creditors extended credit to LIAT because it was an airline owned by Caribbean governments; their expectation was that Governments would not renege on LIAT's debt which is constructively sovereign debt. Those creditors are now disadvantaged by the failure of shareholder governments to seek to negotiate with them reasonable terms for affordable repayment. A similar circumstance applies to the employees of LIAT who are all CARICOM nationals. Surely, it is the obligation of governments, particularly as shareholders of LIAT, and, therefore, the employers of LIAT staff, to work-out some form of negotiated compensation for them.

My Government remains convinced that LIAT 1974 Ltd could be reorganised for the benefit of the Caribbean's people; to continue to provide the essential bridge between our nations; to satisfy obligations, at least partially, to creditors and employees through negotiations; and to turn the airline into a leaner, more efficient service that could be profitable. After all, in as much as LIAT 1974 Ltd, has been saddled with many challenges, its loss was \$12 million last year. A reorganised operation, efficiently managed, could turn around to produce modest profits.

It is against this background that the Government of Antigua and Barbuda once again calls on the main shareholder Governments of LIAT 1974 Ltd to reconsider the decision to liquidate the airline and, instead, to give meaningful consideration to reorganising it. We emphasise that a technical report already exists that could be the blueprint for deliberation of reorganisation.

My Government looks forward to receiving an early response from you on the proposal for reorganisation which would not only maintain LIAT 1974's essential service to all our countries, but would also keep faith with LIAT's creditors and employees, and put in place management policies and plans to make the airline return sufficient profits not to require subsidies by governments.

As a contingency arrangement, should you decide not to consider the reorganisation of LIAT 1974 Ltd, the Government of Antigua and Barbuda intends to launch LIAT 2020 Ltd as early as possible.

To this end, we have applied to register the name, and we hereby seek your release of the trademark to allow LIAT 2020 Ltd to be registered.

In the meantime, we advise, in full transparency, that the Government of Antigua and Barbuda has: (a) set aside \$20 million to capitalize the company; (b) secured the serious commitment of other governments and private sector partners to take equity stakes, producing, so far, another \$20 million; (c) put an expert team in place to produce a plan for a lean and efficient operation that would be profitable. Further, we extend an open invitation to all CARICOM governments, particularly the main shareholders of LIAT 1974 Ltd to participate in the ownership of LIAT 2020 Ltd.

We remain convinced that a sustainable air bridge between the countries of CARICOM is essential to the success of regional integration in all its aspects, as it is crucial to act as a feeder airline for the transportation of tourists. LIAT is a Caribbean institution that has defeated competitive airlines that crumbled, when their goal of quick money did not materialize. We in the Caribbean should enhance our institutions for our individual and collective good over the long-term, and not succumb to tearing them down to satisfy passing, short-term pressures.

I look forward to receiving a written reply from you on the propositions set forth in this letter at the earliest opportunity. Meanwhile, my Government will move ahead with its plan to build another regional airline on the foundations of LIAT, and to hold open an invitation for you to join, should my proposal of reorganizing LIAT 1974 Ltd not meet your approval.

Yours sincerely,



Gaston A Browne MP
Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda

Building Resilience Through Great Customer Service A Three Step Approach



By Garfield Joseph, MBA

INTRODUCTION

Keeping good customers should be the number one priority of every business. When a company takes care of the customer, the customer will take care of the business in good times and in bad times. Yet, for too many businesses, customer satisfaction is not a top priority. There may be several contributing factors. On the one hand, relatively good financial performances may suggest that all is well with the customer. Other contributing factors may include a lack of leadership commitment to customer satisfaction or simply not knowing how to build a customer service culture.

However, it is not extremely difficult to build a strong customer service culture. What is usually needed is a change in mindset, top management commitment, a process for intercepting and interpreting customer feedback and creating action plans to address key issues and concerns articulated by the customer.

Top Management Commitment It always starts at the top. Senior management mindset and commitment set the tone and influence the culture in any

organization, that is why building a customer focused organization starts from the top. It is the shadow of the leader that heavily influences the behaviour of others. Therefore, if the owner of a business or top management, including board of directors, show little care or concern for the quality of service rendered by the organization, then it follows that lower level team members will do the same. On the other hand, when the owners and senior leaders of the organization are highly committed to building a customer focused organization and allocate resources to support these kinds of initiatives, this signals to the rest of the team that customer satisfaction is important and employees are more committed to such an initiative. An example of this kind of leadership commitment can be found in many successful and highly profitable organizations. One such organization that readily comes to mind is South West Airlines. South West Airlines is well recognized in North America for its relaxed and fun culture, with great customer satisfaction scores from its customers year after year. The company is rewarded for its service by having millions of loyal customers and as such is more resilient and offer better shareholder value, even in challenging economic times, when compared to other airlines that do not have a similar customer service culture.

Capturing the voice of the Customer So, senior management having a customer first mindset sends the right signals to the rest

of the organization. This is the starting point. The next step is to implement some type of process to systematically capture the customer experience. How customers feel about the company's products and services, good or bad, should be captured and shared across the company consistently. Obtaining feedback from the customer is not a program of the month or a nice thing to do but is a business imperative. The importance of formally capturing customer feedback has been highlighted year after year by the American Customer Satisfaction Index, ACSI, which recently found that only 8 percent of customers describe their recent experience as great, even though 80 percent of companies believe that the experience they provide to the customer is indeed superior. It therefore means that capturing the voice of the customer is even more important now in an ever-changing environment because of Covid -19.

