

PM BROWNE: NO IMMEDIATE PLANS FOR PARLIAMENTARY PAY RAISE, BUT REQUEST IS NOT UNREASONABLE

Story on Page 2



An early morning blaze on Monday in Nutgrove flattened three wooden buildings leaving several homeless. There were no reports of injury. **Story inside on Page 8** (Photo Credit: Sadique Armstrong)

Browne defends parliamentarians' salaries, benefits

Antigua and Barbuda's prime minister has spoken up in defence of the salaries and benefits which form the remuneration packages of the members of his Cabinet and other parliamentarians.

Gaston Browne sparked national debate when he revealed at the weekend that some members of his Cabinet had requested a pay raise.

Many people hold the view that even if a raise

for government ministers is deserving, now is a most inopportune time to even entertain that discussion as unemployment and under-employment as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic are still major issues for hundreds across the nation.

The overwhelming view on various discussion forums appears to be that ministers of government should be making personal sacrifices at this time in a show of solidarity with

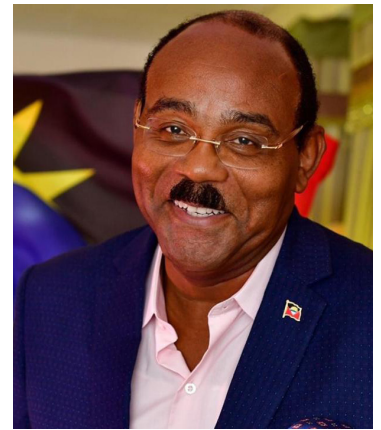
those members of the public who are still suffering the fall out of the pandemic.

Prime Minister Browne, however, says that ministers, and other members of parliament, do not make nearly as much as people perceive and added that even perks of the job, such as free utilities, do not make a significant enough financial impact to justify their revocation when the massive size of the Antigua and Barbuda economy - more than \$4billion - is taken into account.

In support of his argument, Browne added that under-paying senior government officials could inadvertently result in unscrupulous individuals abusing their power.

"Lee Kuan Yew (Former Prime Minister of Singapore) had a famous saying, if you don't pay your parliamentarians properly, your leaders, then you're gonna end up with a number of charlatans. You know, people who can't do the job, who would pretend as though they know, just like those elements in the UPP.


"How do you even justify, for example, that in the public sector you have



Prime Minister Gaston Browne public servants who are making 15, 20, \$25,000 a month, a minister makes 10 [thousand], less than a number of public servants and you're gonna argue that the \$10,000 a month or the \$1,000 a month that he gets in utilities that I should take that back? I don't know that that's precisely fair," proffered Browne.

He continued, "Many of my ministers would have said to me since last term at some point we have to review the Parliamentary pay. I mean, I don't know when that will be - clearly we can't do it now because of the COVID situation and so on - but we also have to increase the pay of public servants. But I don't know that we can continue to increase public servants' pay and at some point do not revise the pay for parliamentarians."

Mr. Browne added that if one were to objectively analyse the emoluments of government ministers based on their duties against that of some public sector workers and the standard set by the private sector, they are, in fact, sorely underpaid.



RLNC 5

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA
REGISTERED LAND ACT, CAP. 374

Section 34
of the
Act

Registration Section	Block	Parcel
Potters & Belmont	613-1891D	110

DEC 10 2021


NOTICE OF APPLICATION TO REPLACE LOST LAND CERTIFICATE

TAKE NOTICE that an application was filed in the Land Registry on 10th day of December, 2021 by **DAVID DORSETT** of **WATT, DORSETT, HEWLETT LAW** of 55A Newgate St., St. John's, Antigua the Applicants herein for the replacement of Land Certificate No. ~~5521~~⁵⁵²³/89 and dated the 21.11.89 issued to **Veronica Victoria James**, being the owner of the above-mentioned property, which has been lost or destroyed.

TAKE FURTHER NOTICE that anyone who objects to the issue of a Land Certificate who has knowledge of the original Land certificate must within the period of one (1) month from the Second Publication of this notice in the newspaper inform the Registrar of lands in writing.

TAKE FURTHER NOTICE that in the absence of any objection or information as to the existence of the original Land Certificate within the time specified the Registrar of Lands may proceed to cancel the original Land Certificate and issue a new Land Certificate in its place without further notice.

Dated the 11th day of December, 2021


 REGISTRAR OF LANDS

Gaston Browne: George Walter should never have been a national hero

Never one to avoid sharing controversial views, Prime Minister Gaston Browne has declared that Sir George Walter should never have been bestowed the honour of National Hero.

During his Browne and Browne programme on Pointe FM, the prime minister said the decision to make Antigua and Barbuda's second premier a national hero was just another example of the poor judgement of the former United Progressive Party (UPP) administration in bestowing accolades upon persons undeserving of them.

According to PM Browne, Sir George's legacy is not one which bears the hallmarks attributable to those deserving of the honour of a country's National Heroes.

"I'm gonna make a controversial statement here, but I strongly believe in it. When you look at for example, the decision of the UPP government to make George Walter a National Hero, I mean, that was just totally undeserving.

"George Walter served for a brief period of time as General Secretary of the Antigua Trades and Labour Union and he was given a nice little cushy job. He stayed there and undermined Sir Vere [Bird Sr.] when they had the little problem there with the workers and

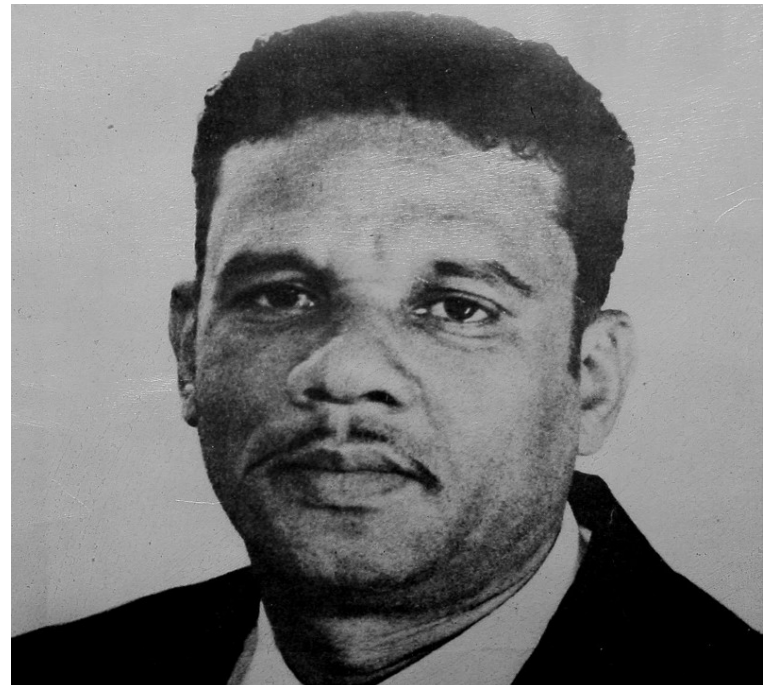
the workers were demanding salaries and wages that the government couldn't pay.

