



**COURT FREES
MENTALLY
ILL WOMAN
IMPRISONED
FOR FAILING
TO WEAR A
MASK**

Story on Page 2

Local News

Mentally ill woman freed from HMP after months in custody

A mentally challenged, middle-aged woman has been freed from His Majesty's Prison after spending nearly a year in custody on minor charges.

Magistrate Joanne Walsh issued the order to release the woman on Thursday after a writ was filed in the High Court seeking her liberation.

The matter involved Gillian Simmons of Potters Village who is in her early fifties. The mother of five was imprisoned in January this year for failing to wear a face mask and using threatening language.

On Thursday, the High Court afternoon opened hearing on the writ of Habeas Corpus and a constitutional motion



Wendel Robinson

that were filed in court, to hear a case against four top officials.

Attorney General Steadroy Benjamin, Police Commissioner Atlee Rodney, Superintendent of Police Jermaine

Anthony and the Chief Magistrate Joanne Walsh were all served as defendants.

Attorney Wendel Robinson, reported that when the High Court learnt that Simmons had been freed, an order was made for a date to be set for the court to consider the alleged constitutional violations suffered by his client.

Robinson, who is representing the Simmons family, said threatening language carries the penalty of a fine or a short duration of imprisonment. It is uncommon for a person charged with the offence of using threatening language to be imprisoned.

cont'd on pg 3



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"HAPPY HOLIDAYS AND MAY THE CHRISTMAS SEASON BRING ONLY HAPPINESS AND JOY TO YOU AND YOUR FAMILY."

Merry Christmas

AND A MAGNIFICANT

HAPPY NEW YEAR

FROM THE MANAGEMENT AND STAFF
ANTIGUA POWER COMPANY

St. Paul seniors treated to Christmas dinner, entertainment

Scores of senior citizens from the St. Paul's constituency were dined and entertained on Wednesday night at an event hosted by the incumbent Antigua Barbuda Labour Party representative E. P. Chet Greene.

Greene welcomed the seniors to the event, which was resumed after the two year pause caused by the pandemic. He expressed joy that they could all gather once again to socialise at the Senior Citizens Extravaganza.

"The last time we met like this we were at the Catamaran Hotel, however, this year I am happy that we are able to be having our function in our own place, the St. Paul Empowerment Centre," he said.

Greene said the community centre belongs to the people of St. Paul for their use for social and other com-



The incumbent ABLP candidate for St. Paul, E. P. Chet Greene distributing gifts to senior citizens at a special dinner and social evening on Wednesday night at the St. Paul Empowerment Centre.

munity-based events. "January 18 is a date far away. Tonight is about Christmas and the celebration of an event that we started long ago," Greene added.

He made it clear that the resumption of the annual event was not driven by the

looming January 2023 elections.

Following dinner, which was prepared at the centre, the seniors were entertained by Ruell Browne, who was followed by the contestants in WTP radio station's Christmas song competition.

Soca Diva, Claudette Peters, also put in a special guest appearance.

The evening was capped off with the presentation of Christmas gifts to the seniors by Greene. This gift giving exercise is a long-standing feature of the annual event.

cont'd from pg 2

"Certainly, it doesn't carry a penalty of eleven months and she has been there for eleven months.

"They are saying that she has to be evaluated because

they believe that she has a mental issue, but you cannot have a person in custody for eleven months waiting to be evaluated.

"She is in prison beyond any time that would have

been allotted to her if she was serving a term of imprisonment for the offences she was charged for," Robinson said.

In sworn testimony, the woman's son, Keemo Simons, said his mother has

suffered mental illness for several years and often left home to wander around St. John's.

He continued that sometime in January this year, his mother left home but did not return. While this was unusual, it did not create worry immediately as she always came home.

It was not until sometime later that he learnt that his mother had been arrested and charged by police and remanded to prison by the court.

Fri 23 Day 83°		Fri 23 Night 75°	
16% E 16 mph	71%	22% E 12 mph	78%
Sunny skies. High 83F. Winds E at 10 to 20 mph.		Clear skies. Low around 75F. Winds E at 10 to 15 mph.	
Sunrise 6:33 am	Sunset 5:40 pm	Moonrise 6:44 am	Moonset 6:00 pm
UV Index 8 of 10	New Moon	UV Index 0 of 10	

Sandals Antigua expansion to create 300 permanent jobs

Sandals Grande Antigua has announced that it will begin the expansion of its property in the first quarter of 2023.

In the construction phase of the project, the hotel anticipates that as many as 400 jobs will be created over the two years it will take to complete the upgrade.

Another 300 permanent jobs will be created to serve the additional guests the resort will serve.

Word of the expansion of the luxury, couples only resort, has been welcomed by Prime Minister Gaston Browne who said the de-



velopment is a sure sign that Antigua and Barbuda is on its way to recovering from the COVID-19 pan-

demic.

The Sandals expansion also signals the business community's confidence in

the stability of the government and its management of the economy.

cont'd on pg 5

ANTIGUA & BARBUDA
POINTEXPRESS
TRUSTED NEWS AND RESPECTED VIEWS

Wishes You A
MERRY
Christmas And Happy
New Year

NOTICE
POINTE XPRESS WILL TAKE ITS ANNUAL CHRISTMAS BREAK FROM
24TH DEC 2022 TO 3RD JAN 2023.
HAPPY HOLIDAYS FROM THE MANGEMENT & STAFF OF
POINTEVILLE COMMUNICATIONS INC.

cont'd from pg 4

Minister of Tourism, Charles Fernandez, also welcomed the news.

Last week, Minister Fernandez said the 2023 tourism season is projected to be one of the country's most successful as a number of developments will open doors while several existing properties will be upgraded under new management adding to Antigua and Barbuda's room stock.

Already, Jolly Beach's reopening this month has increased the country's room stock by 200. Several more will return to service when the resort, which is now under new management, is fully renovated.

There is word that the world-famous Nikki Beach luxury hotel and resort

chain will also come to Antigua and Barbuda very soon.