Domino's Pizza is one such example of a company that listens hard to its customers. A few years ago, they were able to capture feedback from customers who said that its Pizza tasted like cardboard. Pretty insulting. But Dominoes did not use this feedback to push back against the customer. Rather it listened and responded by changing its dough formula. And in one year, by listening and responding to the voice of the customer, the company's revenue improved a whopping 18 percent. Capturing data, listening, and responding to the voice of the customer

and acting upon the data through performance improvement plans are the hallmarks of great companies. Use Customer Data to Drive Continuous Performance Improvement The third and final step in building a customer service culture is the implementation of a customer service performance improvement plan. As data is collected and analyzed, themes and patterns will emerge. Internal analyst, or external service providers then summarize the data so areas of opportunities can be identified and acted upon through training, coaching and job chats to drive performance improvement. Employees who provide great service are often recognized and rewarded and those whose attitudes and behaviors are unable to meet and exceed customer expectations are usually managed out.

Conclusion

It is well documented in the academic literature, and other sources, such as the Harvard Business Review, and from the long term tracking of the financial performance in many organizations, both large and small, that companies whose top management sets a customer first service culture, have strong systems and processes to capture feedback and then act upon the feedback in meaningful ways through continuous performance improvement plans, are more profitable, spend less on marketing and advertising to win new customers, and are also more resilient in times of recession.

When the customer wins, everyone one wins!

Jamaica: PM Holness Stands By His Man - Scandal-Plagued Wheatley May Get Second Chance As Minister

Despite adverse findings against Dr Andrew Wheatley by the director of investigation at the Integrity Commission, Prime Minister Andrew Holness has hinted that he would not rule out appointing the embattled former energy minister in a future Cabinet. Asked by Radio Jamaica's Dionne Jackson Miller during Wednesday's digital press conference if he would return Wheatley to a new Cabinet after a general election, the prime minister suggested that his position on that issue remained unchanged from yesteryear.

"My answer then would be an excellent answer for your question today (Wednesday)," said Holness, referencing a similar query asked in 2018 after Wheatley resigned in the wake of the then auditor general's findings into allegations of malpractices at Petrojam.

"I have paid close attention to public opinion. I'm always a believer in second chances, reforming, and redemption, but at this moment, there are still things to consider before that can happen," said Holness in 2018.

On the question of Wheatley's candidacy in the next general election, Holness said that there would be no "moves at this time not to have him run as a candidate". "MPs are obviously elected by the people. I can't remove an MP from his position. There are processes in law for that to occur as it relates to whether or not Dr Wheatley continues as a candidate. From what I have seen and what I have observed

and my own analysis of the situation, I don't think there will be any move at this time not to have him run as a candidate," he said.

The embattled former energy minister, who is a Holness loyalist, has been referred to the director of corruption prosecutions in the Integrity Commission in a damning report released on Tuesday. The director of investigation said that Wheatley was "dishonest in his representations concerning Ms Sophia Deer and whether he sought to mislead and did mislead the director of investigation".

Deer is the principal of Homestead Primary School, which is located in the St Catherine South Central constituency in which Wheatley is the member of parliament. She also sat on several boards within the Ministry of Science, Energy and Technology when Wheatley was minister.

There was, however, no credible evidence of nepotism, the report said.

STEPDOWN

Addressing the issue during an interview on Power 106 on Wednesday, Jeanette Calder, executive director of the Jamaica Accountability Meter Portal, said that based on the latest report from the Integrity Commission, Wheatley should step down as a member of parliament.

"In light of what the auditor general had already shared then, I felt that it would have been appropriate for the former minister to do so," she said.

"Certainly, with the details that have come forward now, it



removes any doubt in my mind that it would be the right thing to do for Jamaica."

Calder said that if she had the chance to quiz the prime minister, her first question would be: "What does accountability look like to you, PM?" According to Calder, accountability has remained an abstract term during Holness' more-than-four-year term. "I don't know what it means to the prime minister," she said. Calder quoted the prime minister's response to a question on Monday from The Gleaner on controversy engulfing St Ann's Bay Mayor Michael Belnavis, including revelations of his role in a private company that captured government land and constructed a building in violation of the law. In the midst of a Sunday Gleaner probe, the building was demolished.

Said Holness: "My job is to brief myself properly, bring the people in who are at the centre of any accusation to get full knowledge, and once I am satisfied that there is something there that requires action, then you would know by my past track record that I do act on these matters."

However, Calder contended that "I want Mr Holness to un-

pack for Jamaica what does act mean, because to date, over the four years, I really cannot point to any case of real accountability. I see the process begin. I don't see it end".

She argued that the director of investigation has referred to administrative breaches in his report. "Administrative sanctions can be taken," he added.

But Holness said at Wednesday's press conference that any fair assessment of his leadership as prime minister would conclude that he has taken strong action within the law.

"There is an unrealistic narrative that expects the prime minister to act on matters without first being properly informed, without having solid legal ground to act, without the benefit of the investigative and prosecutorial authorities to inform my action," he said.

