



ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

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Happy New Year!

JOHN E. ST. LUCE
FINANCE & CONFERENCE
CENTER



A new name for the ADOMS building on Sir Sydney Walling Highway. The modern facility which will officially open tomorrow, bears the name of retired Antigua Labour Party Politician, Sir John E. St. Luce, a former MP and Minister of Finance.

Michael Browne returns today as Cabinet Minister

Murder accused, Ziggy Beazer, to make court appearance this week

Ziggy Beazer, who has been charged for the murder of Leroy Caesar, is expected to make his first court appearance this week.

Caesar, a 64-year-old resident of Jennings, was being held at the St. John's Police Station when he and Beazer reportedly got into an altercation in the cell they shared at about 9:20pm on December 30th last year.

Caesar was found unresponsive and was subsequently transported to the Sir Lester Bird Medical Center where he was pronounced dead at approximately 10:38 the same night.

Beazer has a criminal record and spent seven years behind bars on a



Ziggy Beazer is accused killing 64-year-old Leroy Caesar at the St. John's Police Station

previous murder charge. He was re-

leased in July 2020, however, when he was deemed unfit to stand trial after being diagnosed with schizophrenia.

Meanwhile, Magistrate Conliffe Clarke remanded 31-year-old Richard Lewis when he appeared before the St. John's Magistrates' Court last Friday morning.

According to a police report, the Willikies man fatally stabbed fellow villager, Jace Merrick, during an altercation in Willikies on the night of Tuesday 28th December, 2021.

Attorney Sherfield Bowen is representing Lewis, whose committal proceedings will begin in the District 'B' Magistrate's Court on March 30, 2022.

ECCB governor says economic recovery will depend heavily on rebounding tourism



ECCB Governor, Timothy Antoine

The Eastern Caribbean Central Bank is relying on a rebounding tourism industry within the currency union to achieve its 7.0 per cent growth projected for 2022.

In his Christmas message, ECCB Governor, Timothy Antoine, highlighted the struggles the sub-region continues to endure during the COVID-19 pandemic and reiterated the bank's position of playing its part in the recovery process.

"Looking ahead, we currently project the ECCU will grow by about 7.0 per cent next year, as the recovery of

Tourism, our dominant export, gathers momentum. The ECCB will publish revised estimates at the end of January 2022. Our Central Bank will continue to implement the Programme of Action for Recovery, Resilience and Transformation. Key actions include boosting food and nutrition security; access to credit for small businesses; accelerating digital transformation, strengthening cyber security and enhancing climate resilience," Antoine remarked.

In the height of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the bank reported it recorded achievements, notably collaboration with banks and financial institutions to deliver loan repayment deferral programme, the provision of a million dollars to member countries to aid in the timely rollout of vaccine programmes and the successful launch of DCash. These along with a 1.0 per cent projected growth for 2021 after a 17.0 percent contraction in the previous year are being described as successes. Governor Timothy Antoine reflected on the devastation caused in St. Vincent and the Grenadines by the La Soufriere Volcano and thanked healthcare and

other frontline workers for their contributions in managing the spread of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

"We are grateful that our fair isles were spared the ravages of monster storms but are mindful of the devastation wrought by the eruption of the La Soufriere volcano in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and the criticality of additional resources as the country builds back. We urge those who pledged, to make good on their commitments and encourage others to step forward. "As we prepare to enter the third year of the pandemic with no immediate end in sight, I hail the tireless work of our frontline warriors in healthcare (including laboratory testing personnel) as well as security, border control and other essential workers including the media. I thank all those who have stepped forward to be vaccinated and encourage those who have not yet done so, to do so. Let us all do our part to save lives and restore livelihoods," the governor concluded.

He has called for everyone to work collectively in navigating the pandemic.

MP Michael Browne to be sworn in as Minister of Creative Industries & Innovation

All Saints West member of Parliament, Michael Browne, will take the oath of office as Minister of Creative Industries and Innovation during a ceremony this morning at Government House. Governor General Sir Rodney Williams will preside over the 10am swearing in, following which Browne will receive his instruments of appointment. Prime Minister Gaston Browne wrote to Sir Rodney last week, advising him to appoint Michael Browne to the new position effective 3rd January, 2022. The former Minister of Education, Science and Technology resigned from his position and also from the Cabinet of Antigua and Barbuda after his appointment was revoked, following his arrest in November 2020 on a serious charge related to allegations made against him by a woman he knew.

The matter went to trial in the High Court in late 2021. But the MP was found not guilty on 13th December following a Judge alone trial.



Hon. Michael Browne, Minister of Creative Industries & Innovation

Prime Minister Gaston Browne previously stated if Michael Browne was exonerated, he would return to the Cabinet, a promise he fulfilled. The MP's first Cabinet meeting in more than a year is expected to be later this

week.

With his new ministerial portfolios, Minister Michael Browne will be responsible for the planning and execution of Antigua and Barbuda's largest festival, carnival, which until now was the responsibility of Minister Daryll Matthew. Other national events that will be under his charge include Independence celebrations, V. C. Bird Day Celebrations, Cultural Festivals, the Performing Arts and the One Nation Concert. Graphic Arts, Visual Arts, Decorative Arts and Musical Arts.

On the innovation front, Browne will have oversight of The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the science and innovation centre that seeks to combat climate change and develop clean technology.

He is expected to speak to reporters following today's ceremony about his immediate plans and the direction in which he wishes to take the newest ministry.

Antigua & Barbuda among CNN's top destinations to visit in 2022

The country has received a much needed boost to its recovering tourism industry in the form of a beaming destination recommendation from US news giant, CNN.

An article published on CNN.com over the weekend identified Antigua and Barbuda among its top picks for holiday travel in 2022. Antigua and Barbuda topped the list of twenty-two destinations and was the only Caribbean destination featured.

The article highlighted the twin island destination's famous white and pink sand beaches as well as the country's claim to staging the longest running Sunday party in the Caribbean at historic Shirley's Heights.

The England cricket team's tour of the region later this year, which will see them going head to head against the West Indies at the Sir Vivian Richards Cricket Stadium, was among the country's attractive selling points to fans of the sport who may be finalising their annual vacation plans.

Sister island, Barbuda, received special mention as an exclusive vacation spot for celebrities like the late Princess Di-

ana and others including Robert De Niro and billionaire James Packer who are also the co-owners of Nobu Beach Inn. Another major selling point that was featured was Antigua and Barbuda's ongoing commitment to reducing its footprint on the environment through the introduction of a number of green

initiatives. The country was the first in the region to completely ban single use plastics. It also established the "Green Corridor" which is a collection of resorts and other businesses in the southwest of Antigua which have all adopted environmentally friendly practises.



Visitors enjoying the Caribbean's longest running Sunday party at Shirley's Heights

2022 New Year's Day Address to the Nation

By the Honourable Gaston Browne
Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda

Fellow Citizens and Residents

As the Old Year ends and the New Year begins; we, the people of Antigua and Barbuda, have much for which we should be justifiably proud. We have not emerged from the struggles of 2020 and 2021 unscathed; but we are far less wounded than many less fortunate peoples all over the world.