The Halcyon Resort, which is also being refurbished, is expected to re-open as the Royalton Chic in 2023.

This week, the Antigua Barbuda Hotels and Tourist Association said that 2022 performed outstandingly when compared with the record-breaking tourism achievements of 2019.

While the room stock in 2022, is less than it was in 2019, occupancy in October and November 2022 outperformed figures of the same period during the country's last regular season before the pandemic.

Occupancy in October 2022 closed at 68.5 percent against 52.3 percent for the

same period in 2019.

In November, occupancy stood at 81.5 percent,

a significant increase over the 69.4 percent recorded in 2019.



ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA CIVIL REGISTRY
(Births, Deaths, Marriages, Adoptions, Deeds, Bills of Sale, etc.)

NOTICE
December 21 2022

Please be advised that the **Antigua and Barbuda Civil Registry** will be CLOSED to the public on the following days:

Friday December 23 2022
Friday December 30 2022

For any further information please contact us at **Tel: 562 9687/88.**

We apologise for any inconvenience caused.


Registrar



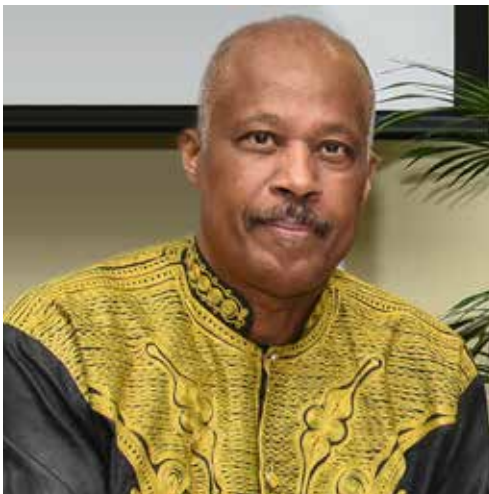
UWI Vice-Chancellor, Sir Hilary Beckles, responds to Netherlands' Apology for Slavery

The following statement is issued by Professor Sir Hilary Beckles, Vice-Chancellor of The University of the West Indies, and Chairman of the CARICOM Reparations Commission in response to an apology for African enslavement, issued by Prime Minister Mark Rutte on behalf of The Kingdom of the Netherlands on 19 December 2022.

"It has been near a decade since the Governments of CARICOM established a Reparations Commission to promote regional and global understanding of the enslavement of African people and native genocide with the objective of securing reparatory justice and development for the still suffering people of the Caribbean.

With the formal apology from the Dutch Prime Minister acknowledging that the transatlantic slave trade in enchained African bodies and chattel enslavement were crimes against humanity, the reparatory justice movement has moved into a new phase.

Prime Minister Mark Rutte must be commended for this enlightened



Sir Hilary Beckles

development that establishes The Netherlands as the European country best poised to bring global leadership to this long and sustained call for justice. His statement moves us closer to closure in respect of the crippling, criminal chapter in human history.

We recognise however, that this development is best understood as an internal conversation within the Dutch state. The Prime Minister did not bring to the table those who are the survivors of the crimes. The victim communities in the Caribbean and African are not

stakeholders to this statement.

Historic though it is, the statement is flawed on the basis that the Prime Minister did not seek the organised input and support of the Caribbean. The unilateralism of the apology and acknowledgments must now move to a multilateral basis. The marginalisation of these victim communities will undoubtedly be experienced as an ongoing approach steeped in the imperial culture we are seeking to replace with a deeper democratic sensibility.

The Dutch State was Europe's pioneer of the global slavery enterprise. For most of the 17th century it monopolised the transatlantic slave trade and provided the finance and technology that enabled the English, French, Spanish and Portuguese to establish their own slave-based empires. As a result, Amsterdam became the financial centre of Europe and the leading supplier globally of capital for colonisation.

The national enrichment from African enslavement was large and

cont'd on pg 7



Guys and Dolls
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Skytiger donates \$3,000 to the National Public Library

Skytiger, through its philanthropic arm SkyTigerCares, made a \$3000 donation to the National Public library recently.

The contribution will be used to help the library to continue to provide valuable resources and services to the community.

"We believe that the public library is an essential part of our community, and we are thrilled to be able to support it in this way," said Joyce Gilead-Andrew, HR Business Partner for SkyTiger.

"We hope this donation will make a meaningful dif-

ference in the lives of those who rely on the library for information, education, and entertainment."

The public library serves a vital role in the community, providing access to books, magazines, and other materials. It also hosts various events, classes, and programmes for the benefit of the community.

The donation will support the library's ability to continue offering these resources and services.

"We are extremely grateful for this generous donation from SkyTiger,"

said Ryllis Mathew, Director of the Public Library.

"This support will allow us to continue to provide top-quality resources

and programming to our patrons. We are so thankful for the support of our community partners like SkyTiger."

FLOW donates to Swimming Federation raffle



Flow Antigua and Barbuda continues to demonstrate its commitment to the youth by supporting swimming in Antigua and Barbuda and the OECS. The company was delighted to donate a Samsung Smartphone with a 30-day Always-On prepaid plan to the Antigua and Barbuda Swimming Federation for their fundraising raffle. Flow's Carissa Warner, Commercial Executive presents the smartphone to Edith Clashing of the Antigua & Barbuda Swimming Federation.

cont'd from pg 6
unprecedented. The Dutch community, with the slavery wealth derived from human enslavement, and crimes against humanity, became a sustained developed nation. It continues to be an imperial nation holding Caribbean people impoverished in colonial bondage.

Critically, nonetheless, we acknowledge that the honourable Prime Minister described his statement as ending with a 'comma' rather

er than a 'full stop'. This metaphor is encouraging and offers hope for the future.

The CARICOM Reparations Commission is keen to enable the Prime Minister to complete the Dutch sentence. It looks forward to the next step which must be a dialogue with nations and communities that continue to suffer and expect to be treated with the dignity of participation in the dialogue."