Besides Wheatley, then Education Minister Ruel Reid was forced to step down after being enmeshed in fraud allegations involving his wife and daughter as well as Caribbean Maritime University President Fritz Pinnock and JLP Councillor Kim Brown Lawrence.

St. Kitts- Arrival Of Haitians Suspected Case of Human Trafficking



With the police force's investigation continuing into the discovery of several illegal Haitians at a location in the Keys Area, local investigators are now suspecting that a similar discovery in the British Virgin Islands and the one in St. Kitts are related.

On Monday, June 22, police and soldiers went to a house in Keys where they found 10 males who were deemed to have arrived illegally - three others escaped but were later captured.

Police on Monday, June 29 revealed that Mervin Maynard of Keys Village was charged with 'Knowingly Harboring Persons who entered the Federation Illegally'.

Law enforcement officials in Road Town, Tortola on Thurs-

day, June 25, discovered 10 illegal migrants who entered that territory via sea.

While responding to reports from a concerned member of the community regarding a white sailing vessel that allegedly dropped off persons with backpacks at Prickly Pear Island, the Joint Task Force responded and the vessel on the North Western side of the island was seized.

The task force found 5 males and 1 female taking refuge in a small building; 4 more persons, 2 on the beachfront of the island, and 2 on Leverick Bay, Virgin Gorda were located.

Preliminary investigations from the BVI police found that 53-year-old Crawford Sabaroché of Dominica residing in

St. Maarten was arrested and charged for "Being Engaged in Illegal Smuggling and Illegal Entry". Sources in St. Maarten confirmed to WINN FM Wednesday that it is a case of Human Smuggling. According to one source, it has been ongoing for quite some time, and law enforcement officials in the British Virgin Island, St. Maarten and St. Kitts and Nevis should be sharing information.

The source tells WINN that investigations in the past indicated that migrants would fly into the various countries then use vessels to travel to the United States Virgin Islands where they would seek refuge.

Here in St Kitts Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) with Responsibility for Operations Adolph Adams tells WINN FM that the police's investigations are moving full steam ahead as they seek to connect the dots in the case. A Police source tells WINN that the group of migrants, who resided in Dominica, was heading to St. Martin with the USVI as their final destination; however, they were dumped off in St. Kitts

and Nevis. A law enforcement official confirmed that the illegal migrants came to the island via boat but they have not been able to locate the vessel. The St. Maarten source indicated that the business of human smuggling/ human trafficking is a high network, highly profitable business if successful. However, the source was confused as to the discovery of a group of Haitians in St. Kitts, since reports suggest that St. Maarten, with its use of the US dollar currency, is often described as the gateway for a connection to the USVI.

He noted that reports point to the use of a South to North Route that would not place them close to St. Kitts.

This is not the first time that a group of illegal Haitians were found in the Federation.

Back in October, the police discovered a group of 34 Haitians in Bird Rock, who indicated that their vessel had run aground.

The group told police that they were heading to French St. Martin with an onward connection.


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Caribbean Public Health Day: In a Time of COVID-19

Over the years, the Caribbean region has faced a series of public health challenges. The persistence of diseases such as dengue, and the emergence of new ones such as the Coronavirus (COVID-19). The COVID-19 pandemic has emerged as the biggest threat to the Caribbean region in recent times and has presented a clear and present danger to the health of the Region's residents, and economies.

"This virus has been in the forefront of the minds of everyone. We have all been concerned about the safety and health of our loved ones, our ability to provide for them should they become ill, and access to health care services. It has also underscored the importance of public health in the Region," stated Dr Joy St John, CARPHA Executive Director, in observance of Caribbean Public Health Day (CPHD).

Public health is achieved by promoting healthy lifestyles, researching disease and injury prevention, and detecting, preventing and responding to infectious diseases. It is also about protecting the health of entire communities.

The celebration of Caribbean Public Health Day on July 2 coincides with the anniversary of the legal establishment of CARPHA, which makes it an appropriate time to highlight the work of the Agency, the contribution public health can make to the socio-economic development of the Region,

and to sensitize Caribbean people about the importance of public health. CPHD is an opportune time to highlight the role public health plays in the midst of a challenging crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has demonstrated that public health interventions such as closure of borders and stay at home policies were necessary to reduce health and socioeconomic losses. Additionally, it also showcased the critical roles of providers of public health services who continue to work tirelessly to protect, and better the health of the Region's people.

The work of CARPHA advances the public health of the Region in several ways, including monitoring health and disease spread and responding to emergencies, laboratory services, nutrition and food security, health research, environmental health and pharmaceutical quality.

CARPHA Medical Microbiology Laboratory (CMML) has been actively involved in the regional response to COVID-19. As the regional reference laboratory, the CMML conducts tests for suspected COVID-19 cases for Member States using the World Health Organization (WHO) recommended testing protocol. The Agency continues to work closely with its Member States (CMS) and Caribbean coordinating partners and mechanisms to respond to the threat. The pandemic has increased the burden on health



CARPHA Executive Director, Dr Joy St John

care systems in countries. In response to further improve public health capacities in the Region, CARPHA in collaboration with other Caribbean coordinating partners and international public health partners, have been working to further strengthen and enhance the public health systems and institutional capacity in CARPHA Member States. On this day, Caribbean Public Health

Day, we urge you take a moment to reflect and acknowledge the importance of public health and those employed in that area. Beyond COVID-19, public health is not only about the control of infectious diseases. The Region continues to be plagued with non communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and the second leading cause of death—cancer.

