

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

# POINTX PRESS

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# ACCUSED COP SHOWS SHAME!

SEE PAGE 3



INSIDE: PM IN ACTION FOR YOUTH AND FOR THE ENVIRONMENT (SEE PAGES 4 AND 12)

# Congratulations, Cabinet, for progressive steps on coconuts and corporal punishment

In every aspect of morphology, anatomy and life cycle, the coconut tree is indispensable to both the definition and the experience of our existence in island paradises – none more paradisiacal than Antigua and Barbuda.

Remove the coconut and you markedly denude the paradise of its emblematic visual outline; its reassuring, soothing and hospitable allure; a perennially reliable source of very healthy food and drink which the coconut continually gives without demanding any time-consuming care or expensive fertilizers in return; and the free environmental guardianship whose high tolerance for salinity

(along with its dense soil-binding and erosion-preventing roots) are often the salvation of beaches and coastlines from sand-mining and sea level incursion. But the iconic coconut palm – a centerpiece of ALL our tourism marketing and promotional paraphernalia (t-shirts, postcards, mugs, brochures, commercials and videos) – has been under assault for many years with insufficient response from its human beneficiaries in the form of timely interventions to mitigate and defend against the tenacious onslaught of diseases and the ravages of increasingly violent hurricanes.

Coconut mite, red palm mite, red mealy bug,

pink mealy bug, lethal yellowing, leaf spot, leaf blight – have been relentless, as have been the battering by winds that more-and-more inch toward 200 mile-per-hour regularity.

Our restorative replanting and sourcing of new, disease-resistant varieties has generally not kept pace with these perils and their discernible decimation of our once ubiquitous sentinels and guarantors of food security, fuel sustenance, resistance to land degradation and soil loss, providers of free raw materials for commercially successful arts and crafts of quantities and diversity limited only by our imagination and creativity.

... That is, until our Cabinet of Ministers, led by the ever forward-thinking and future-minded Gaston Browne, revealed that it has been taking action to decisively turn the corner on this steady coconut wipeout.

As per this week's post-Cabinet briefing notes ... "100,000 coconut palm seeds from Costa Rica will enter Antigua shortly for propagation of new coconut palms that were destroyed during the lethal yellowing disease which killed off thousands of palms ... The seeds will produce trees resistant to this disease. They will grow about six feet tall, and will begin producing fruit shortly after three

years of growth ... Other farmers have already begun the process of propagating the resistant strain of palms for their own use.”

No further comment is needed except our continued profuse congratulations to the Gaston Browne administration for its visionary recog-

nition of the important and – we dare say – indispensable role of the coconut in our history, heritage, economy, image and identity.

Our felicitations to the Cabinet are no less for its expressed desire to review the issue of corporal punishment in schools. According

to some post-Cabinet notes, “consideration was given”, at the apex executive body’s weekly meeting on Wednesday, “to [end] that form of punishment”, but to defer a final decision pending consultation with parents, teachers and other key stakeholders. The Cabinet’s

view and preference for “alternative forms of punishment ... to be adopted and beatings ended” is more in step with the values and perspectives of an emancipated people who have evolved into higher levels of social and cultural enlightenment.



## Veteran senior cop in court for alleged theft of money; possession of illegal gun and ammo

Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) Glenroy Weekes (*SEE FRONT PAGE PICTURE, second from left with green cap*) bowed his head as he entered the St. John’s Magistrate Court on Thursday afternoon to

face larceny and illegal weapon charges. He was flanked by his attorney, Leon “Chaku” Symister. Prosecutors allege that the veteran firefighter stole money while battling a blaze at XPZ Supermarket on Tuesday. A subsequent

search of his home reportedly turned up the unlicensed firearm and ammunition. The accused recently celebrated 40 years as a member of the Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda, but, if convicted, could see

all of this go up in the smoke of disgrace, dismissal and possible imprisonment. He has reportedly been suspended from the Force pending the outcome of the Court cases against him.

# PM calls on young scholars to embrace intellectual approach



Prime Minister Gaston Browne has called on the region's young scholars to embrace the intellectual approach to problem solving.

The country's leader was speaking on Thursday 3rd June at the CXC Regional Awards for Outstanding Performance in July/August 2020 examinations held in Antigua and Barbuda.

"There are those who have deliberately taken an anti-intellectual posture and would

seek to ridicule you for embracing scholarship. I urge you to embrace your intellect and to continue pursuing excellence. The Caribbean region is depending on you to take the baton from my generation and to elevate our people to heights that our parents never dreamed of. Begin to cultivate an unshakable conviction and commitment to the advancement of the region and jealously protect our

place in the world," said Prime Minister Browne.

The country's leader also pointed out that although not recognized immediately, the experience of scholars during the current global pandemic is something no generation alive today has ever experienced.

"It is often said that Caribbean people do not document their

experiences as much as they ought to. I therefore encourage you to consign that truism to the annals of idle chatter and document your experiences so that your children can read about them in the future. This may very well become an important exercise in creating a blueprint for future generations," he stated.



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# Senate approves key legislative amendments

The Senate on Thursday approved amendments to three pieces of legislation: the Loan Borrowing (ACB) Amendment Act; the Mount St. John's Medical Centre Amendment Bill, and the Money Laundering Prevention Amendment Act. Mover of the bills, Leader of Government Business Senator Maureen Payne-Hyman explained that while the amendments to the laws were not major, their impact was nonetheless significant.

In the Loan Borrowing (ACB) Amendment Act, Senator Hyman noted that original legislation was passed in December of last year, but that the government had been able to negotiate better terms and there was need to return to Parliament to make the required changes.

"Basically, the loan has been re-configured with a new schedule in place. The truth is nothing has been changed in terms of the overall monies being borrowed. However, the interest rate has been reduced from 11 to nine percent, and the security and everything else remain intact," she explained.

According to the Senator, the

Government was able to negotiate better terms and took advantage of these.

Opposition Senator Damani Tabor was generally supportive of the move, but he suggested that an apparent softening of the Government's stance towards the International Monetary Fund (IMF) would have been a better option as the interest rate was much lower at one percent.

He recommended that the Government consolidate its loan portfolio with an IMF facility at the lower rate and use the 'savings' to undertake social programmes to assist families and businesses during the pandemic.

Tabor's recommendation, though, drew sharp rebukes from several on the Government benches, including Senator Osbert Fredrick who questioned the Opposition party's fascination with the IMF.

"The IMF may give us loans at lower interest rates but they come with conditions such as retrenchment in the public sector. It would make it easier for the Government to pay, but make it harder for the people," Frederick explained.

In his contribution, Government Senator Philip Shoul said it was commendable that the Government was able to re-negotiate the interest at a lower rate which will result in significant savings.

He also stated that it was foolhardy to think the Government could negotiate a consolidation loan with the IMF and then 'give away' the expected 'savings' from the lower interest rate.

"It is not going to happen. Any loan from the IMF will come with conditions attached," Shoul declared.

Government Senator Colin O'Neal Browne, for his part, also took issue with Senator Tabor's suggestion about going to the IMF, stating that by going to a local finance institutions it is a guarantee that the interest fees paid to the bank will remain in the economy for the overall good of all concerned.

The Mount St. John's Amendment Bill also generated a lively debate, after which it was approved by the Senate. The Money Laundering Prevention Amendment Bill also received the approval of the Upper House.