"George Walter exploited that situation and became [premier], served for one term, went to jail for misbehaviour in public office and they made him a National Hero!" Browne said.

Browne said, in his mind, the decision to elevate Sir George is rooted in the fact that the UPP is envious of the irrefutable legacy of contributions members of the Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party have made.

"They can't stand on their record. They can't stand on their achievements - neither personal nor public - but they want to envy people within the Labour Party whenever we elevate our people who serve and who would have slaved to build this country."

The ABLP leader's comments were triggered by criticisms levelled against his administration by UPP



Former Premier, Sir George Walter (Credit: Antigua Barbuda Workers' Union)

Chairperson, D. Giselle Isaac, who has slammed the government for renaming the Mount St. John's Medical Centre the Sir Lester Bird Medical Centre.

In her view, that honour should have been given to Sir Prince Ramsey, a beloved and regionally renowned medical doctor who received great celebrity for his decades of contributions

to the treatment and care of people living with HIV/AIDS.

According to PM Browne, it is inconceivable that the UPP would argue the decision to honour those who have made well documented and tangible contributions to Antigua and Barbuda in favour of those who are "lazy" and have not created a "legacy of success".

Tue 11 Day		Tue 11 Night	
82°		72°	
4%	ENE 10 mph	35%	NE 10 mph
Except for a few afternoon clouds, mainly sunny. High 82F. Winds ENE at 10 to 15 mph.		Cloudy with occasional showers. Low 72F. Winds NE at 5 to 10 mph. Chance of rain 40%.	
Humidity 64%	UV Index 8 of 10	Humidity 79%	UV Index 0 of 10
Sunrise 6:39 am	Sunset 5:51 pm	Moonrise 1:10 pm	Moonset 1:21 am
		Waxing Gibbous	

What role should the private sector play in education?

Private actors, if left unchecked, can fragment educational systems. That is why we need strong government regulation.

By Manos Antoninis
Director of UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report

Rarely does a topic on education elicit such passionate debate as the one about private and public schools. Some 350 million students across the world are educated in non-state schools, ranging from faith-based institutions and schools run by NGOs to for-profit schools. Non-state actors also run school buses, supply uniforms, produce textbooks and manage school canteens. Technology companies have made advances into education as well, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic – from online testing to virtual classrooms.

There are many reasons why the private sector is playing such a significant role in education. One of the attractions is that there is a potential market for them. Globally 1.6 billion children and young people head to class each day around the world and \$5 trillion is spent on education every year.

So what are the consequences of the presence of the private sector in education?

There is no denying that many non-state actors are delivering where there is need: in conflict situations, in crises, in many countries where the public education system is dysfunctional. But there is also no denying that while governments are bound by their public commitments to education equity, the private sector is not.

To investigate the role and impact of non-state actors in education worldwide, UNESCO put together the 2021/2 Global Education Monitoring Report.

Entitled “Who Chooses? Who Loses?”, it explores how the right of all children to have 12 years of free education, to which all countries committed in 2015 in the Education 2030 Framework for Action, can be compromised by a stronger role of private actors.

In the report, we cite many examples of strong collaborative partnerships between private and public actors, designing skills systems tuned to the labour market, for instance. But there are also many occasions in which the governance and oversight of the multitude of actors in education have gotten out of control and have led to the fragmentation of education systems.

The big challenge now is to make sure that the presence of the private sector in education is not making it harder for school children who, due to poverty, are falling behind in their education. Despite some well-meaning regulations, it can be hard to guarantee that private schools will support governments’ agendas to help such children.

Our report shows that in about 40 countries, the children of the richest households were 10 times more likely than the poorest to attend private primary school. Recognising the potential dangers for equity, over a quarter of countries have banned for-profit provision in primary and secondary education.

Such measures, however, are rarely imposed in early childhood education, a period that is critical to the development of a child and their potential later on in life. At this level, private providers are even more present than in primary and secondary education. In many countries, this renders kindergartens unaffordable for the poorest families – precisely those who need such services the most, as they are more likely to have no other options for childcare. For example, in the United



Manos Antoninis

States, where poverty disproportionately affects Black people and where there is a significant lack of state-funded early education institutions, Black families with two young children have to spend 56 percent of their income on average on pre-kindergarten and kindergarten education.

Our report calls on governments to make sure that, whoever is involved in education and whatever they are doing, they are respecting and abiding by the values of equity and allow every child to fulfil their potential. There are a few solutions we recommend.

First, governments should follow their public commitments and invest in free, good quality, state education. They should make sure that the poorest families, which do not have the funds to pay for better education elsewhere, can always access a good quality school where they are. But one in three countries is still spending on education below the two internationally agreed benchmarks: at least 4 percent of GDP or at least 15

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VACANCY – ELECTRICITY PLANT ENGINEER

BARBUDA POWER STATION

The Antigua Public Utilities Authority is now seeking applications from suitably qualified persons for the above position within the Electricity Business Unit:

Overview: The Green Barbuda Power Plant will be commissioned in Barbuda shortly. The Plant Engineer will be based in Barbuda and responsible for managing all aspects of the operation and maintenance of this Solar Hybrid Power Plant.

Key tasks include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Providing day-to-day oversight of the technical and administrative functions of the plant.
- Ensuring the plant meets the required availability, reliability, efficiency & safety targets.
- Managing the maintenance program including breakdown, preventative and predictive maintenance.
- Maintaining adequate inventory levels of fuel, spare parts, tools and equipment.

Suitable candidates for the Electricity Plant Engineer role should possess the following:

- A Minimum of a Bachelor's Degree or equivalent in Mechanical or Electrical Engineering from a recognized tertiary institution.
- A minimum of ten (10) years' experience in supervising the operation and maintenance of a Power Plant.
- Experience in Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) Systems within a Power Plant or similar operation.
- Experience in the operation and maintenance of a Solar Plant.
- Demonstrated knowledge of Electrical and Mechanical Generation principles.
- Knowledge and working experience with Battery Systems within a Solar Plant would be an asset.