The COVID-19 pandemic injured us in many ways, but it did not kill our national spirit of resilience that has lifted generations of our people from the depths of despair, to the great heights of achievement.

Rallying in support of the measures that your government implemented, we kept our economy afloat, we maintained public sector employment fully, we incentivized the tourism sector and safeguarded private sector jobs in construction and hotel refurbishment.

In addition, we continued to renew and expand our infrastructure in roads, government buildings, ports, water supply and digital capacity.

We moved forward in dire circumstances, where other countries have reversed.

And that is because, together, we reaffirmed the spirit of resilience that has consistently triumphed over adversity and trials.

Yes; there were some who doubted. And yes; those doubters continue to find new reasons for questioning our capacity to meet our challenges and to overcome them.

But, as a people, we listened to the voice of reason and common sense, acknowledging that, as an Antiguan and Barbudan family, we would rise, or fall together, as one nation, one people, with a common destiny.

We acted on that recognition, unlike those who failed to join the battle against COVID, but instead chose to carp, criticize, and squawk on the side-lines of our efforts.

Showing faith in your government's leadership, we, the Antiguan and Barbudan people, picked ourselves up and fought our way back; though the road was arduous and the journey long.

And, that is why by the end of 2021, we happily witnessed the fruits of our labour in the revitalization of our



Honourable Gaston Browne
Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda

tourism industry, the return to work of many of our people, and greater optimism about our future.

This unrelenting fight for a strong recovery, has resulted in economic expansion of four percent in 2021, despite the battering from COVID 19.

Your loyalty to your country's future; your belief in us as a people; and your determination to support your government's leadership, has brought us, with God's grace, out of the worst valleys of darkness, into the bright light of new possibilities.

I thank every Antiguan and Barbudan who was courageous enough, not to surrender to fear; not to succumb to despair; not to listen to the opportunistic voices of division, discord, doom and gloom.

I recall Romans, Chapter 8, verse 31:
"What shall we say about things as

wonderful as these?

If God is for us, who can ever be against us?"

My Fellow Citizens and Residents, You will recall the long period when the main source countries, from which our tourists originate, closed their borders, grounded planes and stopped cruise liners from traversing the seas, resulting in our economy declining by 17.3%.

You will recall that Government's revenues dropped suddenly and gravely by 50 percent in May of 2020.

Yet, we managed to keep all public servants employed, ensuring that families had at least one person, bringing in an income.

We continued to build out infrastructure, providing employment for hundreds, while building for the future. We completed the Friars Hill and Sir George Walter Highways, and we are close to completing the Factory/Lunar Park roads for several miles up to Willikies.

We have substantially completed the US\$95M cargo port, to facilitate transshipments of cargo, positioning the St John's port, as a vital logistics and shipping hub for the future.

We can be proud of the fact, that we will host the most modern airport and seaport in the region. We should also commend the directors and staff of the Antigua & Barbuda Airport Authority for their achievement, in copping the prize for the best Caribbean airport.

We also maintained investment in education, thereby continuing to give our young people every opportunity to compete with the best in the world, and to contribute to our national growth and development.

Thus, we completed the expansion of the Sir Novelle Richards Academy; and we continue to expand the broadband infrastructure in our schools and enhance the Five Islands Campus of the University of the West Indies.

Among other things; we established an agreement with Harvard University to certify the graduates of Five Islands in certain disciplines and to give them access to the learning material and teachings of Harvard.

My fellow country men and country women,

In the Budget statement that we will present during the course of 2022, we will lay out in detail the complete plan for the country's further economic and social development.

Our development and investment plan, will not be fanciful promises of mythical investors, sitting abroad on millions of dollars, earning no interest or other return, while they wait for a different government in Antigua and Barbuda.

Those beliefs are unrealistic imaginations – dreamt by loafers, lacking sound judgment; or deliberately weaved by unscrupulous charlatans; whose purpose is to deceive and manipulate the minds of the innocent and unsuspecting.

Here is the reality: no bonafide investor sits idly on money.

All investors want to make money work; giving them interest/profits quickly and continuously.

Instead of trying to sell false promises to our people, your government offers reality in deeds and in accomplishments.

While we engage in diversification of our economy into cannabis, stem cells, block chain and crypto currencies; we continue to strengthen agriculture to ensure food security and food sovereignty.

We are also developing digital technologies, to facilitate digitalization of our economy, to create new jobs and opportunities for entrepreneurship.

We are also recovering our vital tourism industry.

2021 was a year of steady growth particularly in July and August, when air arrivals surpassed our best ever monthly 2019 numbers, for the same period.

Air arrivals from all markets by the end of November 2021 showed strong growth over 2020.

We are estimating 167,000 air arrivals for this year, 2021. This is more than half of the total number of arrivals by air in 2019.

These figures indicate that tourism is bouncing back, and that our promotional efforts and preparations in Antigua and Barbuda are working.

On the cruise tourism front, at the end of December 77,565 persons visited since cruising resumed in July.

Already, the scheduled calls for 2022 are encouraging, demonstrating the value in the investment we have made.

Our yachting industry has proved to be durable and resilient.

The latest improvements of the industry's infrastructure such as, the increased availability of potable water, additional berths, and the availability of low-sulphur diesel fuel for the mega yachts; have also improved the attractiveness of yachts remaining in Antigua as a major home base.

Our tourism industry has proven to be resilient, and we will continue to work with our international partners, not only to hold but, to strengthen the place we occupy as one of the most desirable destinations globally.

Over the past 18 months, we incentivised the hotel industry, helping hoteliers to refurbish and renovate their properties so that, as the pandemic eases, they could present our country as a fresh, reinvigorated destination to tourists.

This strategy, together with the patience and endurance of the workers in the industry, is what causes our hotels to be near full capacity now, despite the shadow of COVID that hangs over the globe.

We also increased capital spending, despite the huge constraints, to complete the new cruise tourism berth that will accommodate the Oasis class ships, bringing thousands more tourists to our shores, and greater earnings to our people.

Much was made by self-serving voices of the fact that this month, even though the new pier was ready, an Oasis ship could not call.

No attention was drawn to the fact that we enjoyed as many as five cruise ships on many days this month, because of the new Oasis class pier.

And no reference was made to the fact that, what stopped the Oasis ship from calling, was not that we had not built the fifth pier, but that an unexpected rock formation delayed the completion of the dredging of the space required for the turning apron.

That work is underway and will be completed by March, despite the dark hopes and selfish wishes of siren voices, that would lure ships to crash on rocks, rather than to moor

safely on solid shores; bringing not moans of misery but cries of joy.

As our National Hero, Sir Vere Cornwall Bird Snr, would have said: "The dogs bark but the caravan moves on".

Fellow Citizens and Residents You know for 18 long months, in the most stringent economic circumstances, your government worked diligently and creatively, to keep everyone of us safe from the ravages of the COVID-19 virus.

That was our first priority for spending.

It did not matter who was black or white; who was born Antiguan and Barbudan, or who was not born here, who was young or old, who was rich or poor - we wanted everyone to be defended, to be safeguarded, to be secure.