# Free public access to beaches reaffirmed; National Parks to be expanded with addition of HMB land



*By Shelton Daniel*

Expanding the scope of Antigua and Barbuda's national parks was one of the subjects discussed during the Cabinet of Ministers' weekly meeting on Wednesday, according to Information Minister Melford Nicholas.

He said this expansion "would include the Half Moon Bay area", with particular focus on a portion of land to which some special historic and patrimonial significance is attached.

"There was an area of approximately 27 acres of land around Half Moon Bay that the Father of the Nation [the late former Prime

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Minister, Sir Vere Cornwall Bird] had given some directions that it should remain for public use; and we are of the mind that [this land] should be incorporated into part of the National Parks.” Nicholas said Cabinet also “looked at some concerns that were raised by weekenders – if I could coin such a term – who would frequent some of the offshore islands, and there is concern that a number of the beaches on the offshore islands have now become places where fares

are being collected.” He said Government wanted to remind all concerned that “the use of the beaches – whether beyond the mainland or on any of the offshore islands are for public use; and so, if persons were to arrive on any of these beaches from a seaward journey on a boat or a yacht or whatever means ... there can be no request for fares for being on these beaches.” Nicholas disclosed that, “Claims have been made for private ownership of another one of these

offshore islands and we are going to engage those particular persons.” In that regard, he stated further, “We have already asked the Attorney General’s Office to seek to get the assertion in the Land Registry to ensure that this is in fact the case; and, should that be borne out in fact by what is in the books and it is registered ownership of a property, then of course that would be respected in law. But ... the adjoining beaches on those lands will remain for public use.”

## Mystery woman departed Antigua one day after Choksi disappeared – sources

*By Shelton Daniel*

Information Minister Melford Nicholas refused to be drawn into any detailed discussion about the identity and present location of a so-called “mystery woman” who is alleged to have accompanied Indian fugitive Mehul Choksi on his illegal May 23rd departure from Antigua.

Choksi subsequently showed up in Dominica where he was arrested and charged for illegally entering that country. He however claimed to have been abducted from Antigua and taken to Dominica against his will.

Pictures of Choksi in detention in Dominica appear to show signs of physical injury to various parts of his body, such a bloody eye and bruises on his hand and shoulder.

He is reported to have told his lawyers and law enforcement authorities in Dominica that he was beaten by his captors. Prior to his disappearance from Antigua – allegedly on his way to have dinner at a restaurant near his residence in the Jolly Beach area – Choksi is said to have been in the company (not for the first time) of a woman he met and befriended in the course of the past year or six months.

According to various sources, the woman is a real estate investment consultant who accompanied Choksi on walks and occasionally dined with him. Her name has been given, mostly in reports by Indian media, as Barbara Jose at first, and then as Barbara Jabarica.

During his weekly radio program last Saturday, Antigua

and Barbuda’s Prime Minister Gaston Browne said he had received information suggesting that “Choksi may have taken his girlfriend to Dominica to dinner and to have a good time when he got caught.”

A confusion of media reports mingled with accusations by Choksi’s lawyers and politically-fueled convenient “sympathy” from opposition elements in Antigua and Dominica have alleged that the so-called mystery woman was the bait in a so-called “honey trap” laid for Choksi.

In claims reminiscent of the abduction and murder in Turkey a few years of Saudi journalist and political dissident Jamal Khashoggi, the pro-Choksi advocates have alleged that he was lured by this presumed female paramour to her apartment or to a din-

ner invitation where he was set upon by abductors who physically assaulted and spirited him out of Antigua.

What has not been clear is whether this phantom honey-trap woman remained in Antigua after Choksi's departure or whether she accompanied him to Dominica – regardless of whether she did so as a willing companion or as part of the alleged border-violating kidnap operation.

Has law enforcement identified and located Barbara Jose/Jabarica – whether in Antigua or Dominica to perchance determine if she was party in any way to an illegal departure from Antigua and illegal entry into Dominica – not to mention the even more dangerously illegal cross-border abduction of an Antigua and Barbuda citizen? Minister Melford Nicholas was careful to provide only the dry bones minimum in responding to that question from Pointe Xpress during the live post-Cabinet media briefing on Thursday morning.

“We did receive intelligence briefings. I'm not obliged to disclose any of that intelligence informa-

tion, on the basis that it could prejudice the investigations that are currently taking place.”

Nicholas pointed out that the situation regarding Choksi's arrival in Dominica was presently before the Court in that country. “I would not want to prejudice those discussions, other than to say that the Cabinet has received intelligence briefings about the circumstances surrounding the departure or removal of Mr. Choksi from the island, and those investigations continue.”

Nicholas however gave the assurance

that, “Should it be borne out in facts and in the courts that Mr. Choksi was abducted and ... left one of our ports, then clearly that represents a matter that has to be rectified going forward.” Asked categorically whether the existence of that alleged mystery female had been determined and her location known at this time, Nicholas was again ambiguous and non-committal.

“Other than what has been reported in the media ... I would not further any speculation in that particular area,” the Information Minister stated. Prior to publication

of this issue, Pointe Xpress has become aware of further reports in Indian media allegedly quoting Choksi's wife as claiming that while the woman connected to her husband is indeed named Barbara Jabarica, the pictures purportedly of her that have been in circulation do not portray the person she is familiar with. We have further learned that the named mystery woman legally departed Antigua via the V.C. International Airport about 8:00 p.m. the day after Mehl Choksi's disappearance.

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# Antigua and Barbuda to launch major environmental project

On Thursday, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Barbuda Affairs announced that with the arrival of IICA's first batch of vetiver grass, a major project is set to be launched. The project, which is said to be entitled "Strengthening coastal ecosystems-based adaptation (EBA) and community engagement", seeks to facilitate the restoration of marine coastal ecosystem health and improvement of sustainable livelihood opportunities in communities that are increasingly threatened by the development of upland watersheds and climate change. The project will include community engagement and implementation of nature-based solutions, e.g the circulation of vetiver grass. This project is funded under the Caribbean Biodiversity Fund (CBF) EbA facility, support-

ed by the government of Germany through the German Development Bank and the International Climate Initiative. A release by the Ministry of Agriculture explained that the IICA Delegation in Antigua and Barbuda, as the implementing institution of this regional project, is partnering with local agencies, CARDI and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Barbuda Affairs, in executing the activities. The first batch of vetiver grass, a total of 3,100 slips, arrived from Dominica via sea to support the propagation of vetiver grass in Antigua and Barbuda. Another shipment of 3,400 slips is expected to arrive in the upcoming week. According to the release, "The slips were transported to the Forestry Unit where they will undergo a quarantine period prior to transplanting

to the ministry's propagation nursery located in Bendals and the Gilbert's Agriculture and Rural Development (GARD) Centre located at Mercers Creek. These nurseries are said to be fully equipped with drip irrigation systems which will enable a more efficient approach to administer water and fertilizer. Once transplanted, the plants will be cared for and maintained at both nurseries with the objective to rapidly multiply 35,000-45,000 plants which will be harvested in approximately 4-6 months, given conditions favorable for the balance of the year. These plants will then be transported and planted at the main project site, which is located at the Cooks Landfill (border with mangrove swamp) managed by the National Solid Waste Department.

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# Dr. Lester Simon told to stay in his lane

By Shelton Daniel

Stay in your lane, is essentially what a highly respected local medical expert has been told by a member of the Cabinet of Ministers, in response to the doctor's criticism of a recent Government decision.