CCJ to rule on Guyana Opposition appeal next week



Justice Adrian Saunders, the CCJ president

The Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) will rule on July 8 whether or not it has jurisdiction to hear an appeal filed by two senior members of the main Opposition People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) in relation to a Court of Appeal ruling regarding the disputed March 2 regional and general election in that country.

"We also appreciate the need for expedition on our part. Naturally, we would want to read and assimilate all the submissions that have been made and the authorities as best as we

can and try to juxtapose the need to do that with the need for expedition," Justice Adrian Saunders, the CCJ president, said at the end of a day of oral submissions by all the lawyers involved in the matter.

He said that all five judges on the panel had already consulted among themselves "and we are optimistic that we will give a judgement in this matter next Wednesday at 3:00 pm... that is the 8th of July," he added. Guyana's Opposition Leader Bharrat Jagdeo and Irfaan Ali, the PPP/C presidential candi-

date, filed the appeal before the CCJ for several reliefs, including an interpretation of the words "more votes are cast" in Article 177(2)(b) of the Constitution of Guyana.

The Court of Appeal in its decision late last month ordered that the words are to be interpreted as meaning "more valid votes are cast". The court also ordered the decision be stayed for three days. The applicants, who were added as respondents before the Court of Appeal, claim that the decision was wrong for many reasons,

including that the Court of Appeal did not have the jurisdiction to hear and determine the Notice of Motion.

But Trinidadian Senior Counsel Reginald Armour said that the CCJ is not a court of "unlimited jurisdiction.

"It is a regional Apex Court presiding over signatory sovereign member states and derives its jurisdictions and powers solely on the terms of its formative treaty, that is to say the agreement establishing the Caribbean Court of Justice.

US tries to seize four Iranian tankers sailing towards Venezuela

US federal prosecutors are seeking to seize four tankers sailing towards Venezuela with gasoline supplied by Iran, the latest attempt to disrupt ever-closer trade ties between the two heavily-sanctioned anti-US allies. The civil-forfeiture complaint filed late on Wednesday in the District of Columbia federal court alleges the sale was arranged by a businessman, Mahmoud Madanipour, with ties to Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, a US-designated foreign terrorist organisation.

"The profits from these activities support the IRGC's full range of nefarious activities, including the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, support for terrorism, and a variety of human rights abuses, at home and abroad," prosecutor Zia Faruqui alleges in the complaint. The Associated Press news agency reached out for comment to the Iranian mission to the United Nations but did not receive an immediate response. The Trump administration has been stepping up pressure on ship owners to abide by sanctions against US adversaries like Iran, Venezuela and North Korea.

In May, it issued an advisory urging the global maritime industry to be on the lookout for tactics to evade sanctions like dangerous ship-to-ship transfers and the turning off of mandatory tracking devices - both techniques used in recent oil deliveries to and

from both Iran and Venezuela. The campaign appears to be working. On Thursday, the US Treasury Department lifted sanctions on eight vessels that were recently found to have transported Venezuelan crude. The move followed an auction on Wednesday of 100,000 barrels of gasoline seized from a Greek-managed ship whose owner suspected the cargo was heading towards Venezuela.

As commercial traders shun Venezuela, President Nicolas Maduro's socialist government has been increasingly turning to Iran. In May, Maduro celebrated the arrival of five Iranian tankers delivering badly needed fuel supplies to alleviate shortages that have led to days-long gas lines even in the capital, Caracas, which is normally spared such hardships.

Despite sitting atop the world's largest crude reserves, Venezuela does not produce enough domestically-refined gasoline and has seen its overall crude production plunge to the lowest in more than 70 years amid the continuing crisis and fallout from US sanctions. We are "two rebel nations, two revolutionary nations that will never kneel down before US imperialism," Maduro said at the time. "Venezuela has friends in this world, and brave friends at that." The flotilla's arrival angered the Trump administration, which struck back by sanctioning the five Iranian captains of the vessels.

The four tankers named in the complaint filed on Wednes-



Iranian oil tanker Fortune was one the first of five tankers loaded with gasoline sent from Iran in May, Trump was angered by the flotilla's arrival and sanctioned the ships' captains.

day - the Bella, Bering, Pandi and Luna - are currently transporting 1.1 million barrels of gasoline to Venezuela, prosecutors allege. Of the four, the Bella is currently sailing near the Philippines, ship tracking data shows, while the Pandi appears to have turned off its satellite tracking system on June 29 after having spent two weeks between Iran and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The other two were last spotted in May - the Bering near Greece and the Luna sailing between Oman and Iran. One of the companies involved in the shipment to Venezuela, the Avantgarde Group, was previously linked to the Revolutionary Guard and attempts to evade US sanctions, according to prosecutors. An affiliate of Avantgarde facilitated the purchase by the Revolutionary Guard of the Grace 1, a ship seized last year by the United

Kingdom on US accusations that it was transporting oil to Syria. Iran denied the charges and the Grace 1 was eventually released. But the seizure nonetheless triggered an international standoff in which Iran retaliated by seizing a British-flagged vessel.