In our Antigua and Barbuda, we wanted no one to be unseen, no one to be unheard, no one to be unprotected, and no one to be left behind.

That is why our government spent scarce financial resources on building the capacity to fight COVID, including the purchase of ventilators, drugs, protective equipment, vaccines and compensating medical personnel for their front-line work.

It is why we significantly increased our number of hospital beds, to the point where we are among the best in the Caribbean.

It is why we built and equipped in rapid time, the new 17 beds infectious disease Centre; the Sir Cuthwyn Lake Medical Centre; and two modern polyclinics, located in Glanvilles and Villa.

It is also why we renovated and expanded the Hannah Thomas Hospital in Barbuda, and why we are developing a new cardiac unit at the Sir Lester Bird Medical Centre, and a renal facility at Holberton, to increase and expand our renal and kidney transplant services.

Simply put, the health, the well-being and the lives of all who inhabit this country comes before anything and everything else.

And your government will not play-with lives and livelihoods for political gain.

That's not the Gaston Browne administration way; that is other people's game.

Our Government is guided by Philip

pians, Chapter 2, verse 4:
 “Let each of you, look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others”.

To your government, the interest of the people of Antigua and Barbuda is first, second, last, and always.

Fellow Antiguans and Barbudans It is because of the vigilance of your government and the support of the people who recognized the wisdom of vaccinations that, of the 4,259 infected cases, 4,060 persons recovered.

By any objective measure, the recovery of 95.3% of those persons infected by COVID-19, is a truly remarkable achievement.

Again, I thank the health workers on the front-line of this grand and noble effort.

We will long remember them for their courage, skill and care.

Equally, we will remember with deep regret the 119 persons who died.

We still lament their untimely deaths in the grip of this dreaded disease, and we continue to join their families and loved ones in praying for the rest of their souls.

But, even one death was too many.

That is why, so many of us in our country call upon those who still refuse to be inoculated, to think again.

Think particularly of young children who cannot help themselves and have to rely on the good sense of adults, to protect them and preserve lives, they have only just started to live.

As a father of young children, one of them fifteen months old, I am frightened every day that they might be infected by a disease we know is debilitating and deadly.

Like all other parents, I know the anguish and heart-rending pain that I would feel, if any of my young children were to be struck down by COVID.

I do all in my power every day to protect them and I pray for God's continued mercy.

Timothy Chapter 5, verse 8 teaches every one of us that:

“if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever”.

I understand the fear of the vaccine, but it has killed no one in our country;

it has saved tens of millions of lives across the globe.

Is it not better to take the vaccine which has so evidently saved so many lives, instead of risking COVID-19 and its many variants that could more certainly take your life, or the life of children and grandparents?

So, once again as we enter a New Year, I appeal to those, who are hesitant to be inoculated, to join the majority of us who have taken the vaccine in order to protect ourselves and everyone in our community; especially the helpless and the vulnerable.

I also, implore the vulnerable ones among us, to get boosted as soon as possible, in light of the rapid spread of the omicron variant.

My dear friends

While I am talking about the senseless talking of lives, let me deplore the 16 murders our country endured in 2021.

Most of these homicides were the consequence of domestic disputes, jealousies and rivalries.

Our country is too small, and our people too few, for 16 murders to simply be a statistic.

All of us are affected by murder, however it occurs.

None of us can be tolerant of murder in any circumstances.

I will take no comfort in comparisons with other countries, which indicate that we have fewer murders than most.

Every life in our small society is precious.

No one has the right to end the life of another.

Therefore, bright and early in 2022, as your Prime Minister, I will require the Cabinet Ministers responsible for social transformation, gender affairs, law enforcement and education, to construct and launch an expanded and robust conflict resolution and public education programme, to proactively curb crime and violence.

My dear citizens and residents Barbuda and Antigua are intrinsic and integral parts of our one nation, and our one people.

Barbuda's development and the welfare of its people may be a political football to some, but to my administration, the interests of the people in Barbuda are as important

as the interests of the people in Antigua.

Despite all the financial challenges we have faced, work has continued on the newly paved 6,100 feet runaway on Barbuda to facilitate jet aircraft traffic.

This will help to upgrade the Barbuda tourism industry, bringing jobs and a higher standard of living to our brothers and sisters in Barbuda.

A new solar-voltaic plant and additional battery storage are being installed on Barbuda, to make it the first island community in this hemisphere, powered exclusively by solar-voltaic power.

It will be the cleanest and greenest island in the world.

Again, despite extremely scarce resources, my government has directed external assistance, and its own funds, to repairing and rebuilding most of the homes that were damaged by Hurricane Irma, at no cost to the families that occupied them.

With regard to private sector investment; the PLH/Discovery Land project is currently under construction employing over 500 persons directly.

More than US\$120M was expended on this project in 2021, and the spending for the next ten years, is projected to be at least US\$150M per year.

My friends, there are those who talk of differences between Antiguans and Barbudans.

They deliberately exaggerate and exploit these differences that they themselves create, without regard for the progress and prosperity that they deny the people on Barbuda. But, we know this truth – that whatever differences may be conjured up in the minds of some, most of us share the same hopes and vision to transform our nation into an economic powerhouse.

This is a vision from which we shall not relent, despite the existential threats, challenges and COVID setbacks.

We want to empower our children and our grandchildren with a life of prosperity and happiness; built on good healthcare, good education, good quality housing and good opportunities for rewarding employment and expanded ownership.

That is our common bond and our shared purpose.

We will not change from it; we will not abandon it.

Antiguans and Barbudans will grow and prosper together.

My dear people,

Ownership is empowerment.

Therefore, we continue to encourage and support entrepreneurship and ownership among our Barbudan brothers and sisters.

To this end, work is advanced on the development of a land registry on Barbuda, to facilitate the granting of freehold land ownership to Barbudans, starting in 2022.

This will secure real ownership empowerment of our Barbudan brothers and sisters, while displacing the disempowering myth of collective ownership.

There is a housing revolution taking place in our country, with enlarged land and home ownership in both Antigua and Barbuda.

Several housing developments are already obvious in our country.

In 2022, the pace will be accelerated, as the economy builds on the growth that we achieved in of 2021.

With regard to water, we share the desire for greater and more reliable supply.

That's why we have invested in three additional reverse osmosis plants, that will provide an additional four million gallons of water every day, while subsidising the cost to every user.

As I speak, APUA is in the process of commissioning two of these three reverse osmosis plants, that will become operational in January 2022.

The third water plant will produce 3 million gallons a day and will be installed in Bethesda, later in the year.

And while I am talking about APUA, let me say this:

Very conscious that today's world - in all its economic and social aspects - is rapidly moving toward digitalized communication, and determined that we, the people of Antigua and Barbuda, will not be left behind and disadvantaged; your government, through APUA, invested in enlarging our telecommunication infrastructure.

APUA is currently investing over \$100 M to expand its home and subsea cable infrastructure, to give modern and affordable broadband services to every Antiguan and Bar-

budan, and to digitalize our nation's economy.

My dear people,

The image and regard for Antigua and Barbuda in the global community today are rising.

We can all take pride in the evident facts that our country is today, treated with regard and respect in the international community.