British Airways experiences disruption in service

Antigua and Barbuda was among several of British Airways' US and Caribbean destinations that were severely impacted by disruptions in services this week.

The UK-based airline operates daily flights to Antigua and Barbuda.

Passengers reported delays of several hours to close to a day without explanation from the airline.

On Thursday, British Airways issued a statement which said in part, "Our flights due to depart the USA tonight are currently delayed due to a technical issue with our third-party flight planning supplier, which we are urgently investigating.

"We're sorry for any disruption this will cause to our customers' plans, our aim is for these flights to depart as quickly as possible."

Actress Liz Hurley was back on her way to the UK from Nevis where



she attended the premier of a movie she stars in that was shot on the island.

Hurley posted on Twitter that she was left stranded by British Airways at the V. C. Bird International Airport for over 20 hours without informa-

tion about what had caused the delay, food, water or an offer of accommodation.

Other passengers with British Airways reservations, replying to her tweet, said they had similar experiences at other destinations.

SIC Holberton Donation



Operations Manager of the Care Project Department, Ms. Sandy Daniel (far left), along with members of the Life & Medical Division of SICL as they hand over their donations to the organisation. Pictured here from SICL (far right to left) Ms. Althea Airall Imhoff, Asst. Manager, Ms. Janice Hodge, Executive Manager, Ms. Lisha Bennett, and Ms. Jhané Payne.



The Ministry of Works says infrastructural work on the Crabbe Hill Main Road will result in delays to road users until the weekend.

A brief notice issued on Wednesday called on all road users to follow all safety precautions when travelling in the area.

The Ministry of Works said the interruption to road users will last until 23rd December.



Season's Greetings

**FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS,
MANAGEMENT, AND STAFF**

Ivory Coast battles chocolate companies to improve farmers' lives

By Tom Collins

Ivory Coast is the world's top cocoa producing country but receives just four percent of the chocolate industry's estimated annual worth of \$100bn.

Aljazeera - On a small cocoa plantation in the southwest of Ivory Coast, a group of men hack away at the yellow and red fruit used to make chocolate.

The farmers race against time, working tirelessly on individual plots of land to collect as many cocoa beans as possible during the West African country's main harvest season, between October and March.

A smaller harvest begins in April. However, erratic rains caused by climate change have dampened the group's spirits as some fear they will harvest less than expected.

"I have to support a family of eight people, and I will only make around \$1,200 to \$1,500 from this year's harvest," said Eugene Kouassi, tending a two-acre plot in Soubre, a town in the heart of Ivory Coast's cocoa land. For most smallholders like him, cocoa farming is their sole source of income. "This money has to last for most of the year," he said.

Cocoa farmers in the region are on the "front lines of the climate crisis", according to West Africa director of the Rainforest Alliance, Siriki Diakite. And



Millions of cocoa farmers in Ivory Coast survive on an average of just \$0.78 a day [File: Thierry Gouegnou/Reuters]

when their harvests suffer, so do their livelihoods.

This is further compounded by how little they are paid per kilogramme for their crop, something the Ivorian government has been trying to tackle as it fails to force the world's multibillion-dollar chocolate industry to pay farmers fairer cocoa prices.

Ivory Coast produces around 45 percent of the world's cocoa beans, but receives only around four percent of the chocolate industry's estimated annual worth of \$100bn.

Millions of cocoa farmers in the country survive on an average of just \$0.78 a day, according to the World Economic Forum.

For context, 1kg of Leonidas chocolate, a popular upmarket brand in Europe, would take Kouassi around 45 days of work to be able to purchase at a cost of around \$32.

'Companies want maxi-

mum profit'

Since 2020, several attempts by the Ivorian government to make chocolate makers pay premiums on the price of cocoa have failed as large companies push back on anything that will eat into their margins.

In October, Ivory Coast and Ghana – which supply 65 percent of the world's cocoa – boycotted an industry meeting in Brussels, a sign that they will no longer sell the commodity at unfavourable prices.

"The chocolate companies want to accumulate the maximum profit," Ivory Coast's minister of agriculture, Kobenan Adjoumani Kouassi, told Al Jazeera. "And when they prioritise profit, it is poor people who suffer. They have to understand that it is exploitation, and it needs to stop."

In 2020, both West African countries introduced the Living Income Differential (LID) – a \$400 premium

placed on every tonne of cocoa transferred directly to the smallholder farmers. The chocolate companies pay the premiums to traders that purchase the beans from large collectives dotted around the country. The collectives gather the harvest from local farmers, adding the premium to the price.

However, despite accepting to pay the levy, some chocolate companies quickly found ways to avoid it. Media reports alleged that American chocolate giant, The Hershey Company, bought 30,000 tonnes of cocoa via the United States futures exchange, ICE, in a bid to avoid paying the LID; however, this could not be independently verified.

Chocolate companies usually buy cocoa directly from the source, but if they buy the commodity on the secondary market, through an exchange, they will not have to pay the associated premiums.

Two years after the premium came into effect, Yves Ibrahima Kone, the director general of Le Conseil du Café-Cacao, the national regulator which introduced the LID, said that in reality, "no one [the chocolate companies] wants to implement it".

'They will have no choice'

In Ivory Coast's cocoa region, knowledge of the

cont'd on pg 12



Season's Greetings!

May the joys of family, coziness,
and laughter follow you into the coming year;
FROM ALL OF US AT ACB CARIBBEAN.



The World Around Us



cont'd from pg 10

premium varies depending on whom one speaks with.

“We have never heard of the LID,” said Lobou Doudou Honore, the chief of a small cocoa farming village called Gripzao, north of Soubre. The chief is the spokesman for around 60 cocoa farmers, each of whom tends plots of varying sizes around the village. He says every single person in the village relies on cocoa as a primary source of income.

Around 50 km (31 miles) south of Soubre, the director of a collective of more than 2,000 cocoa farmers said

they were paid the LID for the past two years.