Dr. Lester Simon was recently (and has repeatedly been) praised by Prime Minister Gaston Browne for his contribution – in prominent and spearheading roles – to the national response against the COVID-19

pandemic. Dr. Simon is widely venerated in his distinguished and very long-serving capacities as Antigua and Barbuda's most senior pathologist and as head of laboratory services at the country main hospital, the Sir Lester Bird Mount St. John's Medical Center.

In addition to that, Dr. Simon is chairman of the National Working Group on COVID-19, a capacity in which he has regularly engaged with the public via all available media to disseminate and defend scientific informa-

tion pertaining to the virus and proven methods of combatting its spread.

He has also openly rebutted vaccine conspiracy theorists and critics of sustained containment measures such as continued mask wearing, social distancing, curbs on mass crowd gatherings, etc. But government's recent decision to permit a controlled reopening of fetes (see Pointe Xpress of Wednesday 2nd June 2021, Pages 8-9, Fete Promoters and Government Agree on a Restart of Party Season) has

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**Dr. Lester Simon**

not gone down well with Dr. Simon who, on his personal Facebook page, has described the decision as “madness”. Among other reasons explained for his disagreement, Dr. Simon is worried that unvaccinated people will somehow be able to breach the admission control measures put in place. He has also warned that once attendees become absorbed into the revelry, with the usual attendant consumption of alcoholic beverages, they will quickly dispense with protective measures such as keeping on their masks. Simon further went on to express alarm at plans to resume the nation’s annual carnival celebrations this year, after they were cancelled in 2020 due to the pandemic.

During the weekly live post-Cabinet media briefing on Thursday morning, Information Minister

Melford Nicholas was asked for Government’s reaction to Dr. Simon’s misgivings.

He began his answer by saying that, “The government has not taken any position with regard to Dr. Simon. He has certainly expressed an opinion. What I would say at this point ... is that within the lane that Dr. Simon has had to operate ... we ... relied on [his] input and technical expertise ... Dr. Simon brings a degree of expertise on board which the Government has armed itself with and relied on his expertise in that particular area.”

Nicholas reminded that the challenge facing Government as a result of the pandemic has always been to simultaneously safeguard the nation’s health while maintaining livelihoods as well. “This is absolutely not Dr. Simon’s lane. We note his comments, but

we have to give support and give an opportunity for other players to begin to play their role.” He described the fete promoters as “absolutely doing the right thing in terms of embracing what it is going to take for us to be able to return to a level of normalcy. They have indicated economic hardships and there are a number of persons who they have employed.

So, from the standpoint of where the government is concerned ... once we are taking care to ensure that we do not have any super-spreading events ... they are operating upon the guidelines of the Ministry of Health ... that must be understood as the over-riding consideration.”

He added with finality that, “Again, this is not Dr. Simon’s lane.”

# PM Browne urges businesses to mount tree planting exercise



Prime Minister Gaston Browne on Thursday joined the First Caribbean International Bank at the University of the West Indies Five Islands Campus for the planting of five trees as part of a year-long campaign celebrating 100 years of the bank. During his remarks, PM Browne outlined the importance of planting trees, stating that it's one of the most inexpensive respons-

es to climate change and at the same time addresses the global warming issue by reducing temperatures, as well as sequestering carbon and inducing more rainfall.

Prime Minister Browne was joined in the tree planting exercise by Chairman of the Board of UWI Five Islands, Ambassador Aziz Hadeed; Pro Vice Chancellor of UWI Five Islands, Professor Denzil Williams; First Caribbe-

an's Director of Sales for the OECS and Country Head for Antigua and Barbuda, Ms. Ladesa James-Williams; a student from the Five Islands Primary School; and President of the Student Guild of UWI Five Islands. The accompanying pictures show Prime Minister Browne and others involved in the tree planting ceremony at UWI Five Islands on Thursday.

# Rotary Club of Antigua supports Wadadli Pen Prize Competition



**A Wadadli Pen first – father and daughter in the top 3.**

The Rotary Club of Antigua (RCA) has recently contributed \$4,045.97 towards cash prizes in the 2021 Wadadli Pen Prize Competition.

This is the first time that the Rotary Club of Antigua has supported the initiative and RCA's President Kevin Silston, explained that this is in keeping with the Club's mantra.

"Rotary usually supports the spelling bee (and reading) competition and

this year in particular because of the COVID-related challenges, we were unable to do that. More broadly, this year, our theme has been opening opportunities by supporting youth development and healthy lifestyle choices. Therefore, with the Wadadli Pen Prize Competition, we can provide some support and it also allows us to execute our mandate, while at the same time supporting a worthy cause." The Club also sponsored the certificates for the 10 finalists in the competition. The announcement of winners was made on May 30th, 2021, via a virtual ceremony, which was attended by sponsors and participants. According to a release from the Wadadli Youth Pen Prize, "This year, Kevin Liddie's name has been added to the Alstynne Allen Memorial Plaque, sponsored by the Best of Books, as winner of the 2021 Wadadli Youth Pen Prize Challenge. The writer of 'Mildred, You No Easy', benefiting from the opening up of the usually youth-focused Prize, finds himself in

company with his 13-year-old daughter Antigua Girls High School student Aunjelique, third-placed with her poem 'The Beach'. Teen, Ashley-Whitney Joshua, author of 'Hiraeth', ranks second. Wadadli Pen congratulates them for emerging victorious from among 72 entries. The announcement of winners was made on May 30th 2021, in the second year of virtual awards." This virtual shift, the organizers said, is not the only way '2020' impacted Wadadli Pen; '2020' was also a subtheme. The subtheme winner is Jason Gilead, whose story 'The Great Old Woodslave' is also an honourable mention for the Wadadli Pen 2021 main prize. Sheniqua Greaves, 'The Juxtaposed Reprieve', is honourable mention for both the '2020' subtheme prize and the main prize.

Other main prize honourable mentions are last year's winner Andre Warner, 'The Brave One', and 15-year-old Christ the King High School student Razonique Looby, 'Vixen'.

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# Why 84 countries are borrowing from the IMF



*By Sir Ronald Sanders*

*(The writer is Antigua and Barbuda's Ambassador to the United States and the Organization of American States. He is also a Senior Fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies at the University of London and Massey College in the University of Toronto. The views expressed are entirely his own)*

In the wake of the economic damage

done by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, countries in every continent of the world have turned to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for assistance.

It is right that they have done so. The IMF exists to provide economic and financial support to countries when other options have been extinguished. The pandemic brought countries to that situation in rapid time, partic-

ularly tourism dependent countries which were the hardest hit.

In some countries, there is an ideological resentment of the IMF. That resentment is based on past harsh conditionalities that the Fund included in the terms of its loans to countries already in desperate straits. That resentment should be re-evaluated. IMF conditionalities still exist, but they are more geared to recognising the breathing space governments require to get their countries' economies performing at an optimum level. The Fund wants to be repaid, so that, in turn, it can pay back the banks, governments and institutions from which it borrows to supplement its lending resources.

While the main source for IMF loans on non-concessional terms are provided by member countries,

through their quota payments, the Fund also borrows money that it lends. Of the IMF's current total resources for lending, amounting to about US\$1 trillion, a significant portion is money that must be repaid.

If the IMF fails to service its loans, the entire world will lose an extremely important pillar of the global financial architecture, resulting in infectious economic instability and, eventually, political chaos and civil strife.