Good governance is good business.

Whenever and wherever there have been indications of wrongdoing or corruption in my administration, with the support of my Cabinet, I have acted on it.

The evidence is there to prove it, and I thank my Cabinet colleagues who stood with me, to uphold our nation's integrity and protect its reputation without fear or favour.

I have just concluded the Chairmanship of CARICOM, where I worked to advance the regional interest, particularly in securing much needed vaccines and turning around the belief that we are a region of money launderers.

I was invited to participate in, and I contributed actively, to each of President Joseph Biden's global summits on Corruption, Democracy, Human Rights and Climate Change.

As the Chair of the Alliance of Small Islands States, I oversaw negotiations at COP 26 in Glasgow, pushing for more funding and for compensation for loss and damage, wreaked on small states by Climate Change.

And, I launched with other small island states in Oceania and the Pacific, a Commission to try to invoke international law to hold polluting states accountable for their actions that threaten our nations.

Antigua and Barbuda was trusted by others, with the responsibility to Chair the Commission and to host the Secretariat of the Commission.

Throughout Latin America and in Canada and the US, because of our principled positions adopted and advanced in the Organisation of American States, our country is given regard greater than its size.

Without offending anyone, we have developed close relations with major developing nations such as China and India, securing tangible benefits for all who reside in our country.

My friends,

As I said at the beginning of this

message, the COVID-19 pandemic hurt us in many ways, but it did not kill our national spirit of resilience, that has lifted generations of our people from the depths of despair to the great heights of achievement.

COVID has not gone, and the pandemic has not ended.

COVID is still here.

But we have managed it better than most.

We have developed the capacity to cope with it, so that we could open our borders and keep them open, rebuilding industry and commerce and getting our people back to work.

It is that knowledge and experience that our country needs, and upon which it relies, to take our people forward, particularly as new variants of the disease emerge.

So, as the New Year dawns, opening new possibilities and challenges, I believe we can build on the progress we've made.

We will have to wear masks for some time yet, as we will have to continue physical distancing and the practice of handwashing and sanitizing.

No people can avoid disease and pandemics or their economic and social impact; but, through leadership, we can choose to overcome the obstacles they present and to turn fear and paralysis to optimism and action.

Proven leadership - the combination of creativity, courage, strength, resilience, strategic thinking, and commitment to people - can lead us out of crisis, create conditions for progress and prosperity, and lift up all the people in our land.

We will leave no one neglected, no one ignored, and no one disadvantaged.

Our nation is ready to resume its egalitarian march to prosperity on which we had so firmly and convincingly set our feet.

We can do it.

And we certainly will do it.

Let us welcome 2022, and resolve to use the foundations, we have so painstakingly built, to make it a year of revival, recovery, and resurgence.

Happy New Year to you.

God bless you and God bless our beloved Antigua and Barbuda



Packed cruise arrivals despite increasing COVID-19 numbers

Despite the recent surge in COVID-19 numbers, Antigua and Barbuda's cruise arrivals will remain unaffected, for now.

The January cruise arrival calendar released by the Antigua & Barbuda Port Authority revealed a packed itinerary with 30th January being the only vacant day on the schedule. On several days throughout the month, Antigua and Barbuda will host as many as six vessels across its several ports in St. John's, Falmouth and Barbuda.

Only three vessels have cancelled their January calls to the island. While there is no indication that this will change, industry observers are cautious as the Omicron variant of the COVID-19 virus is now confirmed to have made its way to the region. On 30th December, 2021, health officials in neighbouring St. Kitts and Nevis confirmed the presence of the latest COVID-19 variant among their local population.

Officials here in Antigua and Barbuda have not yet confirmed whether the more transmissible Omicron variant is in circulation.

Hoteliers, meanwhile, remain optimistic that 2022 will be more fruitful for them in the wake of a devastating 2020 and lacklustre 2021 due to the continuing pandemic.

At the close of 2021, Vice Chairman of the Antigua and Barbuda Hotels and Tourism Association, Alex deBrito hinted that a crisis could again be looming over the sector as there has been a notable rise in booking cancellations. Despite this, he expressed hope that the 2021/2022 winter season would be successful.

Beyond this season however, deBrito suggested that there is the very real possibility that there will be difficult days ahead for the local tourism industry.

A number of countries across North America and Europe - the region's two largest tourism target markets - have

tightened measures related to travel and social activities since the discovery of the Omicron variant late last year.

There are also renewed calls for persons to accept one of the several available approved vaccines or to take a booster shot if they qualify. These steps stop short of the more rigid lockdowns which were implemented at the start of the pandemic in an attempt to reduce infection rates, hospitalisations and deaths.

Governments in developed countries appear to be hesitant to take the route of lockdowns to manage the latest surge of infections, however in what is being called a "soft lockdown" many businesses are voluntarily opting to close out of an abundance of caution. While the Omicron variant is far more transmissible than its predecessor Delta, medical experts say that it appears less likely to result in severe disease or death.

Billion-dollar Panama debt to millers remains in limbo



Guyana's Minister of Agriculture, Zulfikar Mustapha

GEORGETOWN, Guyana (Starbroek News) - As over \$1 billion owed by the Panamanian government to the Guyana Rice Development Board (GRDB) for rice sold to the country remains in limbo, a proposal is being put forward for consideration by the GRDB to offer a commission to millers.

The proposal is in its preliminary stages and no decision has been taken on the way forward, Rajendra Persaud of Nand Persaud Company on Friday related to this newspaper. His company is owed close to half a million US dollars from the deal.

During a meeting last week

with the Guyana Rice Millers and Exporters Association, President Irfaan Ali informed millers that it has been difficult to get a commitment from the Panamanian government to honour their payment obligations. The President, according to Persaud, explained that the Panamanian government is currently investigating the deal and corruption in the country and as such, there is no clear indication when the country will be ready to honour its debts.

Persaud said it is now up to the GRDB, since it is that agency that facilitated the deal, to resolve the matter of payment.

30 days of Festive Feast

Family Feast \$54⁹⁹

- 8 PIECES OF CHICKEN
- FRIES OR mashed potatoes
- COLESLAW
- CORN
- 2 BISCUITS

Santa BOX \$39⁹⁹

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- BURGER
- CORN
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May it be smooth
and may you enjoy
your trip!




ASIB
A Message from Antigua and Barbuda Transport Board

#drivesafeantigua



BE THERE

ANTIGUA & BARBUDA

SUPER LEAGUE		
Quarter-final 1	January 26	Sir Vivian Richards Stadium
Quarter-final 4	January 27	Coolidge Cricket Grounds
Quarter-final 3	January 28	Sir Vivian Richards Stadium
Quarter-final 2	January 29	Coolidge Cricket Grounds
Loser QF 2 v Loser QF 3	January 30	Sir Vivian Richards Stadium
Loser QF 1 v Loser QF 4	January 31	Coolidge Cricket Grounds
Semi-final 1	February 1	Sir Vivian Richards Stadium
Semi-final 2	February 2	Coolidge Cricket Grounds
5th / 6th Play-off	February 3	Sir Vivian Richards Stadium
7th / 8th Play-off	February 3	Coolidge Cricket Grounds
3rd / 4th Play-off	February 4	Coolidge Cricket Grounds
Final	February 5	Sir Vivian Richards Stadium

*QF = Quarter Final



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heartlight.org

"Hitherto hath the Lord helped us."
- 1 Samuel 7:12 -

By: Garfield Joseph

As I reflect on all that has happened in 2021, locally and internationally, and contemplate what 2022 portends, as a man of faith, I am inclined to borrow a text of scripture from Samuel, a Levite, a prophet, and last judge of Israel, that sums up my reflections and my outlook. This passage of scripture is lifted from the first book of Samuel chapter seven and verse twelve and reads thus: Ebenezer, hitherto has the Lord helped us.