Additionally, the role requires candidates to have:

- Strong communication, analytical, critical thinking, strategic and report writing skills.
- The ability to provide guidance and supervision to a large team. This includes identifying training needs, motivating & inspiring the team to meet unit goals and objectives while managing performance in accordance with the set guidelines of the Authority.
- The ability to effectively prepare management documents including budget estimates and monthly reports
- The ability to multitask and work under pressure to set deadlines.
- The ability to work flexible hours, if required, including weekends and holidays
- The physical and mental ability to withstand the rigors of the role.

Interested persons are asked to apply in writing to:

The Human Resources Manager
Antigua Public Utilities Authority
P.O. Box 416
Independence Ave. & High Street
St. Johns, Antigua

or Email: hr@apua.ag

Deadline for application is **Monday 10th January, 2022**

** Only suitable applicants will be acknowledged **

"APUA is an equal opportunity Employer"



COVID-19 outbreaks at ABTB Inspection Centre, ACB force shut down; PM's staff undergo testing

The Antigua and Barbuda Transport Board (ABTB) Inspection Centre and Antigua Commercial Bank Caribbean are the latest organisations forced to shut down due to COVID-19.

On Monday just after 12pm, the ABTB announced it would suspend services to the public after it was discovered that several of its employees attached to the Vehicle Inspection Centre tested positive for the COVID-19 virus.

Five workers returned positive test results after complaining of feeling ill. ABTB General Manager, Hubert Jarvis, indicated a medical

team was called in and rapid COVID-19 tests were administered to all employees. Additionally, the building was sanitized and those who have tested negative will return to work today and normal hours of operation will resume.

Mr. Jarvis spoke of the culture that exists at the ABTB, where employees are encouraged to vaccinate against the COVID-19. According to him, a large percent of the workforce is fully vaccinated and approximately 50 percent of workers have received booster shots. He is confident that those who contracted the virus did not do so at work, but rather over the



festive season, while socializing.

The general manager is appealing to employees and members of the public who seek the services of the Transport Board to adhere to the protocols that are in place, which include the wearing of masks above the nose, sanitizing and social distancing. He added that their facilities are equipped with hand washing and sanitization stations that are readily available to everyone. He opined that the recent relaxation of some restrictions have caused people to let down their guards.

Other areas of the Transport Board's operations were unaffected by the outbreak.

These include the Government's Motor Pool and its headquarters located in Herbert's.

Meanwhile, at the weekend, ACB Caribbean announced its branch located at the corner of High and Market Streets will be closed until further notice. The bank's statement provided no details other than to inform that there had been "COVID exposure" at the branch.

The Office of the Prime Minister was also affected by the most recent wave of infections. Last week, seven members of staff tested positive for the virus after tests were carried out. However, the office remains open.



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percent of total public spending.

As a result, costs for public schools are often offloaded to parents. In Uganda, for example, families regularly pay informal fees to go to school even though this is against the law. Eliminating such costs has been proven to have substantial benefits. A scholarship programme in the Gambia that covered informal fees for uniforms and books increased the enrolment of girls by 13 percent.

Second, governments should ensure that regulations covering state and non-

state schools are equitable and enforced. Our report compiled and assessed regulations in over 200 education systems.

It found that while an array of rules exists on paper, they are not properly enforced. This is most obvious in countries such as Nigeria where the proliferation of unregistered low-fee schools of low quality is jeopardising the education of many children.

Regulations that actually promote equitable education are not common. About 55 percent of countries try to prevent selective student admission pro-

cedures in non-state schools, but only 7 percent of countries have quotas to support access to schools for disadvantaged students.

Our report calls on all governments to take a serious look at schools, teachers and students together as they are part of the same education system. Governments cannot turn a blind eye to privilege or to disadvantage – as they have so often done during the pandemic.

Regulations should work for everyone and should promote equity and quality for all, not fancy ideas for some.

VACANCY – WATER PLANNING ENGINEER

The Antigua Public Utilities Authority is now seeking applications from suitably qualified persons for the above position within the Planning, Standards, Maintenance & Construction (PSMC) Department:

OVERVIEW This role actively engages in engineering works and provides direction, coordination and oversight within the PSMC Water Planning Section. This includes producing engineering solutions and supervising and scheduling a variety of water utility engineering tasks using Computer Aided Designs (CAD) and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to assist with water infrastructural development in Antigua & Barbuda. The role is also responsible for forecasting distribution demands, liaising with contractors and developers on water requirements and responding to public enquiries and requests.

Key tasks include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Observing developmental trends, contacting and communicating with private and public developers, contractors and relevant authorities.
- Identifying, coordinating and planning water source development.
- Producing detailed and finished drawings for water facilities from preliminary sketches and field notes.
- Researching, updating and digitizing water facility records and data.
- Upgrading engineering plans & records, conducting investigations and collecting data.
- Preparing engineering designs, costing and scheduling projects.
- Maintaining up to date information and trends related to GIS and CAD software for water systems design and modelling.

Suitable candidates for the Water Planning Engineer should possess the following:

- A Bachelors' degree or equivalent in Civil/Agricultural Engineering, Geography or Environmental Engineering along with certification in GIS.
- A Masters' degree in any of the above mentioned fields would be an asset.
- A minimum of three (3) years' experience in coordinating water distribution development, CAD drafting & design, and demonstrated leadership skills.

Additionally, the role requires candidates to have:

- Strong communication, analytical, critical thinking, strategic and report writing skills.
- The ability to provide guidance and supervision to a large team. This includes identifying training needs, motivating & inspiring the team to meet unit goals and objectives while managing performance in accordance with the set guidelines of the Authority.
- The ability to effectively prepare management documents including budget estimates and monthly reports
- The ability to multitask and work under pressure to set deadlines.
- The ability to work flexible hours, if required, including weekends and holidays
- The physical and mental ability to withstand the rigors of the role.

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Substitute teachers' contracts extended, plans in motion to make them civil servants

The contracts of more than 100 substitute teachers have been extended as plans are finalised for them to be made civil servants.

The confirmation comes from Director of Education, Clare Browne.

109 substitute teachers were recruited in October after government's vaccine mandate created a void in the public school system caused by some educators, who were on leave without pay, because of their unvaccinated status.

The temporary workers, who began performing duties on 1st October, 2021, were strategically placed throughout the public school system, to ensure there were no interruptions to the teaching and learning process.

Their agreement with the Ministry of Education ended on 31st December,

but officials have seen the need for their continued contributions and have renewed their contracts for three months, commencing this month.

Director of Education, Clare Browne said: "Once the teachers who were on unpaid leave were allowed to return with testing in December, the government also allowed the substitute teachers to remain.