According to the asset forfeiture complaint, an unnamed company in February invoiced Avantgarde for a \$14.9m cash payment for the sale of the gasoline on board the Pandi. Nonetheless, a text message between Madanipour and an unnamed co-conspirator suggests the voyage had encountered difficulties.

"The ship owner doesn't want to go because of the American threat, but we want him to go, and we even agreed We will also buy the ship," according to the message, an excerpt of which was included in the complaint.

Haile Selassie: Statue of former Ethiopian leader destroyed in London park

A statue of former Ethiopian leader Haile Selassie has been destroyed in a park in Wimbledon, south-west London.

Police are investigating the incident, which took place in Cannizaro Park on Tuesday evening.

The damage to the bust was carried out by a group of around 100 people, according to an eyewitness.

It appears to be linked to unrest in Ethiopia sparked after a popular singer, Hachalu Hundessa, was shot dead earlier this week.

Demonstrations following his death saw a statue of royal prince Ras Makonnen Wolde Mikael, the father of Selassie, Ethiopia's last emperor, torn down in the city of Harar in eastern Ethiopia.

Many people from Ethiopia's ethnic Oromo group say they were oppressed under Haile Selassie's reign and their language and traditional religion were banned.

Hachalu's songs focused on the rights of the Oromos and he had been a prominent voice in anti-government protests that led to a change in leadership in 2018.

Local resident Andrew Morris told the Press Association he had seen a mostly male group in the park, carrying flares with Oromo slogans, while out walking his dog.

"I heard the statue being smashed up, but didn't actually see it happen," he added.

The Metropolitan Police said



Haile Selassie was Ethiopia's last emperor

inquiries were ongoing and no arrests had yet been made after they were called to a report of criminal damage at 17:10 BST

on Tuesday.

Selassie lived in Wimbledon in 1936 during his exile following the Italian invasion of his

country. The statue was sculpted by Hilda Seligman, while he stayed with her family, and later erected in Cannizaro Park.

Russian voters overwhelmingly back a ploy by President Vladimir Putin to rule until 2036

President Vladimir Putin has won a resounding victory in his bid to stay in power until the middle of the next decade, as Russians voted overwhelmingly to endorse the country's political status quo, according to preliminary results.

Russians went to the polls Wednesday to cast ballots in a nationwide referendum on constitutional amendments. The vote paves the way for Putin, who has ruled for two decades, to remain president until 2036.

Campaign literature made little mention of the real purpose of the referendum, framing it as a return to old-fashioned family values, designed to appeal to conservative voters. "Our country, our constitution, our decision" was the slogan on the information bulletin explaining the constitutional reform to voters. The brochure spelled out a range of amendments, including a provision that defines marriage strictly as a "union of a man and a woman."

But the brochure glosses over one key point: The changes to the constitution effectively reset the clock on Putin's term limits, allowing him to seek two more six-year terms when his presidency ends in 2024.

It's little surprise, then, that the government has pushed a robust get-out-the-vote effort, with a very clear goal: ensuring the public gives a re-

sounding endorsement to the constitutional change.

The preliminary results made that clear. Russia's Central Election Commission on Wednesday night released a tally after processing 50% of ballots, saying 76.24% of the citizens who voted supported the amendments.

Earlier, in a departure from practice in presidential elections, the CEC released initial results on Twitter at around 3:00 pm Moscow time (8 a.m. ET), five hours before polls closed in the capital. The statement gave no specifics about where those votes had been counted; polls at that point had already closed in Russia's Far East.

The Russian government opened early voting last week in what was officially described as a measure to encourage social distancing amid coronavirus, but critics have said the government has drawn out the vote and declared Wednesday a national holiday to encourage voter turnout.

In a statement Wednesday, CEC head Ella Pamfilova defended the process, saying, "For the entire voting period, serious violations that would have required Central Election Commission proceedings were not found."

The early results are reminiscent of the 2018 presidential election, when Putin won re-election in a landslide with three quarters of ballots cast.



Russian President Vladimir Putin votes at a polling station in Moscow on Wednesday.

Then as now, Putin had the advantages of incumbency, plus a servile state media that allows for little open debate on domestic politics and a large state sector that encourages employees to cast votes for the status quo. Putin's popularity is genuine, despite being dented during coronavirus lockdown. On the day before the vote, the Russian President appeared in a videotaped message in front of a stirring new monument to Soviet soldiers killed in World War II.

"They fought so that we could live in peace, work, love, create value and feel proud of Russia, a country with a unique civilization and

a great culture that unites the destinies, hopes and aspirations of many generations of our forefathers," he said.

"We are going to vote for the country where we want to live, with cutting-edge education and healthcare, a reliable system of social protection and an effective government accountable to the people. We are going to vote for a country to the benefit of which we have been working and which we would like to pass on to our children and grandchildren." Those may be pleasing sentiments, to be sure. But that doesn't mean the referendum sits well with all Russians, many of whom are tired of Putin's rule.

Hong Kong: UK makes citizenship offer to residents



Up to three million Hong Kong residents are to be offered the chance to settle in the UK and ultimately apply for citizenship, Boris Johnson has said.

The PM said Hong Kong's freedoms were being violated by a new security law and those affected would be offered a "route" out of the former UK colony.

About 350,000 UK passport holders, and 2.6 million others eligible, will be able to come to the UK for five years.

And after a further year, they will be able to apply for citizenship.