Consequently, like any lender, the IMF has to make sure that borrowing countries will be able to repay. It sets terms – called conditionalities – to ensure that the best use is made by borrowers of the money they are advanced, and that loans can be repaid.

Presently, IMF loans are on more generous terms than they used

to be. For instance, financing for approved medium term growth and development strategies could be secured with a repayment period of 14 years, a 4-year moratorium and an interest rate of 1 per cent. Loans of this nature are not available from any other source.

Of course, negotiating the best conditionalities is important. This is not the time to lay-off public sector workers, especially in countries where employment in the private sector has declined disastrously because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The IMF Executive Board and Management are aware of that and have adopted policies that are more open to support for vulnerable groups than they were in the past.

What is more, approval by the IMF to fund a programme opens the door to borrowing from other financial institutions, and to rescheduling debt with agen-

cies such as the Paris Club. These institutions, including the Caribbean Development Bank, regard the imprimatur of the IMF as crucial in determining a country's creditworthiness.

In the present global economic crisis, 84 countries have already taken advantage of the IMF's lending to the tune of US\$109,594.38 million. Of those countries, eight are CARICOM states, namely: Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines which have borrowed US\$842 million. Eleven Latin American countries, including Honduras, Costa Rica, Panama, Peru, Ecuador and Nicaragua, have borrowed US\$66,677.46 million.

Those who argue against the IMF on ideological grounds should have alternative sources of financing to propose. Either they must show a clear path to the capacity of their countries to

recover and prosper from renewed and sustainable economic activity, or they must identify cheaper sources of borrowing with less strenuous terms. If they cannot identify such possibilities in a realistic way, then the only alternative to borrowing from the IMF is to leave their economies to languish, running out of money and failing to provide goods and services that their people expect.

The current economic conditions across the CARICOM states, except for Guyana and possibly St Kitts-Nevis and Trinidad and Tobago, require pragmatism and practicality in recognising that working with the IMF has value.

There is no shame in going to the IMF to borrow in the current climate. It is a necessity, particularly when other options have dried-up. Further, the IMF is fulfilling the role for which it was created – to lend when other op-

tions are closed. The anti-IMF ideological argument is one that cuts off your nose to spite your face. It makes little sense.

In the current crisis, political parties and others that try to discredit governments because they opt to borrow from the IMF, ignore two salient points. First, governments are not now constrained to approach the IMF because of any failed policies they pursued. They approach the IMF because the devastating effects of the pandemic forced them there. And, second, the IMF is a lender of last resort. Governments contract with the IMF because the economic circumstances of their countries are such that they must borrow to sustain their populations, and, in those conditions, where better than the institution that provides the cheapest lending.

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*In order to qualify for a loan under the programme, applicants must meet the following criteria:*

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- Be pursuing or propose to pursue a fulltime course of study approved by the Student Loan Advisory Committee (SLAC).



# Trinidad Gov't approves priority vaccination, travel exemptions for artistes



**Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, Randall Mitchell**

**LoopTT** - Members of the entertainment industry who wish to leave the country to perform abroad and return home will be granted travel exemptions.

The artistes will also be prioritized for COVID-19 vaccines.

Recently, the Trinbago Unified Calypsonians' Organization (TUCO) wrote to Health Minister Terrence Deyalsingh requesting special consideration for local musicians in the ongoing vaccination drive.

Speaking on Twitter Spaces on Wednesday night, Attorney General Faris Al-Rawi confirmed that Cabinet on Wednesday agreed to priority vaccination for artistes.

The conversation was hosted by Al-Rawi and included several members of the entertainment

industry, including DJ and producer Travis World, soca artiste Sekon Sta, promoter and DJ Private Ryan and fete promoter Jules Sobion, son of former Attorney General Keith Sobion.

Al-Rawi explained that Tourism Minister Randall Mitchell took a note to Cabinet on priority vaccination for artistes and it was given approval.

He said: "Greenlight for priorities for artistes. It's just not special treatment. The artistes of this country bring brand recognition to the country, bring prioritization of the economic focus for the country. You guys are in the priority zone."

He continued: "What we are trying to do right now is ensure that the vaccine train hits Trinidad

real fast, in any event, so that we have transporting of people back and forth. The Prime Minister meets with the airline industry, so all of the dials are pushed right now to max as we plan the exit from COVID-19."

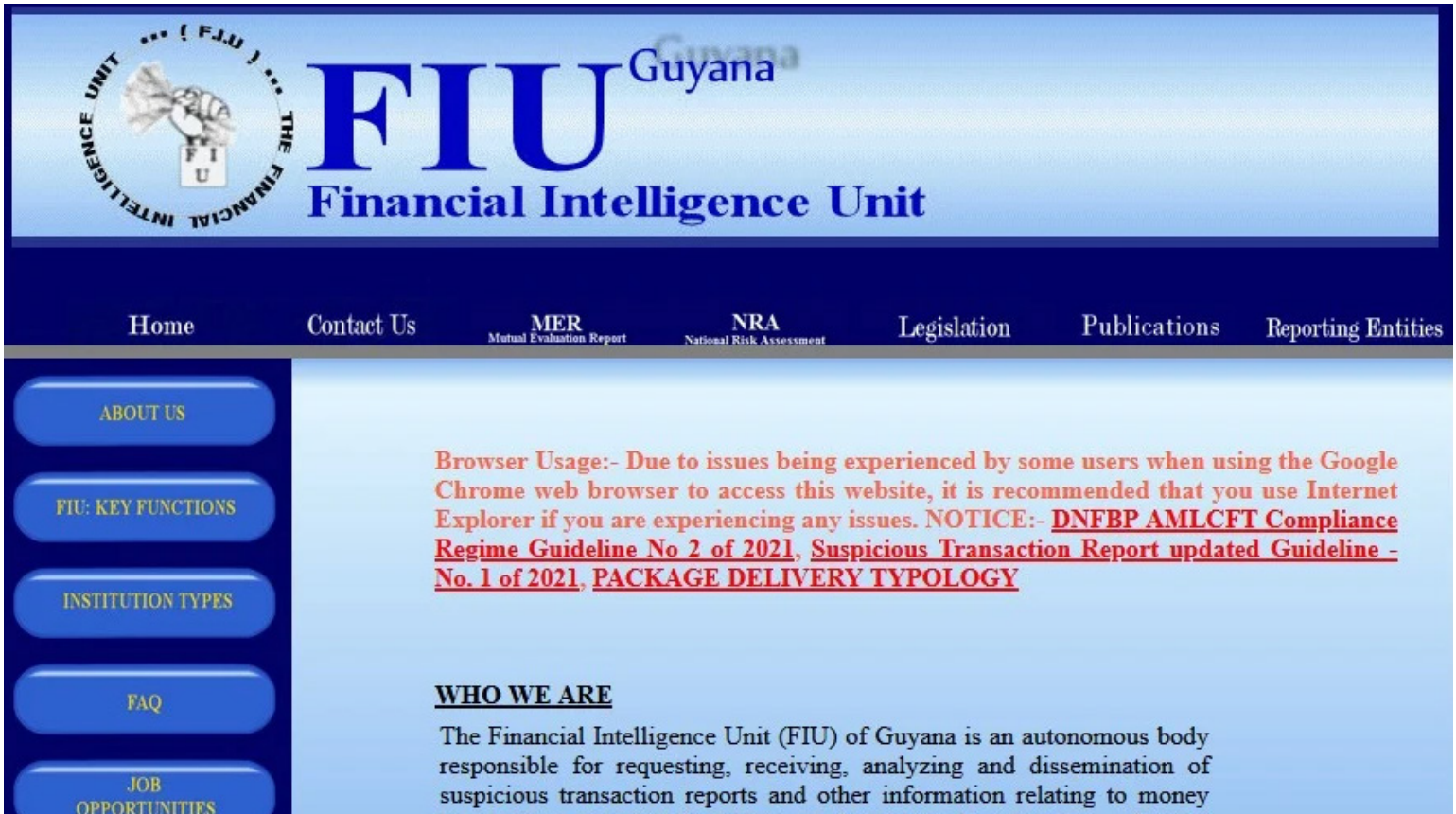
Mitchell, who joined the conversation later that night, outlined the plans for artistes.