Ebenezer, "the stone of help" is not only the name of a place in ancient Israel, but also a stone, a monument, that Samuel the prophet sets up after a successful battle to commemorate a great victory over the Philistines.

The record is, several months after Israel's defeat at Ebenezer by the Philistines, one of Israel's continuous warring neighbors, Samuel called for the people of Israel to gather at Mizpah and repent of their sins. The Philistines again amassed their armies to attack, but as Samuel was praying, God threw the Philistines into a panic. The Israelites cut down the Philistines as they fled, chasing them as far as below Bethcar.

This was a great victory for Israel. In commemoration of the victory, Samuel erected a stone between

Mizpah and Shen and called its name Ebenezer; for he said, 'hitherto has the Lord helped us.'

Well, when I think about all that has happened in 2021, I cannot help but to lean on this passage of scripture and adopt it for myself and for my country. Hitherto the lord helped us.

In 2021, COVID -19, with all its variants and mutations, wreaked havoc, destruction, and disorder. This dreaded pandemic is measured not in the deaths of hundreds or thousands, but in millions, and the disruption it has caused in the movement of goods and services, the loss of jobs, anxiety, and physiological and psychological trauma, forces us to pause with gratitude for surely it could have been a lot worse. But for Ebenezer, hitherto has the Lord helped us.

So, in everything give thanks. In the enjoyment of plenty give thanks. In sickness and in health, give thanks. In the advancement of honour, give thanks. For the possession of wealth, give thanks. For the increase in family give thanks. Even when the barns are empty and there are no grapes on the vine, give thanks, even for the continuance of life.

While there are many persons in our fair Antigua and Barbuda who may have experienced and are still

experiencing tremendous economic and or personal challenges, and even though many strange and unforeseen events will yet arise, we can still be grateful even for small mercies. For example, we can thank him for our benefactors and for family and friends, who were there for us, and will be there for us, to give us songs in the night during our most dark and difficult days.

Even though the COVID-19 battle still lingers, and the taming of this dreaded disease remains a challenge, we declare, Ebenezer, hitherto has the Lord helped us.

This expression of gratitude is not only a reflection of a grateful heart, but also an expression of faith. And if faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen, surely, it is better to live a life with gratitude than to mutter and to murmur and to complain about what might have been and should have been.

And this is the faith I live by; that he who has helped in the past, without doubt, can help us in the future.

Ebenezer! Antigua and Barbuda, hitherto has the Lord helped us.

Take now a review of all that the Lord has done for you in 2021. Now, what say you?

25 homeless following disastrous New Year fire in PoS



A devastating fire at Quarry Street, Port of Spain has left more than 25 people homeless Photo credit: Trinidad Express

PORT OF SPAIN, Trinidad (Trinidad Express) Fire officers believe a sky lantern or fireworks may have caused a New Year's morning fire in East Port of Spain which destroyed four homes, damaged two cars and caused a power outage after an electricity pole was incinerated. The fire, which raged for two hours, left 25 people homeless. The exact cause of the fire was still being determined yesterday, but it is believed to have been sparked by a sky lantern, also known as a Chinese lantern, police said. A sky lantern is a small hot-air balloon made of paper, with an opening at the bottom where a small fire is suspended. It has become popular in recent years as a firework. While 25 people were affected by the blaze, only one woman sustained minor injuries while attempting to

escape her burning home. The Sunday Express was told that minutes after midnight, police and fire officers received information that houses at Quarry Street were on fire. Appliances from the Wrightson Road headquarters, the Belmont Fire Station and the Four Roads Fire Station responded, under the supervision of divisional FSO Stewart. Officers said water was an issue initially, but was eventually supplied by WASA, and within two hours the fire was contained and extinguished. When the Sunday Express visited the scene on Saturday, residents were distraught as they went through the still-smoking structures, looking for personal items they could salvage. Member of Parliament for Port of Spain North/St Ann's West Stuart Young said yesterday he was upset

and saddened over the incident, noting how it "highlights how the irresponsible

actions of a few can, in a split second, negatively affect the lives of many innocents". The Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission (T&TEC) urged the public to exercise caution in the use of fireworks on Old Year's night. "Fireworks and fire lanterns (aka, sky lanterns) may be lovely to look at, but they pose a danger to electricity infrastructure, property and animals. If not handled properly, they can also cause burns and other physical injuries," T&TEC said in a statement.

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Minority Barbados opposition parties forming coalition to contest January poll



Photo credit: Nation News Barbados

Bishop Joseph Atherley will lead the coalition Alliance Party for Progress (APP) in Barbados' January 19 elections

Minority Barbados opposition parties forming coalition to contest January poll BRIDGETOWN, Barbados - Several minority opposition political parties are holding talks with a view to forming a coalition to contest the January 19 general election that Prime Minister Mia Mottley announced this week, 18 months ahead of the end of her first five-year term in office.

Political observers say Mottley's Barbados Labour Party (BLP), which won the 2018 general election by a 30-nil sweep, will face its sternest test from the long established Democratic Party (DLP) that it trounced in the last general election. But the outgoing Opposition Leader, Bishop Joseph Atherley has already announced the formation of a new coalition, called the Alliance Party

for Progress (APP) that includes the United Progressive Party (UPP) led by Lynette Eastmond. Eastmond, will serve as deputy leader in the APP. Now, the leader of Solutions Barbados, Grenville Phillips II, says his party will be forming a coalition with three other undisclosed political parties to contest the polls. Speaking to the media as four Solution Barbados candidates paid their deposits in order to contest the election, Phillips said that hopefully by the evening of December 31, his party would have 30 candidates to cover all the constituencies. "The important thing is that every constituency must have a chance. They must know what they are voting for. We have heard it before when people cry wolf and say this is the most important election. This really is the most important election for Barbados. This one determines what happens in 2022," Phillips said. Meanwhile, former BLP government legislator, Lucille Moe, who, for months, had been absent from the Senate, is reported to be a campaign strategist for the DLP.



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US airport chaos continues as more than 2,600 flights cancelled



AlJazeera - Air travel continues to be severely disrupted in the United States, with bad weather in parts of the country adding to the impact of a surge in COVID-19 infections fuelled by the Omicron variant. The US had 2,604 cancelled flights on Saturday, more than half of the 4,529 cancelled worldwide, shortly after 4:30pm (21:30 GMT), according to tracking website FlightAware.