"We have since asked the Cabinet in a formal way, through a circulation note, for the Cabinet to allow us to hold the substitute teachers for the next three months, until such time."

He explained the communication dispatched to Cabinet is simply a formality, since the decision making body had already agreed to allow the Ministry of Education to continue to retain the substitute teachers.



Director of Education, Clare Browne

Clare Browne revealed the extension will allow his department to put mechanisms in place that will allow for a smooth transition of the substitutes to permanent employees.

"During the period of substitu-

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Nutgrove fire leaves 5 homeless

A fire in the wee hours of Monday morning has left five people homeless.

According to Fire Chief Elvis Weaver, the St. John's Fire Station received a call

for response to a fire in Nutgrove at 3:40am on Monday 10th January, 2022.

Upon arriving on the scene, they discovered three wooden structures engulfed in flames. The structures affected were 21 by 13 feet, 32 by 17 feet and 10 by 10 feet in size.

Chief Warner said all the structures were supplied with electricity.

Pointing out the extensive damage which had been done, he added that he was uncertain whether the buildings were covered by insurance.

The cause of the fire did not appear to be immediately clear, however, investigations into the reason for the blaze are ongoing.





XPZ Supermarket reconstruction delayed

Reconstruction of popular Chinese supermarket, XPZ, is scheduled to begin by the end of 2022.

The supermarket on Sir Sydney Walling Highway was destroyed by fire on 1st June, 2021, leaving the owners estimating their losses at approximately \$10 million.

A former employee, a national of China, is in jail awaiting trial charged with arson.

Speaking to Pointe Xpress from China, the supermarket's manager, David (only name given), said demolition at the site has begun. He said their rebuilding plans were delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

He added, however, that efforts to clear away the debris of the previous structure are ongoing and promised that the supermarket would be rebuilt bigger and better than before at the same location.



An excavator has been seen removing the twisted metal from the premises.

The owners of XPZ operate another business located in St. John's that sells clothing, however the supermar-

ket was the larger of the two businesses and attracted many customers who found the prices attractive and the location convenient.

Scores of employees were placed on the breadline following the fire.

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tion, we want to do the paperwork to get them over as fully established teachers in the education system," Mr. Browne revealed.

He offered high praise for the level of work they put in during the last three months, saying the ministry has benefitted from the

mandate.

"Many if not all the principals would have written, indicating how well these substitute teachers immersed themselves in the work and how they have really helped to ensure that at a time when students needed to have teachers, they would have ensured

that student learning continued."

Director Browne views the move to make the substitute teachers permanent employees as "just reward".

Mr. Browne insists the substitutes were carefully selected and are well qualified, with many being holders of bachelor's and mas-

ter's degrees.

"These are persons that had applied for teaching. We went through a vigorous interview process, they would have been trained (concentrated), they went out and delivered and the principals are attesting to the quality of their performance," the director added.

How to Recover From a Toxic Relationship

By Seth J. Gillihan
PHD, Clinical psychologist

Few things feel as freeing as leaving a truly toxic relationship. It's such a relief to escape the constant criticism, continual conflict, and emotional manipulation. But what if you discover that you've taken the poison with you?

Unfortunately the toxicity of bad relationships very often outlasts the relationship itself, like a "gift that keeps on giving" (in the worst of ways) long after the relationship is over. Maybe you find that you've internalised the harsh voice of an emotionally abusive parent, and now your self-talk carries the same messages and tone that your parents did. Perhaps you find that your ex-spouse's harsh judgments of you are colouring your relationship with your current partner. Or you might have left a gaslighting partner, only to realise that you continue to doubt what your senses and intuition are telling you.

The dynamics we experience and the negative messages we hear can be sticky, attaching to our psyches and continuing to affect us even decades later. Our minds are often the longest captives of toxic relationships.

But that doesn't mean we can never be completely free. I've seen hundreds of people manage to free their minds from their past relationships in my work as a clinical psychologist. While the work is never quick or easy, it can be tremendously rewarding. The following principles can be very helpful in the final phase of liberation.

Be patient with yourself. Keep in mind that it takes time to retrain your brain. You're a work in progress. Messages you received throughout childhood can be especially long-lived. Even if your toxic relationship was in adulthood and relatively brief, the patterns you learned can be hard to break. Give yourself compassion when you find that the toxic relationship is continuing to colour your thoughts and reactions. Being

impatient with yourself just reinforces the toxic voice; instead, allow yourself the time and space needed to heal.

Notice how you speak to yourself. Be on the lookout for what your internal voice is telling you. Be curious, like a scientist, as you explore the patterns of your mind. It's very important that you write down the thoughts you find. Actually getting the thoughts out of your head with pen and paper is much more effective than simply noting them mentally. You'll be in a much better position to start developing more useful ways of thinking.

Adopt a gentler voice. Begin to replace your harsh, critical thoughts with more supportive ones. Not sure what to say? Imagine how you would speak to a dear friend, or to your own child. Practice using this gentle response deliberately when you catch the old way of speaking to yourself. For example, if you make a silly mistake, replace "You're such an idiot!" with, "Everyone makes mistakes. What can you learn from this one for next time?"

Lead with kindness. Don't wait until you catch the harsh internal voice to practice self-kindness. Instead, be proactive as you reprogram your mind. Start training your thoughts in the morning, before your feet even touch the floor. Write down three thoughts you want to strengthen, and leave them on your bedside table. When you wake up, read and repeat the thoughts to yourself before you get out of bed. For example, you could practice thoughts like, "I am enough to face whatever this day brings." See what happens when you fill your mind with thoughts that serve you well. (Adapted from The CBT Deck.)

Find your strength. Do more of the things you enjoy and are good at—the activities that bring you alive. You may have given up these activities during your toxic relationship, since manipulative people typically don't want to see you thrive. Witnessing your own com-



Seth J. Gillihan

petence is a powerful antidote to seeing yourself as weak or inadequate.

Embrace who you are. Toxic relationships often lead us to hide or deny important parts of ourselves. For example, if you're naturally exuberant, a constantly critical parent might have led you to bury that joyful part of yourself. Find moments of stillness to listen for what is longing to be expressed. Look inward for urges you might be squashing. Begin to make space for more of your experience.

Be where you are. Toxic relationships can lead you to feel bad, not only about who you are, but about even existing, as though you don't have the right to take up any space at all. But your existence is nothing to apologise for. You have a right to be here, because the universe has seen fit to welcome your presence. Don't try to shrink your body or excuse yourself for being where you are. Stand firm in the space you occupy, unapologetically. It's yours. As you breathe in, say to yourself the words, "I Am." As you exhale, say to yourself, "Here." Exactly where you belong.