He said artistes will be prioritized for vaccines and will be used to promote the Ministry of Health's national vaccination programme. The tourism minister further noted that the entertainment industry has reopened in North-American counties and cities. He added that local artistes were hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic and have been unable to earn an income due to the restrictions.

He said: "What we have proposed is that you guys can go ahead, leave the country, take up your bookings, do what you need to do, earn what you need to earn, because we have realized that you all have had a major hit to your earning potential for the last 14 to 15 months.

You go abroad, you do your gigs and we are going to make exemptions easier. No anxiety, you just contact us, we liaise with the Ministry of National Security, and we get those exemptions for you so there is no uncertainty in the whole process. There is no considering whether you are going to spend all your money on hotel fees and living out there without a sense of when you can return."

# Guyana Financial Intelligence Unit warns of 'romance scams'



**Browser Usage:-** Due to issues being experienced by some users when using the Google Chrome web browser to access this website, it is recommended that you use Internet Explorer if you are experiencing any issues. **NOTICE:-** [DNFBP AMLCFT Compliance Regime Guideline No 2 of 2021](#), [Suspicious Transaction Report updated Guideline - No. 1 of 2021](#), [PACKAGE DELIVERY TYPOLOGY](#)

**WHO WE ARE**

The Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) of Guyana is an autonomous body responsible for requesting, receiving, analyzing and dissemination of suspicious transaction reports and other information relating to money

**Stabroek News** - The Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) of Guyana on Thursday said it wished to bring to the attention of the public, the existence of persons in the country who are actively involved with international partners in the commission of what is referred to as "Package Delivery Scams or Romance Scams". In a statement, the FIU said Package Delivery or Romance Scammers have emerged more prominently during the Covid-19 pandemic. This scam targets persons via several social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. The methodology used by the scammers is to befriend unsuspecting persons via the aforementioned digital platforms. "After some time used to build trust with their 'new friend' or 'love interest', the scammer

promises the intended victim some form of assistance. This, in most instances, is supposedly a 'package' containing valuable gift items such as designer clothing, jewelry, televisions, cell phones and other electronic devices. The victim is usually contacted by a local associate of the scammer, confirming the arrival of the package and requesting their personal contact and other information. The intended victim is subsequently contacted again and requested to deposit money to a specified local Bank Account or send via a money transfer agency (MTA). They advise that the payment is required to cover brokerage fees, customs duties, penalties and/or shipping charges for the package(s), which was found on inspection to contain high valued items. "Once the payment is made, the

scammers discontinue all contact with the victim. In some instances, requests are made for additional payments for various reasons which may sound plausible to unsuspecting individuals", the FIU said. It added, "If you or someone you know is approached via Email, Facebook, WhatsApp, SMS, etc., and promised gifts or Covid-19 related financial or other assistance, beware! This may be a SCAM. DO NOT share any personal information, transfer or deposit money into the bank account of persons you meet online and do not know very well. "If you believe that you are a victim of the 'Romance or Package Delivery Scam', report it IMMEDIATELY to the nearest Police Station".



*Asheka Haynes says she suffered a severe asthma attack after being choked and slapped by police last Friday.*

## SVG woman says she almost died after police beating

*I-Witness News, SVG* - Police allegedly beat two sisters at their Glen home last Friday, causing the younger one to have an asthma attack that she said could have left her with brain damage or dead.

Asheka Antoine, 27, told the media on Tuesday that officers showed very little concern for her, even as she almost died.

Speaking to the media in the Kingstown chambers of her lawyer, Kay Bacchus-Baptiste, Antoine said an officer turned over her bedside table when she asked him to pass her the asthma pump she keeps on it because of breathing problems at night.

She said her asthma attack began after an officer choked her and beat her on the head when they came to the house, claiming they were looking for guns and ammunition. Antoine's sister, Sho-

morn Haynes, 32, who also lives at the house, said the police also beat her in the presence of her children.

"The Senator, they said they were protecting her because she is a woman. What are we? Are we men?" Haynes said.

She was speaking about the April 13 case in which Senator Ashelle Morgan and Assistant Director of Public Prosecution Karim Nelson have been implicated in the shooting of Diamond resident Cornelius John at his home.

No arrest has been made in the case, although John, a 60-year-old businessman, has identified one of his alleged attackers.

"We is dogs. We nah men; we ah dog," Antoine said sarcastically in response to her sister's comment. At the press conference, Bacchus-Baptiste read what she could discern from the medical

reports that Dr. Michael Goodluck, the district medical officer, produced when he attended to the sisters around 1 p.m. on Friday.

The report said that Antoine had several hematomas; multiple contusions; abrasions to the cheek, neck, anterior chest wall; the entire back, upper limbs, the thighs had painful swellings; contusions to the general scalp which triggered a seizure; and bronchial asthmatic severe episode; and a bruised pelvis.

Haynes' report spoke of "severely painful" and "very tearful".

The doctor said Haynes had severely painful stress contusions with significant swellings to the left cheek with oral inner mucus, contusions, several painful ruptured membranes, and her ear was severely painful and bruised.

# CARICOM SG calls for fairness in international financing for SIDs



*CARICOM Secretary-General Ambassador Irwin LaRocque*

**CARICOM Today** - CARICOM Secretary-General, Ambassador Irwin LaRocque has made a call for fairness in international financing for Small Island Developing States (SIDs), noting that they have been experiencing a battering from climate impacts, not of their own making. "We have had to face the sharp end of climate change impacts in conjunction with our other inherent vulnerabilities. It is, therefore, crucial that vulnerability be the main criterion in determining access to concessional financing, which we urgently need in our quest for resilience." The CARICOM Secretary-General was at the

time speaking at a High Level Panel Discussion on Climate Disruption, Biodiversity Loss and Nature-Based Solutions.

In partnership with the CARICOM Secretariat and the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCCC), the Government of the United Kingdom (UK) hosted the virtual Forum, as President of the Twenty Sixth Conference of Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP26) on Tuesday 25 May.

The organizers anticipated that the discussion would build on the momentum provided by the CARICOM Moment of Ambition, convened in December 2020. That Forum highlighted solutions that harness SIDS leadership in conservation and climate action, while raising some of the challenges the region faces.

The event was also to heighten CARICOM's commemoration of World Biodiversity Day and support preparation for COP26 under the Nature-Based Solutions campaign, a key

pillar of the UK's COP26 Presidency.

In his remarks, Ambassador LaRocque said SIDs faced disadvantage with accessing financing to recover from the impacts of climate change and resilience to them.