Among international carriers, China Eastern scrubbed more than 500 flights, or about one-fourth of its total, and Air China cancelled more than 200 flights, one-fifth of its schedule, according to FlightAware. The US cancellations represent the highest single-day toll since just before Christmas when airlines began announcing staffing shortages as a result of increasing COVID infections among

crews. The worst-affected US airline was Southwest, which had to cancel 450 flights nationwide or 13 percent of its flight schedule, according to the site. American Airlines and Delta Air Lines scrubbed more than 200 flights each, and United Airlines cancelled more than 150. SkyWest, a regional carrier that operates flights under the names American Eagle, Delta Connection and United Express, grounded 480 flights, one-fourth of its schedule. A spokesperson said weather in the cities of Chicago, Denver and Detroit as well as a COVID spike were to blame. More than 800 flights were scrubbed at O'Hare Airport and more than 250 at Midway Airport. More than 12,000 US flights have been cancelled since December 24. The global air travel industry is still reeling from the highly contagious Omicron variant.

South Africa Parliament: Man arrested over massive fire



BBC - A man has been arrested after a large fire severely damaged the Houses of Parliament in the South African city of Cape Town. A police spokesperson said the man was facing charges of arson, housebreaking and theft, and would appear in court on Tuesday.

Firefighters have been working for hours to extinguish the blaze. President Cyril Ramaphosa called it a "terrible and devastating event", as he vowed parliament's work would continue. Footage from the scene on Sunday showed a plume of black smoke

filling the sky, with huge flames coming out from the roof of the building. Officials said the fire started on the third floor offices and quickly spread to the National Assembly (the parliament's lower house) chamber. The parliament is not currently in session because of the holidays, and no injuries were reported. Brigadier Nomthandazo Mbambo said the suspect is also expected to be charged under the National Key Points Act, which protects sites of strategic importance. In a statement on Sunday night, South Africa's parliament confirmed that there had been "significant damage" to the New Assembly Wing of the building, which includes the National Assembly chamber where lawmakers sit. It also said some offices had been "severely gutted".



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How To Clean Up Your Diet After The Holidays, According To Nutritionists



No holiday celebration is complete without ridiculously stuffing ourselves with festive items like comatose turkey, greasy treats, mashed treats and rich desserts.

While a little indulgence here and there is really good for you, the problem is that this festive food turns out to be a complete experience.

When it comes to eating, a "free-for-all" approach where you indulge in binge eating for long periods of time is just as bad as an "all or nothing" approach to eating that leaves you feeling deprived in the long run, says New York - Dietitian Etosha Farmer.

"This overeating, in the short term, can lead to digestive distress, fatigue, increased cravings and feelings of guilt or shame," notes Miranda Galati, registered dietitian and founder of Real Life Nutritionist. Plus, "it can promote inflammation and brain fog because it disrupts metabolism," says Hayley Pomeroy, celebrity nutritionist and author *Cooking for a fast metabolism*.

The key here is to be mindful of your food choices and indulge in moderation. "Even something like your favourite dessert can make its way into a healthy, balanced diet," says Emily Berry, RD, a registered dietitian in Louisiana. "My rule of thumb is when

you go out to eat or gather, pick one thing you're 'bragging about' and try to make healthy choices about that," explains the nutrition expert. Bottom line: Treating yourself to a scoop of ice cream or a slice of pie is totally fine. However, eating your weight in biscuits and sweets is not.

Here are ten simple, nutritionist-approved tips to help you get your diet back on track after a holiday surplus:

Stay away from cleansers and detox. "A lot of people feel they need to go to extreme lengths to fix what they eat during the holidays. But extreme diets are not sustainable and are rarely healthy," Berry says. Galati agrees, "Going to extremes will only worsen your relationship with food in the long run." Berry suggests that a better approach is to return to your normal routine and build your health from there.

Skip accuracy. "Instead of making a decision, set a healthy, fun 90-day goal," Berry suggests. For example, go for a run two to four times a week, eat more home-cooked meals or meditate daily. "This approach gives you a goal that comes fast enough that you can actually keep it," she explains. Filled with protein and fibre. "Prioritise protein, fibre, and healthy fats when you get back to building balanced meals," Galati says. Try to eat 25 to 30 grams of fibre per day by increasing your intake of foods like lentils, beans, leafy green vegetables, and whole grains, Farmer suggests. Don't go cold turkey. "Keep some of your favourite holiday items in the fridge so you can enjoy them once the festivities are over," Galati suggests. "The goal is to find balance each day to avoid overeating when the next holiday comes around," the dietitian notes.

Increase your water intake. Farmer recommends "drink half your body weight in ounces of water each day." Staying adequately hydrated will help your body metabolise carbohydrates and flush out excess sodium, thus

reducing flatulence. If you want to upgrade your regular H2O, here are some quick and easy water recipes to try.

Don't miss breakfast. "Always eat within 30 minutes of waking up," Pomeroy advises. "Eating within 30 minutes of waking up and eating three meals and two snacks a day will help prevent you from overeating later," she notes. Here are some quick breakfast recipes that require minimal culinary skills. Smart snack. "If you're going to indulge in sugary desserts, an amazing way to combat fat storage is to add fat," Pomeroy says. "Mix sugar with sources of healthy fats, such as raw nuts, seeds and seed butter, or a quarter of an avocado," she suggests. And if you're eating something like ice cream, Pomeroy adds, choose a full-fat option instead of a low-fat or low-fat option. "Fat slows down the rate at which sugar is delivered so your blood sugar doesn't rise and your body is less likely to store that sugar as fat," explains the nutritionist. Download Whole Foods. "Focus on whole foods in their natural form," says Farmer. "Reducing processed foods - which are high in sodium, sugar and unhealthy fats - in general can help quickly clean up your diet and get you back on track," the healthy eating expert explains. Farmer suggests that you eat at least one fruit and two different vegetables each day.

Double the vegetables. "I recommend the radishes, celery, cucumbers, and peppers. They all contain a lot of fibre, which will help you burn off the trash you may have made its way through during the holidays," Pomeroy says. "They also have thermogenic phytonutrients—meaning they not only help you burn off trash but also burn through historical fat (the fat you've been carrying around for a long time)," she adds.

Move. "Enjoy low-intensity movements like walking to get your digestion moving again," Galati says. Other low-intensity exercises include yoga, swimming, and tai chi.

Kovacic stunner sets up Blues fightback

Mateo Kovacic scored one of the goals of the season as Chelsea fought back to draw 2-2 with Liverpool in a pulsating English Premier League (EPL) encounter yesterday.

Sadio Mane and Mohamed Salah had given the Reds a two-goal lead at Stamford Bridge on Sunday in their final game before departing for Africa Cup of Nations duty.

Chelsea were not lacking firepower in the absence of dropped record signing Romelu Lukaku as they roared back with two goals in quick succession late in the first half, Kovacic reducing the deficit with a sumptuous volley and Christian Pulisic equalizing.

Both sides had their chances to come out on top in the battle between second and third, but it was leaders Manchester City who were the big winners as they hold a 10-point advantage at the summit.