British National Overseas Passport holders in Hong Kong were granted special status in the 1980s but currently have restricted rights and are only entitled to visa-free access to the UK for six months.

Under the government's plans, all British Overseas Na-

tionals and their dependants will be given right to remain in the UK, including the right to work and study, for five years. At this point, they will be able to apply for settled status, and after a further year, seek citizenship.

The PM said Tuesday's passing of a new security law by the Hong Kong authorities was a "clear and serious breach" of the 1985 Sino-British joint declaration - a legally binding agreement which set out how certain freedoms would be protected for the 50 years after China assumed sovereignty in 1997.

"It violates Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy and threatens the freedoms and rights protected by the joint declaration," he said.

"We made clear that if China continued down this path we would introduce a new route for those with British Nation-

al (Overseas) status to enter the UK, granting them limited leave to remain with the ability to live and work in the UK and thereafter to apply for citizenship. And that is precisely what we will do now."

Foreign Office permanent secretary Sir Simon McDonald expressed the government's "deep concern" about the new law to China during a meeting with the country's ambassador Liu Xiomeng.

The UK government has been raising concerns about the national security law and very publicly trying to pressure Beijing into a change heart.

That has clearly failed - so ministers are now fulfilling their promise to allow some three million British Overseas Nationals to come to the UK. This is a significant move and the government wants to send a strong message.

But there will be more pres-

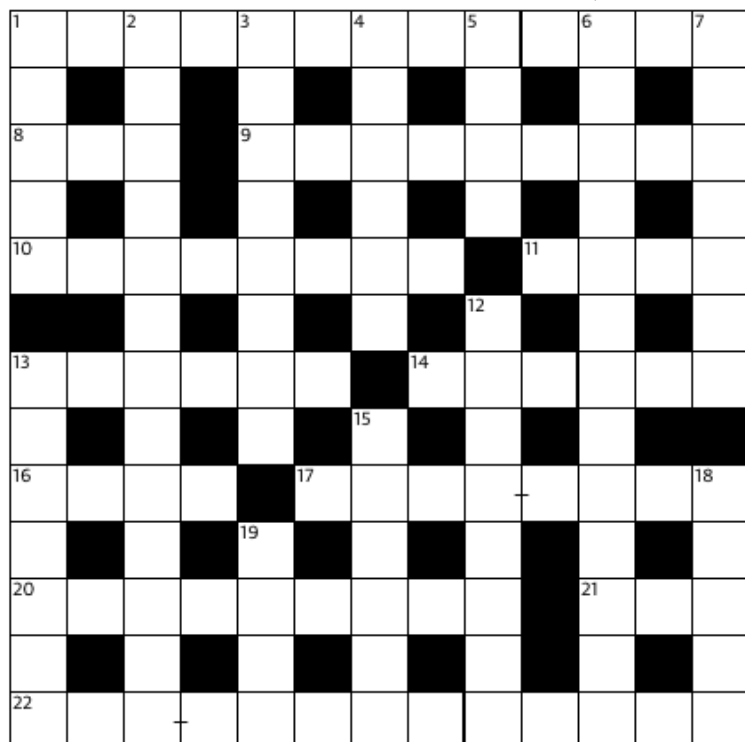
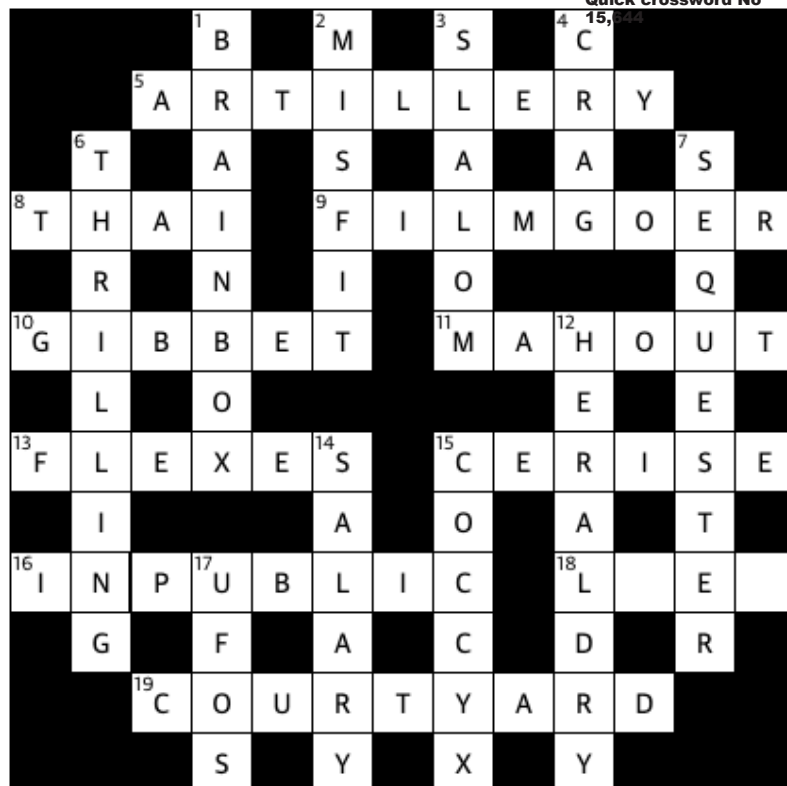
sure now to rethink other elements of our relationship with China - not least the deal to allow Huawei to build parts of the UK's 5G structures.