As the region builds back better from the multiple crises, he said it should be in harmony with nature, as the environment is critical to resilience.

"We must take account of the rich natural resource base of the region, including rich biological resources and ecosystem services which we rely upon in all aspects of our lives. Mangroves, wetlands, forests, seagrass beds and coral reef systems all offer multiple direct climate resilience services and important benefits that boost overall SIDS resilience," Secretary-General LaRocque stated.

Underscoring the importance of the region's forests, he said they protect freshwater resources for cities and communities, and play a major role in global climate mitigation

# Bahamas PM announces VAT holiday for “critical” hurricane preparations next month



**EW News** - Prime Minister Dr. Hubert Minnis on Wednesday announced a value added tax (VAT) free holiday for “critical hurricane supplies and equipment”, beginning sometime next month, as he encouraged Bahamians to prepare for the current hurricane season.

“I remind Bahamians and residents to begin their hurricane preparations,” Minnis said as he led debate of the 2021/2022 budget in the House of Assembly. “To assist with these

preparations, this year, for the first time, we will undertake a VAT holiday for hurricane preparations.

“This will be during the month of July. This will assist Bahamians and residents to enjoy VAT-free shopping on a range of critical hurricane supplies and equipment.”

The prime minister advised that VAT holidays are solely applicable to items purchased within The Bahamas from local wholesalers and retailers.

“We want people to

shop at home so that this money stays at home and benefits Bahamian businesses and, by extension, all of the employees of these commercial enterprises,” he said.

“So, my message to everyone is that they should use the month of July to get their homes and businesses readied for the hurricane season. Take advantage of the savings and avoid the rush.”

The Ministry of Finance is expected to release details on the dates and items included for VAT-

free shopping. During the debate, Exumas and Ragged Island MP Chester Cooper suggested the government’s plan to introduce the VAT-free holiday in July for residents to prepare was not fully thought through, noting that hurricane season has already begun and residents ought to be preparing now.

Last year, the government introduced legislation that authorized the minister of finance to provide VAT holidays up to twice per year for 30 days for specific reasons.

The move saw a back-to-school VAT holiday last August.

The prime minister said the measure provided Bahamian households with VAT-free shopping on a range of school supplies as parents got their children prepared for the new academic year.

“The VAT holiday provided millions of dollars in saving across the country and [was] a boost for Bahamian businesses,” he said.

The Atlantic hurricane season runs from June 1 to November 30.



## Facebook to end special treatment for politicians after Trump ban

**Reuters** - Facebook Inc is planning to end its policy that shields politicians from some content moderation rules, The Verge reported on Thursday, in what would be a major policy reversal for the world's largest social media network.

The reported change comes as Facebook is expected to announce its response to recommendations made by the company's independent oversight board when it ruled on the firm's suspension of former U.S. President Donald Trump.

A Facebook spokesman declined to com-

ment on The Verge report. Tech platforms have grappled in recent years with how to police world leaders and politicians who violate their guidelines. Facebook and Twitter Inc have long held that politicians should be given greater latitude in their speech on platforms than ordinary users.

Facebook's oversight board, an independent group funded by the company which can overrule its decisions in a small slice of content moderation cases, recently upheld Facebook's block on Trump following the Jan. 6

Capitol riot, but said the social media giant was wrong to make the suspension indefinite.

It also gave non-binding recommendations, which Facebook is expected to respond to in full as soon as Friday. The board said the same rules should apply to all users, though it said that heads of state and government officials can have a greater power to cause harm.

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg has long argued that the company should not police politicians' speech. The company currently exempts politicians'

posts and ads from its third-party fact-checking program and its "newsworthiness exemption" allows politicians' rule-breaking posts on the site if the public interest outweighs the harm - though Facebook said it did not apply its newsworthiness allowance in the Trump case.

In the board's recommendations it stressed that considerations of "newsworthiness" should not take priority when urgent action is needed on the platform to prevent "significant harm."

# Global food prices surge again, stoking inflation fears



reached its worst in years as the pandemic exacerbates food inequalities, compounding extreme weather and political conflicts.

There were other elements that exacerbated skyrocketing food costs a decade ago. For example, oil prices neared \$150 a barrel — double current levels — and there was a wave of trade restrictions by major grain shippers. Costs for rice, one of the world's food staples, have remained relatively subdued during the current agricultural price surge.

Gains in the past year have been fueled by China's "unpredictably huge" purchases of foreign grain, and world reserves could hold relatively flat in the coming season, Abbassian said. Summer weather across the Northern Hemisphere will be crucial to determine if U.S. and European harvests can make up for crop shortfalls elsewhere.

"We are not in the situation we were back in 2008-10 when inventories were really low and a lot of things were going on," Abbassian said. "However, we are in sort of a borderline. It's a borderline that needs to be monitored very closely over the next few weeks, because weather is either going to really make it or create really big problems."

**Bloomberg** - Global food prices extended their rally to the highest in almost a decade, heightening concerns over bulging grocery bills as economies struggle to exit the Covid-19 crisis.

A United Nations gauge of world food costs climbed for a 12th straight month in May, its longest stretch in a decade. The continued advance risks accelerating broader inflation, complicating central banks efforts to provide more stimulus. Drought in key Brazilian growing regions is crippling crops from corn to coffee, and vegetable oil production growth has slowed in Southeast Asia. That's boosting costs for live-

stock producers and risks further straining global grain stockpiles that have been depleted by soaring Chinese demand. The surge has stirred memories of 2008 and 2011, when price spikes led to food riots in more than 30 nations. "We have very little room for any production shock. We have very little room for any unexpected surge in demand in any country," Abdolreza Abbassian, senior economist at the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization, said by phone. "Any of those things could push prices up further than they are now, and then we could start getting worried."

The prolonged gains across the staple com-

modities are trickling through to store shelves, with countries from Kenya to Mexico reporting higher food costs. The pain could be particularly pronounced in some of the poorest import-dependent nations, which have limited purchasing power and social safety nets as they grapple with the pandemic.

The UN's index is treading at its highest since September 2011, with last month's gain of 4.8% being the biggest in more than 10 years. All five components of the index rose during the month, with the advance led by pricier vegetable oils, grain and sugar.

The world's hunger problem has already

# Jobs vs heritage: The battle over Amazon's new Africa HQ

*Al Jazeera* - For the Khoi and San — South Africa's first inhabitants — a verdant patch of land in Cape Town embodies victory and tragedy.

The two communities drove back cattle-raiding Portuguese soldiers there in 1510. But, a century and a half later, this was where Dutch settlers launched a campaign of land dispossession.

Today it is again the scene of another conflict, this time over a development where construction is due to begin this month and where there will eventually be a new 70,000-square-metre Africa headquarters for United States retail giant Amazon.

"This is where land was first stolen," said Tauriq Jenkins, of the Goringhicona Khoena Council, a Khoi traditional group opposed to the project. "We want a World Heritage Site. We do not want 150,000 tonnes of concrete."

The 37-acre riverside area was previously home to a golf-driving range and popular bar, a small blue plaque the only indication of its historical significance.

It is now earmarked for a 4 billion rand (\$284m) mixed-use development

complete with a hotel, retail offices and residential units.

Amazon, which already employs thousands of people in Cape Town in a global call centre and data hubs, is lined up as its anchor tenant, with no other big names yet disclosed by city bosses or developers.