“Our buyers are Tony’s Chocoloney, Mondelez and Ferrero,” said Doumbia As-sata Kone, director of the Meagui cooperative. The forward-thinking director is trying to encourage farmers to engage in other sources of income-generating activities, like making honey.

However, authorities say the latest strategy used by companies to avoid paying the LID is by not paying another charge known as the origin differential – a premium set according to the country of origin.

If traders do not pay the origin differential, they can claim to pay the LID but in reality, the price is the same as if no premium were added. The LID was set by Ghana and Ivory Coast but the origin differential is a premium determined by the market based on quality and provenance of the beans.

“This is what the chocolate companies are currently playing with,” said regulator Kone, who travelled to Rome in September to tell manufacturers that Ivory Coast would no longer sell cocoa at a negative origin differential for the first time

in three years. There has not yet been an official response from the industry.

Early reports suggest that global commodities trader Cargill, which processes and distributes grains, oil and vegetables among other agricultural products, bought 25,000 tonnes of cocoa with a positive income differential for the 2023/2024 season, and it is hoped others will follow. This should have a positive impact on the money that farmers receive at the end of the supply chain.

Yet, industry insiders believe that Ivory Coast will continue to face stiff opposition from chocolate companies which can generate more annual revenue than the entire African country.

Ivory Coast’s agricultural minister, Kouassi, however, believes that the West African country finally has chocolate companies in a tight spot. “They will have no choice but to eventually pay the prices we demand,” he said. “We produce the most cocoa in the world.”

“Reduce the supply, increase the demand”

Paul Schoenmakers, head of impact at Dutch chocolatier Tony’s Chocoloney, said most chocolate companies have plenty of room to redistribute wealth further down the supply chain.

“The bigger players in the chocolate and cocoa sector could easily pay farmers more, dilute some of their margins and still make a de-
cont'd on pg 13

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cont'd from pg 12

cent profit,” he said. “In the end, it’s a matter of choice, whether you want to maximise your profits at the expense of extreme poverty.”

In fact, Tony’s Choc Lonely is paying 82 percent more than what the government is asking in an effort to fairly compensate Ivory Coast’s farmers – and it still makes a profit. Schoenmakers said that the chocolatier “pays much more” than the LID, taking into account recent increases in the costs of living and farming.

For farmers to make a decent living, Le Conseil du Café-Cacao says that cocoa must be sold at a minimum of \$2,600 per tonne. This would give farmers a 13 percent margin to recuperate costs and make a small profit.

However, cocoa is currently trading at around \$2,300, meaning that even with the addition of the LID, the farmers will only just make a fair wage. Analysts say the price of cocoa has declined over the course of the pandemic due to reduced demand for chocolate – putting further pressure on farmers’ incomes.

In response, Kouassi said Ivory Coast is artificially limiting its cocoa supply to try and keep prices high.

“We have taken vigorous steps to stop new plantations from being built,” he said. “The objective is to reduce the supply and increase the demand.”

The drastic measure reflects a growing sentiment

among Ivorian and Ghanaian authorities that heavy-weight cocoa producers will no longer be forced to sell the commodity at unfavourable prices by foreign companies.

The African producers have been emboldened by the recent possibility that Nigeria and Cameroon – which together represent

around 15 percent of global cocoa production – will join the Côte d’Ivoire-Ghana Cocoa Initiative (CIGCI), a formal partnership to represent the interests of both countries.

If this happens, chocolatiers will have even less room to manoeuvre as the four African countries will account for 75 percent of the

world’s cocoa production. The remaining 25 percent mainly comes from Indonesia, Brazil and Ecuador, among others.

“Two-thirds is not nothing,” said the minister, referring to the amount of cocoa beans Ivory Coast supplies to the world market. “If you refuse to pay the LID, we will refuse to sell.”



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Religion



Pope warns Vatican staff an 'elegant demon' lurks among them

By Nicole Winfield

AP — Pope Francis warned Vatican bureaucrats on Thursday to beware the devil that lurks among them, saying it is an “elegant demon” that works in people who have a rigid, holier-than-thou way of living the Catholic faith.

Francis used his annual Christmas greeting to the Roman Curia to again put the cardinals, bishops and priests who work in the Holy See on notice that they are by no means beyond reproach and are, in fact, particularly vulnerable to evil.

Francis told them that by living in the heart of the Catholic Church, “we could easily fall into the temptation of thinking we are safe, better than others, no longer in need of conversion.”

“Yet we are in greater danger than all others, because we are beset by the ‘elegant demon,’ who does not make a loud entrance, but comes with flowers in his hand,” Francis told the churchmen in the Hall of Blessings of the Apostolic Palace.

Francis has long used his Christmas address for an annual dressing down of Vatican bureaucrats, taking them through a typical Jesuit-style “examination of conscience” to help them repent in the run-up to Christmas.

His most blistering critique came in 2014, when he listed the “15 ailments of the Curia” that some suffered, including the “terrorism of gossip,” “spiritual Alzheimer’s” and of living “hypocritical” double lives.

The following year, Francis offered an antidote to the sins by listing the “catalogue of virtues” he hoped they would instead follow, including honesty, humility and sobriety.

This year was similar in tone, and Francis reprised his critique of forms of abuse that even religious people use against one another.



Pope Francis looks at a nativity scene as he leaves after his weekly general audience in the Paul VI Hall, at the Vatican, Wednesday, Dec. 21, 2022. (AP Photo/Andrew Medichini)

“There isn’t only the violence of weapons, there is verbal violence, psychological violence, the violence of abuse of power, the hidden violence of gossip,” Francis said, in a possible reference to a new case of abuse of authority that is roiling his own Jesuit order. “Don’t take advantage of your own position and role to mortify the other.”

Beyond that, Francis appeared to also want to take broader aim at arch-conservatives and traditionalists who have become the pope’s biggest critics. Francis blasted their way of living the faith, insisting that being Catholic doesn’t mean following a never-changing set of dicta but is rather a “process of understanding Christ’s message that never ends, but constantly challenges us.”