Finally, take heart—with attention and practice, your mind can be yours once again. In the process, count it a victory each time you catch the old patterns. The fact that you're noticing them means you're learning, you're growing, and you're coming home to yourself.

US expands interview waivers for certain nonimmigrant Caribbean visa applicants

CMC — The United States Department of State has announced that consular officers in the Caribbean and other places are now temporarily authorised, through December 31, 2022, to waive in-person interviews for certain individual petition-based nonimmigrant work visas and their qualifying derivatives.

The categories for the qualifying derivatives include Persons in Specialty Occupations (H-1B visas); Trainee or Special Education Visitors (H-3 visas); Intracompany Transferees (L visas); Individuals with Extraordinary Ability or Achievement (O visas); Athletes, Artists and Entertainers (P visas); and Participants in International Cultural Exchange Programs (Q visas).

Additionally, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has extended con-



sular officers' current ability to waive the in-person interview, through December 31, 2022, for other categories of nonimmigrant visas: Temporary Agricultural and Non-agricultural Workers (H-2 visas); Students (F and M visas); and Student Exchange Visitors (Academic J visas).

"The Department of State recognises the positive impact of temporary work visa holders on the US economy and is com-

mitted to facilitating non-immigrant travel and reducing visa wait times. We recognise the many contributions of international visitors to our communities and campuses," said the department in a statement.

It also added that the authorisation to waive the in-person interview for applicants renewing a visa in the same visa class within 48 months of the prior visa's expiration has been extended indefinitely.

The State Department said that the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in "profound reductions" in the department's visa processing capacity and that it is taking these temporary steps "to further our commitment to safely and efficiently reduce visa wait times while maintaining national security as our priority."

The State Department said it made its determination with the concurrence of its Department of Homeland Security partners.

"Embassies and consulates may still require an in-person interview on a case-by-case basis and dependent upon local conditions," the State Department said. "We encourage applicants to check embassy and consulate websites for more detailed information about this development, as well as current operating status and services."

St. Vincent and the Grenadines granted permission to export medical cannabis

Gleaner - St Vincent and the Grenadines is now the first member state of the sub-regional grouping the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), to be granted permission for the export of medicinal cannabis.

On Friday, the government announced that the island would export its first shipment of medicinal cannabis to Europe.

The announcement follows the recent approval of the first export certifi-

cate for medicinal cannabis.

The export permission was granted to Caribbean Cannabis Company trading as Medicinal.

The company already has several products marketed locally and has worked with traditional cultivators in building out their supply chain.

The granting of the permit came after an import certificate was issued by the Federal Institute for Drugs and Medical Devices for the product to le-

gally enter Germany.

According to Agriculture Minister Saboto Caesar, the jurisdiction has worked over the last three years, with international agencies, friendly governments, and local public and private sector stakeholders, to make this a reality.

"St Vincent and the Grenadines is ready for global business in the Medicinal Wellness Industry Space. We
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New law to allow Caribbean nationals to vote in New York

Caribbean nationals who are not US citizens and live in New York City, will be allowed to vote after Mayor Eric Adams allowed legislation to automatically become law on January 9.

Caribbean nationals are among the more than 800,000 non-citizens and “Dreamers” who could vote in municipal elections as early as next year.

Opponents have vowed to challenge the new law, which the City Council approved one month ago. Unless a judge halts its implementation, New York City is the first major U.S. city to grant widespread municipal voting rights to non-citizens.

More than a dozen communities across the U.S. already allow non-citizens to cast ballots in local elections, including 11 towns in



Photo credit: Getty Images

Maryland and two in Vermont.

Non-citizens still will not be able to vote for president or members of Congress in federal races, or in the state elections that pick the governor, judges and legislators.

The Board of Elections must now begin drawing an implementation plan by July, including voter regis-

tration rules and provisions that will create separate ballots for municipal races to prevent non-citizens from casting ballots in federal and state contests.

It's a watershed moment for the nation's most populous city, where legally documented, voting-age non-citizens comprise nearly one in nine of the city's seven million voting-age

inhabitants. The movement to win voting rights for non-citizens prevailed after numerous setbacks.

The measure will allow non-citizens who have been lawful permanent residents of the city for at least 30 days, as well as those authorised to work in the U.S., including “Dreamers,” to help select the city's mayor, city council members, borough presidents, comptroller and public advocate.

“Dreamers” are young immigrants brought to the U.S. illegally as children who would benefit from the never-passed DREAM Act or the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which allows them to remain in the country if they meet certain criteria.

The first elections in which non-citizens will be allowed to vote are in 2023.

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invite the world to participate!” Caesar said.

“SVG has opened a significant global opportunity for collaboration among member states of the OECS wishing to participate in the international medical cannabis industry.”

“I, therefore, invite all member states of the OECS with the established medicinal cannabis policy frameworks to join forces for the sustainable development of what can become a world competitive sub-regional medicinal wellness ecosystem,” the agriculture minister added.

The government has also an-



nounced that it is working to establish a diversified medicinal wellness platform that will include traditional

medicines, and the emerging psychedelics doctor-assisted treatment initiative.

Cuban asylum seekers in Greece ‘forcibly expelled’ to Turkey

At least 30 Cubans, hoping to claim asylum in Europe, were forcibly expelled from Greece to Turkey towards the end of last year, according to interviews conducted by Al Jazeera and rights organisations.

Al Jazeera spoke to two Cubans who also said that, during their expulsion from Greece, police officers and border guards subjected those they were expelling to violence.

Allegations made to Al Jazeera and rights organisations include accounts of forced undressing, beatings, detention without food or water, confiscation of passports, money and other personal belongings, refusal to register asylum claims, and forced water immersion prior to and during the expulsion process.

Al Jazeera also viewed photos and testimonies of the asylum seekers taken by NGOs on the ground to verify those claims.

Those expelled now say they are left in limbo in Turkey

without identification or access to legal reparations, despite some of them having reported the forced expulsion to the Cuban consulate and Turkish authorities after their arrival.

Joel (name changed to protect identity), 38, a doctor from Havana looking to claim asylum in Spain, says he feared being killed during his expulsion from Greece.

In a video call with Al Jazeera from Istanbul, Joel recounted the two-day ordeal.

In the early hours of October 29 last year, Joel and two other Cubans crossed into Greece from North Macedonia on a 48-hour journey which had taken them from Havana to Moscow, then to Belgrade, then by bus and on foot across Serbia and North Macedonia.

Later that day, Joel says all three were removed from a bus travelling from Thessaloniki to Athens by Greek police.