While some groups have welcomed the prospect of new jobs, the whole project, not Amazon's specific plan, has faced a backlash from other community leaders as well as environmentalists and activists. They have held marches at the site and are now threatening to take the matter to court.

According to the Observatory Civic Association, which represents a nearby residential community, close to 50,000 objections to the development have been lodged so far with city and provincial authorities.

Critics want the development stopped and the area declared a provincial or national heritage site. Environmentalists say it is important to preserve because it is an ecologically sensitive area at the confluence of two rivers. Amazon in South Africa and the United States



declined to comment on the dispute and referred queries to the developer, South Africa's Zenprop. It in turn directed the queries to Liesbeeck Leisure Properties Trust (LLTP), the structure set up to develop this specific project.

"There is no groundswell

of unhappiness," said LLTP's Jody Aufrichtig, emphasising that the development went through an extensive public approval procedure.

"The handful of vocal objectors who remain, who were given fair opportunity to participate, simply do not like the outcome."



# US to swiftly boost global vaccine sharing, Biden announces

**AP** - President Joe Biden announced Thursday that the U.S. will swiftly donate an initial allotment of 25 million doses of surplus vaccine overseas through the United Nations-backed COVAX program, promising infusions for South and Central America, Asia, Africa and others at a time of glaring shortages abroad and more than ample supplies at home. The doses mark a substantial — and immediate — boost to the lagging COVAX effort, which to date has shared just 76 million doses with needy countries.

The announcement came just hours after World Health Organization officials in Africa made a new plea for vaccine sharing because of an alarming situation on the continent where shipments have ground to “a near halt” while virus cases have spiked over the past two weeks.

Overall, the White House has announced plans to share 80 million doses globally by the end of June, most through COVAX. Officials say a quarter of the nation’s excess will be kept in reserve for emergencies and for the U.S. to share directly with allies and partners.

Of the first 19 million donated through COVAX, approximately 6 million doses will go to South and Central America, 7 million to Asia, and 5 million to Africa.

“As long as this pandemic is raging anywhere in the world, the American people will still be vulnerable,” Biden said in a statement. “And the United States is committed to bringing the same urgency to international vaccination efforts that we have demonstrated at home.”



*Vice President Kamala Harris listens as President Joe Biden speaks about the COVID-19 vaccination program, in the South Court Auditorium on the White House campus, Wednesday, June 2, 2021, in Washington.*

U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said the U.S. “will retain the say” on where doses distributed through COVAX ultimately go. But he also said: “We’re not seeking to extract concessions, we’re not extorting, we’re not imposing conditions the way that other countries who are providing doses are doing ... These are doses that are being given, donated free and clear to these countries, for the sole purpose of improving the public health situation and helping end the pandemic.”

The remaining 6 million in the initial distribution of 25 million will be directed by the White House to U.S. allies and partners, including Mexico, Canada, South Korea, West Bank and Gaza, India, Ukraine, Kosovo, Haiti, Georgia,

Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, and Yemen, as well as for United Nations front-line workers.

The White House did not say when the doses would begin shipping overseas, but press secretary Jen Psaki said the administration hoped to send them “as quickly as we can logistically get those out the door.”

Vice President Kamala Harris informed some U.S. partners they will begin receiving doses, in separate calls with Mexican President Andres Manuel López Obrador, President Alejandro Giammattei of Guatemala, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Prime Minister Keith Rowley of Trinidad and Tobago. Harris is to visit Guatemala and Mexico in the coming week.

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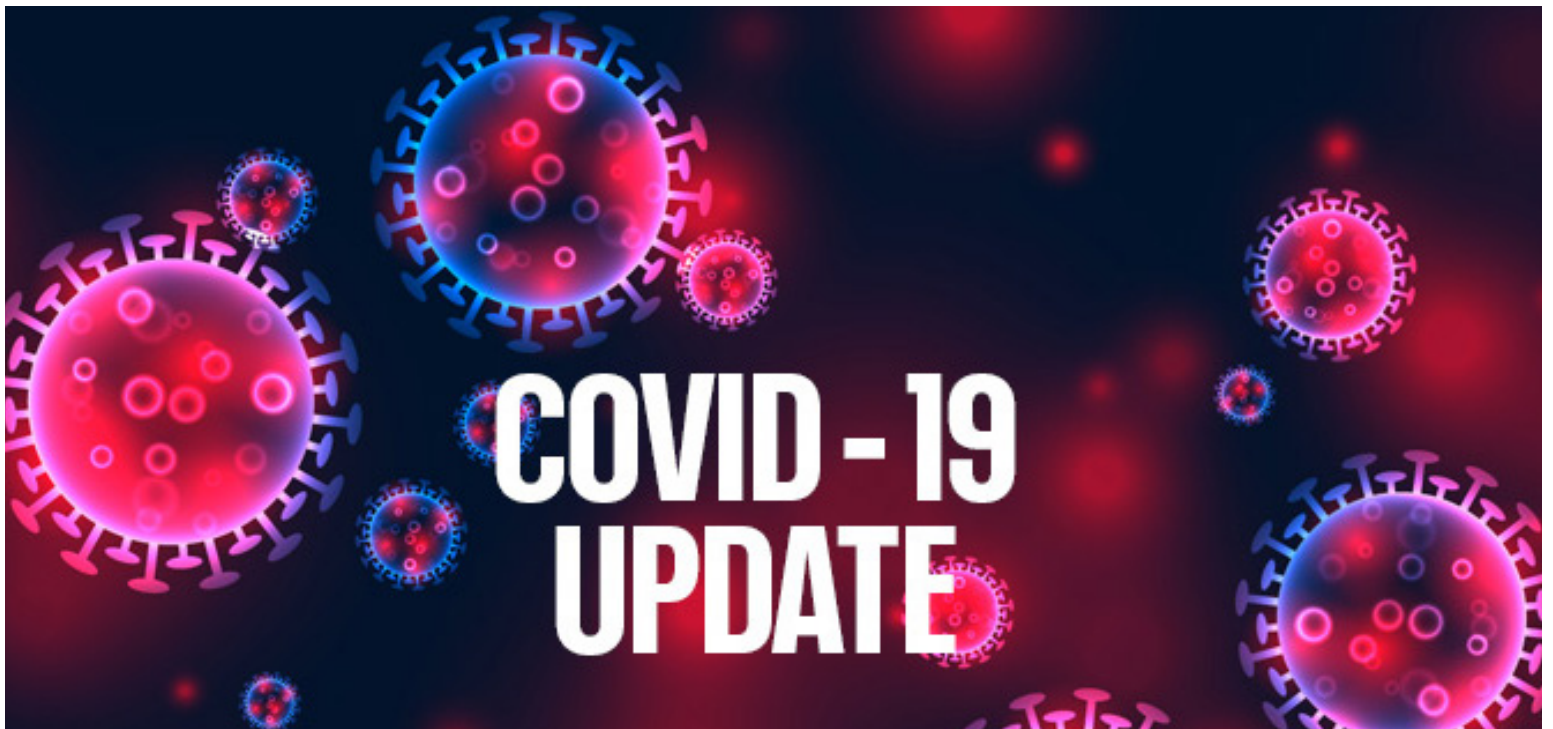
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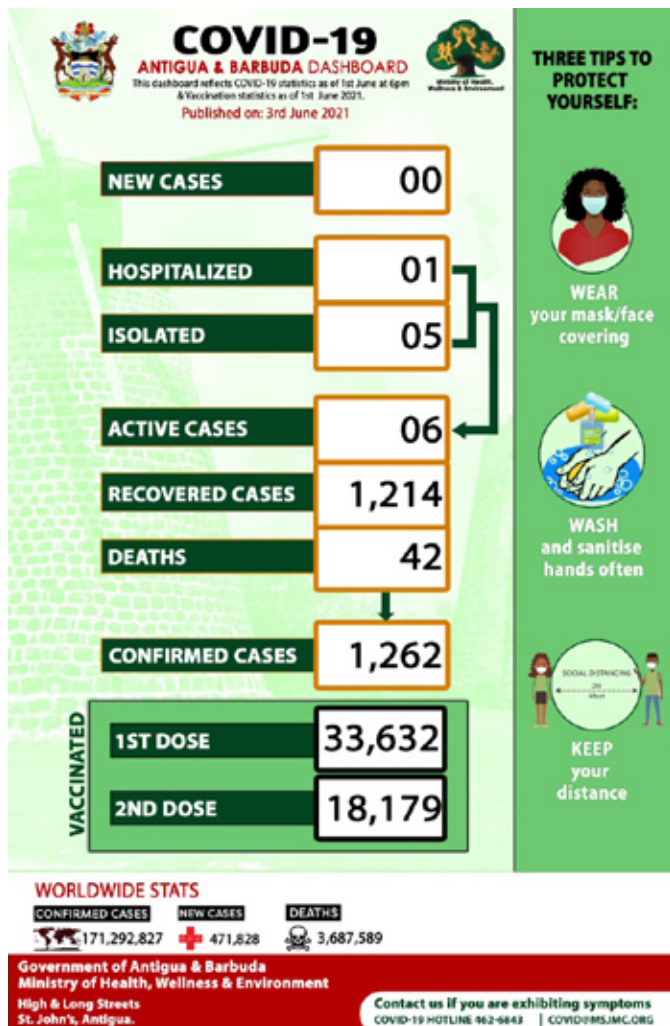