“True heresy consists not only in preaching another gospel, as Saint Paul told us, but also in ceasing to translate its message into today’s languages and ways of thinking,” Francis said.

Traditionalist Catholics have denounced Francis’ emphasis on mercy

and openness to doctrinal wiggle room on issues such as sacraments for divorced and civilly remarried Catholics. Some have even gone so far as to accuse him of heresy for some of his gestures and preaching, including allowing “pagan” statues in the Vatican.

Francis dedicated the bulk of his speech this year to the need to be vigilant about the work of the devil, picking up a theme he recently discussed during his weekly catechism lessons with the general public.

He told the Vatican bureaucrats it’s not enough to merely condemn evil or root it out, since it often comes back in different guises, stronger than before. Francis used the term “we” repeatedly, suggesting he includes himself among those in the Vatican who must remain mindful of the devil in their midst.

“Before, it appeared rough and violent, now it shows up as elegant and refined,” he warned. “We need to realise that and once again to unmask it. That is how these ‘elegant demons’ are:

cont’d on pg 15

IDB says Caribbean should brace for high food, fuel prices and rising interest rates in 2023

Caribbean countries should prepare for prolonged effects of external economic shocks in 2023, including for high food and fuel prices and rising international interest rates, according to a new report from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).

It warned that higher interest rates could lead to economic slowdowns, or even recessions, in important source markets for exported services and goods from the Caribbean.

The impact of these shocks depends on the trade structure of individual countries, as well as the external financing requirements of each country, according to the report, 'Headwinds Facing the Post-Pandemic Recovery.'

Among the report's key findings are that households



RedBarrel Food Transfer

and businesses are feeling the impact of price increases.

"Although domestic inflation has been somewhat less severe in Caribbean countries, rising prices diminish real incomes for households and increase business costs for firms," it said, noting that online sur-

veys from the World Food Program also suggest a sharp rise in food insecurity across the Caribbean.

The annual inflation rate climbed to an average of eight percent by mid-summer in the Caribbean countries covered in the report, excluding Suriname, which

has been coping with high inflation since the fall of 2020.

Regional economic advisor for the IDB's Caribbean Department. David Rosenblatt expressed hope that the "unfortunate external conditions will improve during 2023".

"As with natural disasters, however, it is always prudent to prepare for the worst, even as we hope for the best," he said.

The authors of the report put forward several reform priorities, such as continued attention to fiscal consolidation and debt management on the macroeconomic dimension and targeted interventions to help households cope with the effects of rising food and fuel prices. (CMC)

cont'd from pg 14

they enter smoothly, without our even being conscious of them," he said.

Francis told the story of a 17th century convent in Port Royal, France, where the superior, Mother Angelique, had charismatically reformed herself and her monastery after evil crept in, but the devil came back in the form of a rigid faith.

"They had cast out the demon, but he had returned seven times stronger, and under the guise of austerity and rigour, he had introduced rigidity and the presumption that they were better than others," Francis warned.

Some of Francis' critics themselves were in the audience along with his supporters. Returning to the annual Christmas ceremony was Cardinal Angelo Becciu, whom Francis fired in 2020 and stripped of his rights as a cardinal after the pope accused him of financial misconduct.

Becciu is currently on trial, along with nine other people, in the Vatican criminal court and denies wrongdoing. Francis recently allowed him to resume participating in Vatican ceremonies, a sign the pope thinks he perhaps jumped the gun in sanctioning Becciu before a court ruled on his guilt or innocence.

Caribbean Entertainment Hub names Machel Montano Soca Artist Of The Year

By Adela Scotland

Caribbean Entertainment Hub has named Machel Montano Soca Artist of the year for 2022.

The evolution of Machel Montano into Monk Monte has been a beautiful journey that has impacted millions of lives; this year he became an ambassador of the Save Soil movement as part of his own journey to greater spirituality and awareness. He embarked on an intensive tour with renowned Yogi, Sadhguru of India to promote the importance of cherishing mother earth.

2022 marks 40 years since Machel has been in the music industry. Although 40 is an impressive number, the figure represents more than just the passage of time. It represents 40 years of unmatched talent, 40 years of dedication to the expansion of soca, 40 years of art, and 40 years of redefining what it means to be an entertainer in Trinidad and Tobago.

Success is no stranger to Machel Montano. He has won the International Soca Monarch competition 6 times, sold out Madison Square Gardens on several occasions, and produced an internationally accredited film (Bazode). However, 2022 has been a very special year for him. Staying relevant in an industry as competitive as music for 40 years is not an easy accomplishment. "Machel



Machel Montano

Montano 40th Anniversary" celebration tour saw him selling out Barclays Centre in Brooklyn and numerous other venues throughout North America and the Caribbean; not to mention his successful first Mele Cruise in Cancun, Mexico in July this year

His impressive career was commemorated at the start of the 2023 Carnival season on July 22nd, 2022 at Tribe's weekend-long Band Launch. He was bestowed with the Key to the City of Port of Spain South by Major Joel Martinez.

While giving his acceptance speech on Aripita Avenue, Montano said, "...receiving the key to Port of Spain, the epicentre of Carnival in the country gives him the strength to continue for another 20 years".

Surely fans are all happy to know that their beloved King has many more years of music left in him. Moreover, Trinidad and Tobago honoured the "King

of Soca," at their 46th Republic day celebrations. He was given the "Hummingbird Gold National Award." This award is given to outstanding citizens and it is no surprise that a global trendsetter such as Montano was honoured with the award. Upon receiving the award Montano gave a heartfelt shoutout to his fans saying that over the last 40 years his fans have become part of his "music famalay."

In addition to receiving two national accolades, Machel Montano's biography was published in 2022. Written by his mother Elizabeth Montano, the biography entitled, "King of Soca," details his life and career. The biography tells his journey and what it took for him to achieve international success in a difficult industry. His career started at the tender age of 9 and since then he has continued to wow not only the Caribbean but the world. As a public figure, Machel

Montano has built a worldwide persona and brand. Moreover, he has been public about his spiritual journey and that the evolution of soca music is his purpose in life. His biography expounds his unique story and growth and is another crowning achievement of his 40-year anniversary.