He recalled being taken to three different detention centres where the trio, as well as other Cubans, Syrians, Af-

ghans and Pakistanis had their belongings taken, and were forced to undress, searched, beaten and detained without food or water.

“I told the officers I was a doctor from Cuba and was there to seek political asylum. They just looked at me and laughed,” he said.

After spending the night in detention, the entire group was driven to the forest near the Turkish border.

Joel recounts they were forced to walk in a line, led by gun-carrying officers wearing balaclavas.

“I thought we were being taken to be killed,” he said, adding that as they arrived at the Evros River – which marks the border between Greece and Turkey – an officer hit a young man who was brought there fully naked.

The officer then dragged the man to the river and pushed his head under water, pulling it out only when called out by other officers.

The group, eight people at



Joel, a Cuban national, says he was beaten up by Greek officers during detention and expulsion into Turkey [Courtesy: Joel]

a time, was then loaded onto boats manned by plainclothes officers, taken halfway across the river before being made to swim the rest of the way into Turkey by the officers.

In a testimony given to Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN), Joel said the officers in the boat said “When you get to the other side [of the river] you are free, and you can walk towards the light and find the closest village.”

West African nations sever links with Mali over election delay

Accra, Ghana (CNN) - West African nations will close their borders with Mali, sever diplomatic ties and impose tough economic sanctions in response to its “unacceptable” delay in holding elections following a 2020 military coup, the 15-state regional bloc said on Sunday.

The fresh measures from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) represent a significant hardening of its stance towards Mali, whose interim authorities have proposed holding

elections in December 2025 instead of this February as originally agreed with the bloc.

In a communique issued after an emergency summit in the Ghanaian capital Accra, ECOWAS said it found the proposed timetable for a transition back to constitutional rule totally unacceptable.

This schedule “simply means that an illegitimate military transition government will take the Malian people hostage,” ECOWAS added.



Colonel Assimi Goita (C) seized power for the second time in a coup in May 2021.

The organisation said it had agreed to impose additional sanctions with immediate effect. These included the closure of

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Polish official fired after calling Holocaust law 'stupid'

AlJazeera - A Polish diplomat charged with improving contacts with Jews worldwide has been fired after he criticised his own government's approach to regulating Holocaust speech, the country's foreign ministry said on Monday.

Jaroslav Nowak, the plenipotentiary for contacts with the Jewish diaspora described a Holocaust speech law passed by his country's governing party as "stupid," in an interview last week with Jewish News, a weekly newspaper published in the United Kingdom.

Nowak also said Poland should pass a law on property restitution, a statement implying further criticism of the ruling authorities, who recently passed a law cutting off the chances for restitution or compensation for those who had properties seized by the communists. Among those affected are Holocaust survivors and their heirs.

Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau fired Nowak on Saturday, the ministry spokesman, Lukasz Jasina, announced on Monday on Twitter. He did not give a reason.

The development came days after



A card with the words 'Never again, always remember' commemorates the Holocaust near the former Nazi concentration camp of Auschwitz [File: Kacper Pempel/Reuters]

Poland recalled its new ambassador to Prague after that diplomat criticised his own country in an interview – in that case, in relation to Poland's approach to a dispute with the Czech Republic over a state-run coal mine.

Ambassador Miroslaw Jasinski spoke of "arrogance" on the Polish side, something the government spokesman called "extremely irresponsible".

Nowak's dismissal followed him telling Jewish News that he believed

legislation passed in 2018 seeking to ban certain statements about Poland and the Holocaust "is one of the stupidest amendments that was ever done by any law".

The legislation sought to fight back against claims that Poland, a victim of Nazi Germany, bore responsibility for the Holocaust. The law outraged Israel, where many felt it was an attempt to whitewash the fact that some Poles did kill Jews during the German occupation during World War II.

The legislation originally called for prison terms of up to three years for falsely attributing German crimes to Poland. It was later amended to remove the criminal provisions.

Last year, Poland also approved a law that sharply restricted the rights to reclaim property seized by the country's former communist regime, including Holocaust survivors and their families.

That law also provoked a serious diplomatic dispute with Israel, which still remains unresolved.

Nowak said he believed that Poland will, at some point, "have to do something about" restitution.

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members' land and air borders with Mali, the suspension of non-essential financial transactions, the freezing of Malian state assets in ECOWAS commercial banks and recalling their ambassadors from Bamako. Meanwhile, regional monetary union UEMOA instructed all financial institutions under its umbrella to suspend Mali with immediate effect, severing the country's access to regional financial markets.

The Malian interim government said it was astonished by the decisions. In response, it vowed to close its side of the border with ECOWAS member states, recall its ambassa-

dors, and reserve the right to reconsider its membership in ECOWAS and UEMOA.

"The government strongly condemns these illegal and illegitimate sanctions," it said in a statement read on state television by spokesperson Abdoulaye Maiga in the early hours of Monday, calling on Malians to remain calm.

They have previously blamed the election delay partly on the challenge of organizing a democratically robust vote amid a violent Islamist insurgency.

Special forces commander Assimi Goita was one of several colonels who overthrew Malian President Boubacar

Ibrahim Keita in August 2020, after which the interim authorities promised an 18-month transition to civilian rule.

Goita staged a second coup in May 2021 when he pushed aside the interim president and took the job himself.

The tougher response from ECOWAS reflects the pressure the organisation is under to show it can protect democracy from a backslide to military rule after West and Central Africa saw four coups within 18 months.

The new measures will be gradually lifted only after an acceptable election timeframe is finalised and progress is made towards implementing

it, ECOWAS said.

Under previous sanctions, Mali's ECOWAS membership is suspended and members of the transitional authority and their relatives are subject to travel bans and asset freezes.

Immediately after Keita was ousted, ECOWAS temporarily closed its borders with Mali and halted financial flows – short-term sanctions that caused a sharp fall in imports to the landlocked country.

Mali's political upheaval has also deepened tensions with former colonial power France, which has thousands of soldiers deployed across West Africa's Sahel region to battle Islamist insurgents.

New cadre of media practitioners to benefit from workshop

By **Elwin Francis**

Efforts are being made to develop young sports writers and commentators in Antigua and Barbuda.

Commissioner of Sports, Colin “Tin Tin” James, said he is in the process of organising a media workshop to develop a new cadre of young sports journalists.

James, a veteran journalist, said the workshop is being planned to coincide with Antigua and Barbuda hosting of the first cricket Test between the West Indies and England at the Sir Vivian Richards Cricket Stadium from March 8th to 12th.

James is also producing a cricket magazine in which he will recognise the work of his friend and former media colleague, Ambassador Franklin King Frank-I Francis, who passed away on December 6th last year at the age of 72.