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# No new cases, only 6 active



The most recent report received by the Ministry of Health, Wellness and the Environment from the Sir Lester Bird Mount St. John Medical Centre revealed no new laboratory confirmed COVID-19 cases in Antigua and Barbuda as of Tuesday 1st June 2021 at 6pm. Eighty-one samples were processed at Sir Lester Bird MSJMC. One recovery was recorded, increasing the total to 1,214. Consequently, the total number of per-

sons with laboratory confirmed COVID-19 cases in Antigua and Barbuda remains at 1,262, which is inclusive of six active cases. There is one hospitalized case where the symptoms are considered to be mild. Meanwhile, 33,632 first doses of the Covid-19 vaccines have been administered, while 18,179 second doses were administered. The dashboard has been updated to reflect these changes.

# Cricket: Powell among stronger batting displays



Kieran Powell

**GROS ISLET, St. Lucia** – Left-handed opener, Kieran Powell put himself in the selection mix for the upcoming South Africa series when he narrowly missed out on a hundred on day three of the four-day West Indies inter-squad match. The 31-year old, who last played Test three years ago, was dismissed for 95 as Jahmar Hamilton's XI ended the day on 218 for four in pursuit of 311 for victory at the Daren Sammy National Stadium. Powell faced 175 deliveries in just over 3 ¾ hours and stroked 11 fours and a six, before falling late in the final session with triple figures beckoning, skying a drive at off-spinner Rahkeem Cornwall and falling to a catch at short cover. Discarded Test player Shamarh Brooks wasted a start with 39 while left-handed opener Shayne Moseley gathered 36, and all-rounder Raymon Reifer end-

ed the day unbeaten on 22. Shai Hope had earlier added only two to his overnight 104 as Jermaine Blackwood's XI, on 197 for three, lost their last seven wickets for 27 runs in their second innings. Blackwood added only one before perishing for 24, both he and Hope departing within the first four balls of the day. Left-hander John Campbell, unable to open because of injury, arrived at number six but made only two to further imperil his chances of selection for the upcoming Test series, while wicketkeeper Joshua DaSilva fell cheaply for three. Impressive 19-year old seamer Jayden Seales added another two wickets to his tally to finish with four for 40, while left-arm pacers Reifer (2-22) and Preston McSween (2-35) claimed two wickets apiece. Powell, who gathered 400 runs in the last First Class season,

then starred in two-half century stands, first posting 63 for the first wicket with Moseley who hit three fours and two sixes in a positive 40-ball innings before falling LBW to Cornwall (2-61). When Nkrumah Bonner (1) failed for the second time in the next over, falling to an irresponsible pull which was taken at long leg, Powell then combined with Brooks to put on another 82 for the third wicket. The right-handed Brooks punched half-a-dozen fours in an attractive 87-ball knock and was eyeing up a half century when he missed a sweep at a straight delivery from left-arm spinner Veerasammy Permaul and was LBW. Roston Chase was forced to retire hurt on one, but Reifer and fellow left-hander Paul Palmer (15 not out) entertained towards the end.

## NBA Playoffs Round Up

### *76ers roll past Wizards*

The Philadelphia 76ers eliminated the Washington Wizards 129-112 on Wednesday night. The 76ers won the series 4-1. Wizards' Bradley Beal led all scorers with 32 points and five assists. Seth Curry led the 76ers with a career playoff-high 30 points. Tobias Harris had 28 points, nine rebounds and six assists. He was supported by Ben Simmons who had 19 points, 11 assists and 10 rebounds. The Philadelphia 76ers will be hoping

for a full recovery of their center, Joel Embiid, from knee injury for the second round. They next play the Atlanta Hawks. The 76ers are in the hunt for their first championship since 1983.

### *Hawks ousts the Knicks*

The Atlanta Hawks, the number five seed in the eastern conference, eliminated the New York Knicks, the number four seed, 103-89. Trae Young led the Hawks with 36 points and nine assists, ending

his debut with a long 3-pointer in the final minute. Julius Randle had 23 points and pulled down 13 rebounds for the Knicks to finish his first disappointing postseason. The Hawks will next meet the 76ers in the eastern conference semifinals.

### *Jazz take care of business against Grizzlies*

The Utah Jazz became the first team in the western conference to reach the second round when



## CRICKET WEST INDIES CELEBRATES 95TH ANNIVERSARY



KINGSTON, Jamaica — The West Indies Players' Association (WIPA) earlier this week celebrated the 95th Anniversary of Cricket West Indies' (CWI) affiliation with the International Cricket Council (ICC). The then-named West Indies Cricket Board (WICB) joined the sport's international ruling body, then named the Imperial Cricket Council, on

May 31, 1926, and later played their first official international match in 1928, becoming the fourth Test nation. WIPA's executive and staff, in a statement on Monday, extended warm congratulations to CWI on this important milestone. "We look forward to continuing to partner together to advance the wellbeing and profession of our players," con-

tinued the statement. WIPA President and CEO Wavell Hinds said, "The legacy and longevity of West Indies cricket is rich and enduring. This 95-year-old experiment called West Indies cricket is at times complex, but at best unifying and triumphant." He added: "West Indies' mark on the cricket world has helped emphatically to break down barriers

and eliminate discrimination for the Caribbean people. Undoubtedly, West Indies cricket is firmly hinged in the minds of the people of the Caribbean and the diaspora, continuing to contribute to the evolution of Caribbean civilisation. May the West Indies continue to play with flair, grace and honesty."

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