Mane may have been fortunate to only be shown a yellow card when he caught Cesar Azpilicuetta in the face with his arm just six seconds into a game that saw the introduction of safe standing at Stamford Bridge.

Pulisic wasted a great chance to open the scoring early on, rounding Caoimhin Kelleher - starting with Alisson out due to a positive COVID-19 test - after Trent Alexander-Arnold's attempted clear-

ance struck Mason Mount and left the United States forward with only the Reds' stand-in goalkeeper to beat.

Mane made no mistake in the ninth minute, capitalising on a bad mistake from Trevoh Chalobah by rounding Edouard Mendy and finishing with his left foot.

Salah then struck against his former club 26 minutes in, exquisitely controlling a brilliant pass from Alexander-Arnold and beating Mendy at his near post with a clinical finish after darting beyond Marcos Alonso in the penalty area.

Chelsea stormed back with two goals in the space of four minutes to go in at the break on level terms, Kovacic's sublime 20-yard volley going in off the right post before Pulisic raced clear and coolly tucked home in stoppage time.

The two title hopefuls continued to pose a huge threat going forward following the interval and Mendy had to dive at full stretch palm away out Salah's lob when he spotted the Blues keeper off his line.

Kelleher showed sharp reflexes to keep out Pulisic's half-volley and Mount tested the Irishman from long range, but both sides had to settle for a point.

Also yesterday, Brighton recorded their first win at Goodison Park with an entertaining 3-2 victory

over Everton.

The defeat confined Everton to 15th place on 19 points after 18 games. The Toffies are eight points off the relegation zone, while the win lifted Brighton to eighth in the table on 27 points.

Brentford come from behind to beat Aston Villa 2-1 and claim their first Premier League victory of 2022.

The win means Brentford oust Villa from 12th place, going level on 23 points with Crystal Palace. Villa drop down a place into 13th, losing back-to-back games for the first time under manager Steven Gerrard.

Leeds United moved eight points clear of the relegation places with a 3-1 victory over Burnley at Elland Road.

The victory sees Leeds end a run of four league matches without a win. Leeds stay 16th but move eight points clear of Burnley in 18th, who still have two games in hand on many of the sides around them at the foot of the table.

Meanwhile, defeat leaves Burnley without a win since October as they stay in the drop zone, two points behind Watford in 17th.

The English Premier League will continue today with Manchester United hosting Wolverhampton Wanderers at Old Trafford at 1:30 pm Eastern Caribbean time.

Head coach says unfit Hetmyer letting down Windies



West Indies batsman Shimron Hetmyer

West Indies batsman Shimron Hetmyer has failed yet another fitness test, a situation that has left West Indies head coach Phil Simmons exasperated.

Hetmyer was left out of the team for the upcoming visits of Ireland and England after failing to pass fitness drills administered in his home country of Guyana recently.

The occasion is the third in the last three years that the athlete is failing to get a passing grade for the West Indies basic fitness requirement.

Hetmyer was first left out of the squad in 2020, ahead of the Sri Lanka tour, and then again later that year during the home visit of the same team.

Simmons expressed frustration that Hetmyer was not only letting down himself but failing to maintain the required standards but also the entire team.

“It’s the same old, same old. He did his fitness assessment in Guyana and he came way below the required mark,” Simmons told members of the media during a conference call on Friday.

“Again, it is something that is heart-wrenching because you know that you are part of this team, and you have to keep a certain fitness to be part of this team and you keep letting down your teammates.”

Simmons added the player was also “letting down himself.”

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Two players isolating with COVID-19 ahead of ODI series



Two Ireland players are isolating with COVID-19 as the squad prepares to fly to Jamaica for their upcoming three-match ODI series and one Twenty20 international against the West Indies.

Paul Stirling and Shane Getkate have tested positive but are likely to join the squad around 9 January once subsequent tests are negative.

George Dockrell also tested positive but has been cleared to travel.

Ireland are scheduled to play their first ODI in West Indies on 8 January.

The two further ODIs are to be played at Sabina Park on 11 and 14 January, with the T20 game on 16 January.

The group has been based in Florida in recent days, playing out a 1-1 drawn T20 series against the USA, before their ODI series had to be cancelled because of issues around COVID-19 involving both sides and the umpires.

A round of PCR tests taken by the Ireland squad revealed Stirling, Getkate and Dockrell had all contracted the virus, with Stirling and Getkate now undertaking a mandatory 10-day quarantine.

Dockrell, however, tested positive prior to

travelling to the USA and has a recovery certificate from that infection, plus a subsequent test indicated he had likely picked up dead virus cells from his previous infection.

Cricket Ireland also reported that Harry Tector and Gareth Delany have both successfully completed their quarantine periods and will travel with the squad on Friday.

Captain Andrew Balbirnie and Andy McBrine, previously listed as close contacts of positive cases, are set to join the squad in Jamaica after 2 January as long as they produce negative results prior to departure.

Richard Holdsworth, high performance director for Cricket Ireland, said, “It is a challenging time for all, but the players have responded very well to operating within the managed environment over the last two weeks.

“A managed environment is different to a bio-bubble, and is an approach being used currently to try to find that balance between risk mitigation from the virus and impacts of sustained periods of isolation on the mental and physical health needs of players and staff.

“Part of this new approach is the ability

to have several partners travel with the squad. However, these additional people are required to abide by the same testing and travel protocols as the players.

“However, the transmissibility of this latest strain of the virus has not spared us - nor indeed the USA squad, nor the umpires in our recent series - and overnight three players have now tested positive.

“These are the only three Irish players to date that have tested positive since entering the managed environment, albeit we also have two players isolating as registered ‘close contacts’ of positive cases too. These latter players tested negative subsequently, but will need to do so again before they join the squad in Jamaica.

“We have seen sport all around the world negatively impacted by this virus still and, like all sporting organisations trying to continue with sport during the pandemic, we are adapting quickly and responding to the needs of those in our duty of care.

“We have an extended squad with us on this tour so will be able to cope with these absences pending no further outbreaks.

“We are also working closely with Cricket West Indies to ensure that both parties are satisfied with the current arrangements in place.” (BBC)

Under-17 girls advance to senior national women's squad

By Elwin Francis

Technical Director of the Antigua and Barbuda Football Association (ABFA), Sowerby Gomes, says several members of the Under-17 Benna Girls have been elevated into the senior national women's training squad.

Members of the Under-17 Benna Girls team enhanced their reputations with impressive performances during a recent, successful three-match trip to Grenada.

After losing their opening game 4-2 against a senior Grenada All Star team, the Benna girls recorded two impressive 5-0 and 7-2 victories against the Grenada Under-17 girls in the Spice Isle of the Caribbean just before Christmas.

Gomes said there might be opportunities for the Under-17 team to engage in more international friendlies this year and several of the players have already been drafted into the Antigua and Barbuda senior national women's training squad.

"What is next for the Under-17s is that they might get a few more international friendlies. Those friendlies are likely to be played here in Antigua against other teams who might be passing through Antigua and want to play against our Under-17s," Gomes said.

"At the same time, we

have quite a number of our Under-17s line-up that will be filtering into our senior team, which will have a very heavy engagement in 2022.