Furthermore, Montano's international success can not go unnoticed. To celebrate his 40 years in the music industry Montano held a roast in Brooklyn on November 23rd, 2023. It was hosted by Majah Hype and featured international sensation and Montano's personal friend Lilly Singh. Additionally, on April 27th, 2023 the soca star is scheduled to perform onboard the Mele Cruise from Miami Florida. Truly enjoyment of his music transcends borders and his mission to have soca music a part of the mainstream music industry is coming to life.

Thus it is with great honour that Caribbean Entertainment Hub names the "King of Soca," Soca Artist of the Year for 2022. During Carnival 2023 as you dance to the tune "Never Again," at a fete remember that soca is more than just music to Machel. It is his culture, it is his purpose, it is his legacy. No matter which part of the world you are once you listen to soca you are all part of his "famalay."

Dwayne Johnson updates Black Adam's uncertain future in the DC Universe

By Brian Lowry

“Black Adam” possesses almost unlimited power, but apparently not enough to secure a sequel to the movie, at least anytime soon.

After speculation that DC wouldn't proceed with a second film, star and producer Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson took to Twitter on Tuesday to update fans, saying that he had met with DC Studios' new leadership team, James Gunn and Peter Safran. While he didn't close the door on Black Adam returning in some form, Johnson said the character was not in DC's plans for the immediate future. (DC Studios and CNN are both part of Warner Bros. Discovery.)

The announcement comes on the heels of several decisions by DC's management team that have angered some fans, particularly those involving the flagship characters Superman and Wonder Woman.

“My passionate friends, I wanted to give you a long-awaited Black Adam update regarding the character's future in the new DC Universe. James Gunn and I connected, and Black Adam will not be in their first chapter of storytelling.

However, DC and Seven Bucks have agreed to continue exploring the most valuable ways Black Adam can be utilised in future DC multiverse chapters,” Johnson wrote. “James and I have known each other for years and have always rooted for each other to succeed.”

He went on to write, “It's no different now, and I will always root for DC (and Marvel) to win and WIN BIG.



You guys know me, and I have very thick skin – and you can always count on me to be direct with my words. These decisions made by James and DC leadership represent their vision of DCU through their creative lens.”

Johnson added that he was “very proud” to make the film, which made its debut in October.

“Black Adam” stars Johnson as the title character, spun out of the same comics that spawned the “Shazam!” franchise. In the movie, the antihero is awakened in the present day after being dormant for years, and proceeds to fight the Justice Society of America, including such heroes as Hawkman and Doctor Fate.

Although the movie has grossed nearly \$400 million worldwide, there has been some debate about whether that will be enough to make the film profitable, given its high budget and marketing costs. Johnson has stated via Twitter that it ultimately will be.

The film was coolly received by critics, averaging just a 41 (out of 100) on the aggregation site Metacritic.

“Black Adam” ended with a clos-

ing-credit sequence that hinted at further adventures to come, including a cameo by Henry Cavill in the role of Superman. But it has since been revealed that Cavill will not be part of the franchise going forward.

Gunn, who directed “The Suicide Squad” and its streaming spinoff “Peacemaker,” took to Twitter on Monday to address the “outcry” from some fans over planned changes in the DC Universe.

Those fans took issue with the announcement that a new Superman movie is in the works without Cavill and also that “Wonder Woman 3” has been put on hold, with new management having rejected the treatment for the film submitted by director Patty Jenkins.

Gunn said choices for the DC Universe will be “based upon what we believe is best for the story.”

CNN has reached out to DC Studios for comment, but Gunn responded publicly to Johnson's post on Twitter, saying in regard to Johnson and his company, “Can't wait to collaborate soon.”

Jerry Bruckheimer would 'love' to have Johnny Depp back in 'Pirates' franchise

By Lisa Respers France

Jerry Bruckheimer sounds like he would like to work with Johnny Depp again.

The movie producer was asked by The Hollywood Reporter if Depp was “somebody a studio like Disney would put front and centre again in a Pirates sequel?”

“You’d have to ask them. I can’t answer that question,” Bruckheimer, who produced films for the “Pirates of the Caribbean” franchise, responded. “I really don’t know. I would love to have him in the movie. He’s a friend, a terrific



Johnny Depp and producer Jerry Bruckheimer in 2014.

actor and it’s unfortunate that personal lives creep into everything we do.”

A jury in June found both Depp and his ex-wife Amber Heard liable for def-

amation in their lawsuits against each other. The jury awarded significantly more damages to Depp, which was seen as a legal win for the actor.

Depp sued Heard for defamation over a 2018 op-ed for the Washington Post. In the piece, Heard described herself as a “public figure representing domestic abuse.” Though Depp was not named in the article, he claimed it cost him acting roles, including a potential appearance in a sixth “Pirates” film.

In May, while the highly publicised trial was still going on, Bruckheimer talked to The Times about whether Depp would return.

“Not at this point,” Bruckheimer said then. “The future is yet to be decided.”

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Regional News

Families seek answers on kin missing since fleeing Cuba

AP - A half dozen women went to the Bahamian Embassy on Wednesday hoping to deliver a list of more than 100 Cubans who haven't been heard from since leaving the island this year.

Some are believed to have been lost when rickety boats sank, but families think many of the missing are being detained by Bahamian authorities.

Another group of members of at least two WhatsApp groups involved in the effort said they went to Cuba's Foreign Ministry seeking an investigation into the fate of the missing people by Cuba and the Bahamas.

The women at the Bahamas Embassy declined to comment to The Associated Press, saying they are just desperate relatives whose only goal is to learn about loved ones.

Cuba is going through a migration surge amid an economic crisis resulting from effects of the pandemic and of U.S. sanctions.