Many Tory MPs have been lobbying against that for some time - and this will only add to their concern.

Updating MPs on the details, Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said there would be no limit on numbers or quotas and the application process would be simple. "This is a special, bespoke, set of arrangements developed for the unique circumstances we face and in light of our historic commitment to the people of Hong Kong," he said.

Speaking to ITV's Peston programme, Mr Raab acknowledged there "would be little we could do to...cohesively force" China to allow British Overseas Nationals to come to the UK.

QUICK CROSSWORD

Quick crossword No
15,649Quick crossword No
15,644

Across

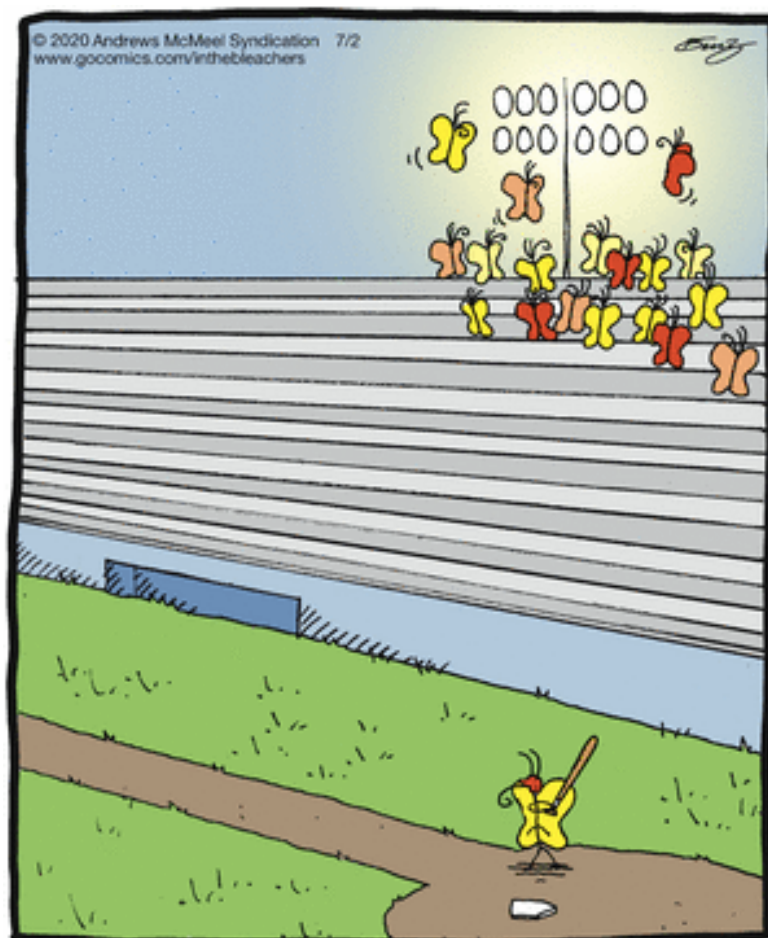
- 1 Celebrity (9,4)
 8 Fake — failure (3)
 9 Go in search of fun (9)
 10 Intense study (8)
 11 Clarified butter, used in Indian cookery (4)
 13 Communal (6)
 14 Test (3,3)
 16 Public open space (4)
 17 Kitchen deputy (4-4)
 20 Pain relief (9)
 21 A life (abbr) (3)
 22 Brief personal encounter — single performance (3-5,5)

Down

- 1 Greek underworld (5)
 2 Landing gear (13)
 3 Age when one may legally buy alcohol in the UK (8)
 4 Over the web (6)
 5 Stage (4)
 6 Miss Muffet's complaint? (13)
 7 Beseech (7)
 12 Commit a sin — spa's rest (anag) (8)
 13 Singer who aims high (7)
 15 Beetroot soup (6)
 18 Overwhelming amount (5)
 19 Unattractive-sounding fruit (4)

CARTOON CORNER

In the Bleachers





DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES (Mar 21-Apr. 19): Keep your mind on attainable objectives and don't rely on outside help for now. Rather than spending time on fantasies or wishful thinking, focus on getting organized and making your home well-run.

TAURUS (Apr. 20-May 20): You can picture how you want things to appear, but it takes effort to make it happen. You might be content with a less costly item, but consider asking a friend for advice and getting something more worthwhile.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20): It might seem as if a fog has lifted. You may be more clearheaded and can observe the signposts and landmarks so you know just where you are. Handle key financial affairs with common sense and good planning.

CANCER (June 21-July 22): Someone close could have their finger on the trigger of a profitable deal. You, however, might be the best judge when it comes to the wisdom of committing to a new relationship or investment.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22): Be a perceptive operator. You might work behind the scenes to turn a problem into an asset. Your priorities may revolve around a job or business project where you can show off skills and experience you have gathered over time.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): Sing along in harmony. A loved one could set a fine example of good manners and professional demeanor. Rather than making excuses, you are prepared to face up to your obligations and work towards mutual goals.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22.): There might be a fly in the ointment. You may focus on fulfilling your desire for a satisfying intimate encounter only to find there's a catch. Concentrate on your job, your work or money-making activities for the best results.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21): The more you learn, the more you can earn and the more you discern. When you need to know something of importance, you'll find that helpful assistance may be readily available. Study the latest reports and data.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): Perseverance can pay off whether you're in hot pursuit of a lucrative business deal or looking for something to enhance your living space. Keep your eyes open and check for potential issues beneath the surface.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): Hope springs eternal, but keep your expectations realistic. Regardless of surface appearances, there could be a surprise during the reveal. Keep your equilibrium and take time to assess before making up your mind.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): Take the money and run. You and a partner or loved one can make a dynamic duo when it comes to achieving fiscal security and a bright future. Share inspiring ideas and wise techniques to empower you both.