James said he will capitalise on the expertise from the cadre of international journalists and broadcasters who will assemble in Antigua to cover the Test match to impart their knowledge of sports writing and commentary to participants at the media workshop.

“Apart from the cricket publication that I am working on for the Test match, simultaneously, I am also in the process of organising a sports writers and com-

mentators workshop,” James said.

“We are hoping to use the international broadcasters who are coming to Antigua in late February and early March to interact with them and try to get a cadre of young, impressionable sports reporters, sports writers and sports commentators to be part of this workshop.”

James said although planning of the media workshop is yet to be finalised, he has already contacted several key people whom he would like to include in the project.

“It is still a work in progress at this time. We have made some contact with some key people already. We are getting some good responses in terms of resource people and very shortly we will be announcing the date based on that,” James said.

“As you know, ESPN is going to cover the series for the Cricket West Indies so we intend to get a resource person from ESPN. You will have the British media whether it be sky or the British newspapers such as the Telegraph, Daily Mail, Times, Guardian and the Independent so we can also get someone from those newspapers.

“We are also looking at the possibility of getting another American net-



Commissioner of Sports and Antiguan journalist Colin ‘Tin Tin’ James. (Facebook)

work involved. Obviously the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) will be around so we would involve them as well.

“So the whole idea is to get the 5th formers in the various secondary schools and those who are attending 6th form at the Antigua State College or just about anyone who wants to be a part of it.

“As a matter of fact, you can be in any form at a secondary school and be a part of this workshop. By the end of January (2022) we should have the date finalised and we should be announcing it.

“The workshop will focus on writing and broadcasting in print, radio, television, social media and sports commentating.”

Stylish Sylla goal seals unconvincing win

CAMEROON (AP) - Guinea got off to a winning but unconvincing start at the Africa Cup of Nations as they edged past Malawi with a 1-0 win yesterday.

A stylish goal from Issiaga Sylla was enough to seal the points, but they were made to work hard by a side playing at just the third finals in their history.

Indeed, it was Malawi

who had by far the better of the early chances and would have gone ahead had Yamikani Chester kept his composure and then kept his feet when twice through on goal.

Ibrahima Conte hit the post with a header before Sylla broke the deadlock, steering home first time after Jose Kante had been found by a good ball from

Liverpool’s Naby Keita.

Experienced Guinea goalkeeper Aly Keita was called on to deny Malawi captain Limbikani Mzava and Peter Banda before half-time as Malawi, ranked 129th in the world and unable even to name a full substitutes’ bench, continued to threaten.

Guinea took greater control in a second half

short on chances as they took a positive step towards qualifying from Group B.

However, the level of their performance did little to belie the 2.28 per cent chance of winning the tournament that Opta’s predictor tool gave them before kick-off, and coach Kaba Diawara will hope for better when they face Senegal on Friday.

Novak Djokovic supporters pepper-sprayed after tennis pro gets visa reinstated

FOX - A crowd of Novak Djokovic supporters were pepper-sprayed in Melbourne late Monday night after surrounding a car believed to be carrying the tennis pro after a judge ruled to reinstate his visa, reports say.

Federal Circuit Court Judge Anthony Kelly ruled the government's decision to cancel Djokovic's visa was "unreasonable" and that he had not been given enough time to speak to his lawyers before the decision was made on the basis that he did not provide sufficient evidence for a medical exemption.

A large crowd of supporters, some carrying Serbian flags, gathered outside his attorney's office after Djokovic's release was ordered. As a black car began to exit, the crowd surrounded it with some even dancing on the vehicle and banging on its windows.

According to The Age, police began using pepper spray on some supporters. As the crowd dispersed, some began confronting officers and throwing bottles.

The vehicle in question was reportedly carrying Djokovic or someone connected to his coaching staff.

The World No. 1 took to Twitter on Monday to thank his supporters, adding that his hope to be able to participate in the Australian Open set to begin on January 17.



A car believed to be carrying Djokovic leaves Collins Street surrounded by Serbian tennis fans on Jan. 10, 2022 in Melbourne, Australia. (Diego Fedele/Getty Images)

"I'm pleased and grateful that the Judge overturned my visa cancellation," he wrote. "Despite all that has happened, I want to stay and try to compete [at the] Australian Open. I remain focused on that. I flew here to play at one of the most important events we have in front of the amazing fans."

"For now I cannot say more but THANK YOU all for standing with me through all this and encouraging me to stay strong," he said in a second tweet.

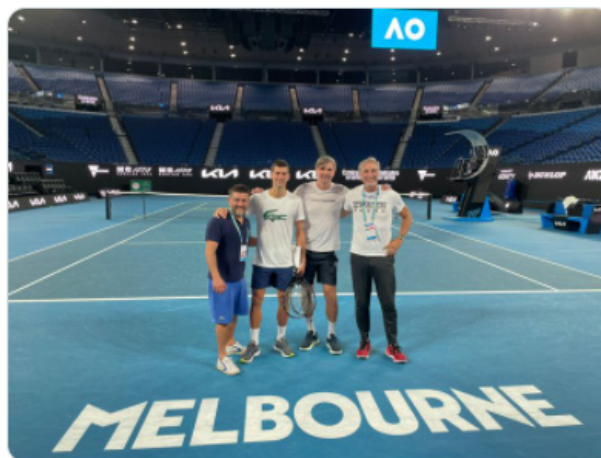
Despite having his visa reinstated, Djokovic could still be deported depending on the federal government's decision to revoke his visa again – a move that would ban him from the country for three years.



Novak Djokovic
@DjokerNole



I'm pleased and grateful that the Judge overturned my visa cancellation. Despite all that has happened, I want to stay and try to compete @AustralianOpen
I remain focused on that. I flew here to play at one of the most important events we have in front of the amazing fans. 🙏



9:17 AM · Jan 10, 2022



Djokovich posted a Tweet on Monday thanking his fans for their support

Mane spares blushes of depleted Teranga Lions

CAMEROON (AP) - Senegal got their Africa Cup of Nations campaign started yesterday with a 1-0 win over Zimbabwe, as Sadio Mane scored the decisive goal with a matter of seconds remaining.

Aliou Cisse's side were without as many as six "indisputable starting players" due to a COVID-19 outbreak, which impacted the likes of Edouard Mendy and Kalidou Koulibaly.

But even allowing for their absences, the Teranga Lions failed to meet expectations for much of the



Liverpool's Sadio Mane, second left, helped Senegal's Africa Cup of Nations campaign get off to a winning start by scoring a late goal against Zimbabwe. (Planet Football)

match.