Shortages of basic goods, long lines and inflation were frequent during both 2021 and 2022.

There is no official figure for those missing after leaving Cuba. The list compiled by families participating in the WhatsApp groups contains 135

names. AP could not verify that the list was handed over to Bahamian authorities.

The effort by the families coincided with an official visit by Prime Minister Philip Davis of the Baha-

mas, who was received by Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel on Tuesday night. The agenda for Davis' visit was not released.

According to the U.S. Coast Guard, 6,182 Cubans attempting to reach

the United States by sea were intercepted during the 12 months that ended Sept. 30. It said it has no specific information on deaths at sea, but that 22 migrants were found dead in the fiscal year 2022.

Pointe Xpress Weekend Puzzle

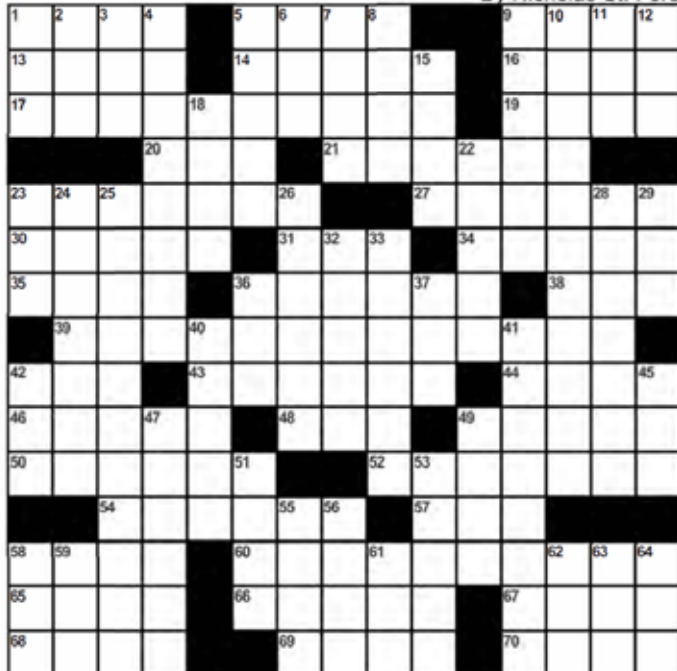
ACROSS

- 1) Pool shooter's powder
- 5) Disguise
- 9) Shakespearean "soon"
- 13) Little pat on the buns?
- 14) Heart chambers
- 16) "Star Trek" producer Roddenberry
- 17) Hollywood
- 19) Riverside plant
- 20) ___ no. (business card info)
- 21) Needed to confess
- 23) Like a pencil point
- 27) Danny of "Do the Right Thing"
- 30) They're way off base
- 31) Was published
- 34) Pattern perfected by Firestone
- 35) Simon or Armstrong
- 36) College or city in Wisconsin
- 38) Sault ___ Marie
- 39) Cold war?
- 42) Worrisome letters to send
- 43) Doo-wop selections, now
- 44) Farmer's prayer, sometimes
- 46) Unsavory type of political campaign
- 48) Steam radiator sound
- 49) ___ Island, Florida
- 50) Rub the wrong way
- 52) Extremely busy
- 54) As of now
- 57) Body appendage
- 58) Rhineland negative
- 60) Some Christmas tree hangers
- 65) Bonny hillside
- 66) Egypt's Mubarak
- 67) Pro ___ (proportionately)
- 68) Musical "Mama"
- 69) Penn on film
- 70) Decide not to take a hit

DOWN

- 1) "Dora the Explorer" fan
- 2) Foreman battler
- 3) Sportscaster Berman
- 4) He didn't know Who's on first
- 5) "My Dinner With Andre" director
- 6) Part of D.A.
- 7) Packed houses (Abbr.)
- 8) Male hatching eggs
- 9) Yes man, e.g.
- 10) Incisive or extremely pointed
- 11) In dire need of gas
- 12) Kelly or Rorem
- 15) "The King and I" schoolteacher
- 18) Auction endings?
- 22) Capone's henchman Frank
- 23) Souvenir from the beach?
- 24) Absolutely fabulous
- 25) Christmas plants
- 26) Is apprehensive about
- 28) Trelliswork
- 29) Poem of homage
- 32) "When ___ said and done"
- 33) ___ than (at least)
- 36) Unit of oil production (Abbr.)
- 37) "No __, ands or buts!"
- 40) Kind of premiere
- 41) Descriptive linguistics
- 42) 1040 ID
- 45) Silent OK signal
- 47) Does penance
- 49) Cleopatra's love
- 51) A pop
- 53) Entrance
- 55) New Mexico tourist city
- 56) Massachusetts motto opener
- 58) Major network
- 59) Victorian, e.g.
- 61) "The Double Helix" subject
- 62) Crooner "King" Cole
- 63) Zeta's follower
- 64) "___ what?"

MERRY CHRISTMAS By Nicholas St. Ford



FTX founder Bankman-Fried to make U.S. court appearance after extradition

Reuters - FTX founder Sam Bankman-Fried is expected to appear before a U.S. court on Thursday after being extradited from The Bahamas, the first step in a possibly lengthy criminal case over the collapse of the bankrupt cryptocurrency exchange.

Bankman-Fried, 30, was arrested last week in the Bahamas, where he lived and where FTX is based. Federal prosecutors in Manhattan charged him with stealing billions of dollars in FTX customer assets to plug losses at his hedge fund, Alameda Research, cementing the one-time billionaire's fall from grace.

He departed the Caribbean nation in FBI custody shortly after 8 p.m. EST (0100 GMT) on Tuesday night.

Just hours later, U.S. prosecutors said two of his closest former associates had pleaded guilty and were cooperating with their probe - a move that significantly ramped up pressure on Bankman-Fried.

"If you participated in misconduct at FTX or Alameda, now is the time to get ahead of it," Williams said. "We are moving quickly and our patience is not eternal."