"So the senior team are currently preparing, we have some young players that are blooming and are part of the Under-17s and they will be joining the senior national women's team that are preparing for some upcoming games in 2022," he added.

Gomes said the recent friendly matches were being used by both the Antigua and Grenada national Under-17 teams to assess their stages of development.

He continued that the matches provided Antigua and Barbuda with an opportunity to assess Under-17 girls head coach Lorainne Charles, who is currently undergoing the B license development programme.

The national technical director also said members of the Under-17 team did well during the boys and girls college combine that was hosted by the ABFA at its technical and training centre from December 12-15 last year.

Gomes says at least nine members of the national Under-17s have been offered scholarships by several United States based colleges which were scouting for new recruits during the recent

ABFA's college combine.

"The college combine was good preparation for our Under-17s because almost 100 percent of the Under-17 national team took part in the combine. We are very pleased because at this moment we have at least nine offers in the female category," Gomes said.

"We have about twenty-six offers overall, nine of which are going to the females. So we are now in the midst of tightening up certain areas so that we can

showcase our females by giving them more opportunities.

"This will be positive for them because those who will be getting those college offers can go off to pursue their careers academically through students' scholarships."

An total of 90 players, comprising 57 boys and 33 girls, participated in the combine while eight US coaches and nine scouts physically attended the sessions with another 45 coaches viewing the sessions online.

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Pollard returns to lead West Indies against England, Ireland



West Indies white-ball captain, Kieron Pollard, will return to the Caribbean side for series against Ireland and England

Kieron Pollard is back from injury to captain West Indies for upcoming limited-overs series against England and Ireland.

West Indies will host Ireland in three one-day internationals and a one-off T20 between January 8 to 16 at Sabina Park in Jamaica before playing England in five T20 internationals at Kensington Oval in Barbados from January 22 to 30.

Pollard missed last year's tour of Pakistan because of a hamstring injury he picked up at the T20 World Cup which was held in the United Arab Emirates and Oman from 17 October to 14 November.

Openers Evin Lewis and Anderson Phillip are unavailable due to recent positive COVID-19 tests and have not been included in the West Indies squads which were announced last Friday to take on England and Ireland.

All-rounder, Fabian Allen, has recovered from an ankle injury but is unavailable for the Ireland series due to a positive COVID-19 test, while left-arm seamer Obed McCoy is unavailable due to rehab on a shin injury.

West Indies head coach Phil Simmons said, "We have tried to maintain the general makeup of the squads from the Pakistan tour before Christmas, with the captain and some senior players coming back in.

"COVID-19 has also played a part in the final makeup of the squad. The challenges in the next couple months are getting the young players in both squads to not only improve on their skills but maintain the attitude and desire we saw in Pakistan.

"We do need to start the year on a high. And we know both Ireland and England have very good teams, so we expect a very strong challenge as we look to improve our chances of automatic qualification for the ICC Cricket World Cup in 2023 and building the T20 team for the ICC T20 World Cup in 2022."

The CG Insurance ODI Series between West Indies and Ireland will form part of the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Super League, in which the top seven teams can secure automatic qualification for the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023 in

India.

All matches in the upcoming series in the West Indies will be available in Ireland and the United Kingdom on BT Sport on its sport channels and across its digital platforms.

West Indies T20 squad against England and Ireland: Kieron Pollard (captain), Nicholas Pooran, Fabian Allen (England only), Darren Bravo (England only), Roston Chase, Sheldon Cottrell, Dominic Drakes, Shai Hope, Akeal Hosein, Jason Holder, Brandon King, Kyle Mayers, Rovman Powell, Romario Shepherd, Odean Smith and Hayden Walsh Jr. COVID-19 Reserves Jayden Seales, Alzarri Joseph and Devon Thomas.

West Indies ODI squad against Ireland: Kieron Pollard (captain), Shai Hope, Shamarh Brooks, Roston Chase, Justin Greaves, Jason Holder, Akeal Hosein, Alzarri Joseph, Gudakesh Motie, Jayden Seales, Nicholas Pooran, Romario Shepherd, Odean Smith and Devon Thomas. COVID-19 Reserves Keacy Carty and Sheldon Cottrell.

Riley: WI cricket needs more money

By: Elwin Francis

Barbados Cricket Association (BCA) president, Conde Riley, believes more funding is required to help West Indies cricket to produce top quality batsmen as in the past.

For that to happen, Riley believes cricketers in the West Indies need to be playing quite a lot more cricket in the region which will invariably require more financial support.

Speaking on Pointe FM's Sports Overflow programme, Riley, who is a member of the Board of Directors of Cricket West Indies (CWI), said CWI is already planning to lobby CARICOM heads of governments to establish a Caribbean lottery from which funding could be derived to inject much needed capital into increasing the opportunities for the sport to be played across the region.

"I am an eternal optimist. I believe that we have the guys to do it. As you may recall, years ago the English county circuit was the finishing school where our players went to work and left the Caribbean with all the talent that they had. I remember the year when Sir Vivian Richards and Sir Andy Roberts went to England to attend Alf Grover School, and then they went into the county circuit so that they were playing cricket for a living day in and day out," Riley said.

"We do not have the resources in the Caribbean. We moved from playing five (four-day) games to 10 for a regional season. But the more cricket you play, the better you would get.

"It is just a matter now of having the cricket going back to like when I was at school when we had house cricket, then you play for the school, then for



Cricket West Indies director and President of the Barbados Cricket Association Conde Riley. (CWI)

(community or village) club when you left school, then if you are good enough you would get into the national team and so on.

"We need to play more cricket at all levels in the Caribbean. When we embarked on that in Barbados we were pointed to the lottery. And I am trying to see how we can get a Caribbean lottery for cricket where we can have longer tournaments where our guys get to play a lot more cricket.

"The (CWI) board is looking at that and I am hopeful that we can get to the point where we can have some meetings with the CARICOM Sub-Ministerial Committee on Cricket.

"We want to point out that as CARICOM heads of governments they are able to

provide funding for a lot of things such as healthcare, education, housing and roads.

"Let's get some money from a Lottery where all the middle class and lower class can buy tickets. Let's get a percentage of that. In Barbados we get it from a 7 to 5 percent tax.

"If we do that across the region, Cricket West Indies will have more monies to invest in the islands. Right now the monies come from the media rights and the ICC dividends and so on.

"But we need in the Caribbean now to have that sort of monies coming from a local source. I think the lottery is the best place. That's what we did in Barbados and I would like to see it across the region," he added.

Riley, who is a retired investment banker, was re-elected unopposed as president of the BCA during a virtual meeting on December 23rd last year.

By virtue of his position as BCA president, Riley is also required to serve on the Board of Directors of Cricket West Indies (CWI) which is the governing body for the sport in the Caribbean.

Most pundits believe Shivnarine Chanderpaul, who retired from international cricket in May 2015 as the second highest run-scorer for the West Indies with 11,867 runs in 164 Test matches, was the last top quality batsman to come out of the Caribbean.

The lack of top quality players has led to a consistent decline in West Indies cricket fortunes at the international level, especially in the Test and One-day formats, over the last 30 years.