Keita Balde summed up their performance early on, wasting one of few clear op-

portunities when shooting over from close range, and Mane spurned another good chance.

The game was largely played at a pedestrian pace in the heat of Bafoussam, but Boulaye Dia sprung into action 14 minutes from time and looked certain to square to Mane for a tap-in, only for Petros Mhari to brilliantly hold on to the squared pass.

Zimbabwe looked set to hang on, but in the final 10 seconds of stoppage time, Kelvin Madzongwe charged down a shot and accidentally handled the ball, allowing Liverpool star Mane to smash home the resulting penalty.

CWI signs exclusive agreement with ESPN

ST JOHN'S, Antigua – Cricket West Indies (CWI) has signed a new broadcast partnership for the region with ESPN and its Caribbean Networks to become the exclusive broadcast partner for all West Indies live home international and regional cricket for the 2022 season.

The new exclusive live broadcast partnership means that CWI and ESPN will ensure more Caribbean fans than ever will have the chance to access live coverage of the West Indies home international matches.

Fans across the region will be able to see West Indies home internationals live and exclusively on ESPN Caribbean and the ESPN app starting on Saturday, January 8, with the first game of the three-match CG Insurance One Day International (ODI) Series between the West Indies Men and Ireland at Sabina Park, Jamaica

to be followed by the one-off CG Insurance T20 International (T20I) between West Indies and Ireland on January 16.

CWI's partnership with the world's biggest sports broadcaster will then see ESPN Caribbean airing the England Betway T20I Series and the England Test tour of the West Indies – the five match Betway T20I series at Kensington Oval in Barbados from January 22-30.

This will be followed by the eagerly-anticipated Three-Test series in Antigua, Barbados and Grenada in March, which will be contested for the recently minted Richards-Botham trophy.

Later this year, ESPN Caribbean and the ESPN app will also feature West Indies Men's home series against Bangladesh, India and New Zealand, as well as continued cov-

erage of the CG Insurance Super50 Cup – CWI's marquee regional 50-over tournament. These match schedules will be made available at a later date.

The extended partnership will mean that the ESPN Caribbean channels and ESPN app will provide fans with a full live schedule of all West Indies home international matches, every ICC international tournament match featuring the West Indies, as well as the CG Insurance Super50 Cup.

Johnny Grave, CEO of CWI said: "We are delighted to grow our partnership with ESPN to include our home Internationals in the Caribbean, bringing the region's favourite sports team, the West Indies, into millions of homes and mobile devices."

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Afghanistan suffer visa glitches ahead of Under-19 World Cup

Visa glitches have delayed Afghanistan's arrival into the Caribbean for the upcoming Under-19 World Cup.

This has had a knock-on effect to a bit of the pre-tournament scheduling, with their warm-up games cancelled, and those of England and UAE rescheduled.

Discussions attempting to resolve the issues are on-going.

"We have been working together with the Afghanistan Cricket Board and relevant stakeholders to try and find a resolution to the problem and allow the team to

travel," ICC Head of Events Chris Tetley was quoted as saying in an official release.

"In the meantime, we have rescheduled the warm-up fixtures to ensure the teams in the region are able to continue their preparation ahead of the start of the tournament on 14 January."

Afghanistan were scheduled to play England and UAE over two warm-up games on January 10 and 12 in St Kitts & Nevis and St Paul's (Liberta village) in Antigua respectively.

England will now play UAE in a warm-up at the Conaree Cricket Centre in



Noor Ahmad is part of Afghanistan's squad for the tournament ICC via Getty

St Kitts today.

The teams at the Under-19 World Cup are split into four groups of four

teams, with Scotland the latest to join the competition, replacing New Zealand who withdrew in November over Covid-related quarantine restrictions.

Afghanistan are placed in Group C alongside Pakistan, Zimbabwe and Papua New Guinea.

The top two teams from the pool qualify for the quarter-finals, while the bottom two from each pool will compete in a playoff round.

As things stand, Afghanistan are set to open their tournament on January 16 against Zimbabwe in Diego Martin in Trinidad. This will be their seventh appearance in the Under-19 World Cup.

Since first qualifying in 2010, they have made every single subsequent edition. Their best finish came in 2018 in New Zealand where they made the semi-finals. (cricinfo)

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"This new addition to our long-standing partnership with the world's pre-eminent sports broadcaster is providing greater access to more live West Indies international and regional cricket than ever before to fans across the region.

"Making it easier for our fans to watch and follow West Indies live cricket is a crucial part of CWI's strategy and this exclusive agreement is equally significant to help engage and energise the next generation of fans and players."

FULL MATCH SCHEDULE

CG Insurance ODI and T20I Series, West Indies v Ireland at Sabina Park, Jamaica

January 8: 1st CG Insurance ODI (9:30am local time/10:30am Eastern Caribbean)

January 11: 2nd CG Insurance ODI (9:30am local time/10:30am Eastern Caribbean)

January 14: 3rd CG Insurance ODI

(9:30am local time/10:30am Eastern Caribbean)

January 16: CG Insurance T20I (4pm local time/5pm Eastern Caribbean)
Betway T20I Series, West Indies vs England (4pm local time/3pm Jamaica Time)

January 22: 1st Betway T20I at Kensington Oval

January 23: 2nd Betway T20I at Kensington Oval

January 26: 3rd Betway T20I at Kensington Oval

January 29: 4th Betway T20I at Kensington Oval

January 30: 5th Betway T20I at Kensington Oval

England Test Series (10am local time/9am Jamaica Time)

March 8-12: 1st Test at Sir Vivian Richards Stadium, Antigua

March 16-20: 2nd Test at Kensington Oval, Barbados

March 24-28: 3rd Test at Grenada National Stadium, Grenada

CWI, Ireland postpone 2nd ODI



West Indies take on Ireland today at Sabina Park, Jamaica where they will hope to secure a win and snag the series.

KINGSTON, Jamaica (CWI) – Cricket West Indies (CWI) and Cricket Ireland (CI) issued a joint statement late yesterday afternoon informing that the second One Day International on the upcoming Ireland tour of the West Indies has been postponed.

This comes after two further positive COVID-19 cases were reported

in the Ireland camp following recent testing, and two players being ruled out due to injury, resulting in Ireland having a severely depleted squad.

The second CG Insurance One-Day International scheduled for Sabina Park on Tuesday, January 11 has therefore been postponed.

CWI and CI are in discussions to review the match schedule and are

working to explore all possibilities for the series to be completed.

The five members of the Ireland team who have returned positive COVID-19 results remain in isolation under the care and supervision of the medical teams.

CWI announced that further updates will be provided as soon as possible.