PISCES (Feb. 19-Mar. 20): Exercise your common sense before you act on matters of major importance. You might display creative genius while negotiating for more favorable terms and impress people with your friendliness.

Simmons' job safe - Skerritt



Phil Simmons

Phil Simmons job as West Indies head coach is safe.

The assurance was given by Cricket West Indies (CWI) president Ricky Skerritt following calls for Simmons' removal after he left the Windies biosecure training base in Old Trafford, Manchester to attend the funeral of his father-in-law last week.

Since then, president of the Barbados Cricket Association (BCA) Conde Riley wrote a letter to CWI board members frowning upon the decision and demanding the immediate removal of Simmons.

The BCA head, who is also on the board of directors of CWI, said Simmons move was inconsiderate and reckless, and he endangered the lives of the 25-member touring party.

Skerritt dismissed any call for the sacking of 57 year old Trinidadian born Simmons.



Shannon Gabriel

Gabriel added to West Indies Test squad

Experienced fast bowler, Shannon Gabriel, has been added to the West Indies 14-man squad for the anticipated tour of England which bowls off next Wednesday at the Ageas Bowl in Southampton.

Originally, the 32 year old Trinidadian paceman was named in the 25 member touring party among the reserves.

However, after proving his fitness following an ankle injury which kept him sidelined since September last year, Cricket West Indies (CWI) announced Gabriel's inclusion for the three-match bio-secure series.

Gabriel, who has 133 Test wickets, adds to an already exciting Windies attack led by Barbadian Kemar Roach. The other fast bowlers are Alzarri Joseph, Captain Jason Holder and Chemar Holder.



Tallawahs CEO breaks silence on Chris Gayle comments

CEO of the Jamaica Tallawahs CPL outfit, Jeff Miller has told Nationwide Sports that he was forced to explain his side of the story to his parents after they heard what Jamaica and West Indies batting star said about him during his release from the Jamaica Tallawahs CPL franchise

Miller said it was difficult for his parents not to have heard the comments because it was all over and because of that he had no choice but to give his side of the story



when his parents called.

However, Miller says he

has moved past that episode and is even willing to

offer a hand of friendship to

Gayle who accused Miller of discrimination, saying it only happened because he is black, and Miller explained how he would deal with a scenario where both of them happen to be on the same street.

“I would walk over to him and extend my hand and say how it’s going Chris and if he refused to shake my hands then I just move on, but I would be the first to reach out to him,” Miller declared.

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From the village of Potters

I am from the village of Potters the best area in Antigua and Barbuda and I am proud of the contribution I have made in sports and community development the words of Joel Rayne a well known and respected sports broadcaster at the state own ABS Television and Radio.

Talking to PointeXpress on Thursday Joel noted that he grew up in the quiet village of Potters playing sports anywhere it was possible. "We played basketball, football, and cricket on the streets and anywhere there was a space to express ourselves as youngsters," he noted.

He lamented what, in his view, is responsible for the general decline in sports in the country. "We have moved from a sporting culture to a society that loves sports but has failed in upgrading our infrastructure, facilities and providing pathways to encourage young people to understand the many benefits available through sports," he bemoaned.

Rayne congratulated the local media for their creativ-

ity during COVID-19 in unearthing many people who have made a contribution to the development of sports who, normally, would have been overlooked.

The man from Potters also expressed his dismay that certain individuals who have been instrumental in the improvement of young people have been overlooked to be honored by the state.

"Outstanding individuals such as Guy Yearwood, James "Tanny" Rose Snr, and Gordon Banks Derrick need to receive their flowers while they are alive," Rayne stated.

He credited Tanny Rose for playing a major role in his growth as a broadcaster providing pathways through many courses abroad while he was a senior member of staff at ABS.

Yearwood has developed many cricketers who have gone on to represent the Leeward Islands and West Indies while Derrick rose to lead Caribbean Football Union and was a stone's throw away from becoming one of the most powerful men in world football.

He also feels that Trinida-



dian great Brian Lara should be honored for his outstanding performance at the Antigua Recreation Ground breaking the world record twice at the venue.

Rayne has served as general secretary of the basketball association, Vice president of the Antigua and Barbuda Football Association and a high ranking member of the National Olympic Committee.

The sports administrator, who is a member of the NOC, said their responsibility is to assist elite athletes

but they have been playing a role helping local athletes where the need arises.

The broadcaster is encouraging parents to get involved in their children's careers as it can only help with their advancement.

Rayne is proud of his time with the Potters Football Club which saw the unit being promoted twice, but is very sad with their recent output as they are rooted bottom of the first division heading for relegation to the second division.

"It's time for development of young talent and I wish them all the best," Rayne said.

DEWS