At his U.S. court appearance, known as an arraignment, Bankman-Fried is expected to be asked to enter a plea. The judge would determine whether to



Sam Bankman-Fried, the founder and former CEO of crypto currency exchange FTX, is escorted into the Magistrate Court building in Nassau, Bahamas December 21, 2022. REUTERS/Marco Bello

grant him bail, and if so, on what conditions.

It was not immediately clear where Bankman-Fried spent the night after arriving in the New York City area shortly before midnight. A representative for Bankman-Fried and a spokesman for the U.S. Attorney's office in Manhattan did not respond to requests for comment.

Bankman-Fried has acknowledged risk-management failures at FTX, but has said he does not believe he has criminal liability. At a court hearing in The Bahamas on Wednesday, his lawyer there, Jerone Roberts, read an affidavit in which Bankman-Fried said he had agreed to extradition in part out of a "desire to make the relevant customers whole."

He attended the hearing in a salmon-coloured courthouse in capital Nassau wearing a suit jacket and button-down shirt, a far cry from the casual attire he became known for while running FTX. He spoke briefly to tell the judge that he was waiving his right to contest extradition, and to say that he had eaten and was in good health.

Since his arrest on Monday, Bankman-Fried has been detained at the Bahamas Department of Corrections prison, known as Fox Hill. A U.S. State Department report in 2021 called conditions at the jail "harsh" though local authorities say the facility has since improved.

A son of two Stanford Law School professors and

a graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Bankman-Fried rode a boom in the value of Bitcoin and other digital assets to become a billionaire several times over as well as an influential donor to U.S. political campaigns.

But in early November, reports that FTX commingled customer funds with Alameda led to a wave of withdrawals from FTX, ultimately prompting the exchange - valued at \$32 billion as recently as January 2022 - to declare bankruptcy. Cryptocurrency exchanges like FTX allow users to buy and sell digital assets.

Bankman-Fried stepped down as CEO on Nov. 11, the same day as the bankruptcy filing.

Deputy U.N. chief urges countries to send armed force to Haiti

Reuters - Deputy U.N. chief Amina Mohammed on Wednesday urged countries to urgently consider Haiti's request for an international specialised armed force to help restore security in the Caribbean state and alleviate a humanitarian crisis.

"Now is certainly not the time for the world to turn away from Haiti," she told the U.N. Security Council. "It is time to step up and turn the current crisis into an opportunity for Haiti to bounce back stronger."

Haitian gangs have expanded their territory since the 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moise. The resulting violence has left much of the country off-limits to the government and led to routine gun battles with police.

In September, Haitian gangs created a humanitarian crisis by blocking a fuel terminal for nearly six weeks, halting most economic activity.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in October proposed that one or several countries send "a rapid action force" to help Haiti's police remove a threat posed by armed gangs. He was not suggesting that the force be deployed by the United Nations.

"The United States has provided more than \$90 million in security support to Haiti in the past 18 months and will continue to provide



United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed speaks at the United Nations General Assembly celebration of Nelson Mandela International Day at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, U.S., July 18, 2022. REUTERS/Eduardo Munoz

critical support bilaterally," Wood said.

Russia requested the Security Council meeting on Haiti on Wednesday. Russia's U.N. Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said: "We have doubts that the option of sending international military force can fundamentally change the situation."

The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, said in October that the United States was drafting a Security Council resolution to back a non-U.N. mission to boost security and allow humanitarian aid to flow. But diplomats said the measure would not be voted on until a force was formed.

A council resolution needs nine votes in favour and no vetoes by the United States, Britain, France, China or Russia.



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UN council adopts resolution urging end to Myanmar violence

AP - The U.N. Security Council approved its first-ever resolution on Myanmar on Wednesday, demanding an immediate end to violence in the Southeast Asian nation and urging its military rulers to release all “arbitrarily detained” prisoners including ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi and to restore democratic institutions.

The resolution reiterated the call by the 15-member council for the country’s opposing parties to pursue dialogue and reconciliation and urged all sides “to respect human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law.”

The council vote was 12-0 with three abstentions, China, Russia and India.

Britain’s U.N. Ambassador Barbara Woodward, whose country sponsored the resolution, said it is the first adopted by the U.N.’s most powerful body since the country, formerly known as Burma, joined the United Nations in 1948.

It is the result of the military overturning the results of a democratic election and seizing power on Feb. 1, 2021, plunging the country into a series of cascading crises with “negative consequences for the region and its stability,” she said.

“Today we’ve sent a firm message to the military, that there should be a no doubt we expect this resolution to be implemented in full,” Woodward said. “We stand with the people of Myanmar. It is time for the junta to return the country to them.”

U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken applauded the adoption of the resolution as an important step but said the Council had more work to do “to advance a just solution” to the crisis.

“The Security Council should leverage this opportunity to seek additional ways to promote a return to the path of



Then Myanmar's leader Aung San Suu Kyi waits to address judges of the International Court of Justice in The Hague, Netherlands, Dec. 11, 2019. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong, File)

democracy, advance accountability for the regime’s actions, and support ASEAN’s efforts to achieve meaningful implementation of the Five Point Consensus,” he said in a statement, referring to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations’ plan to restore peace and stability.

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said Secretary-General Antonio Guterres remains “extremely concerned” about the deteriorating humanitarian situation and human rights in Myanmar. “We welcome this strong message from the Security Council,” he told AP.

For five decades Myanmar had languished under strict military rule that led to international isolation and sanctions. As the generals loosened their grip, culminating in Suu Kyi’s rise to leadership in 2015 elections and moves toward democracy, the international community responded by lifting most sanctions and pouring investment into the country.

That ended with the military takeover on the day Parliament was to reconvene following November 2020 elections which Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy party won overwhelmingly — an outcome the military claims without evidence was based on

fraud.

The takeover was met with massive public opposition, which has since turned into armed resistance that some U.N. experts have characterised as civil war.

Last month, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, a rights monitoring organisation, said over 16,000 people had been detained on political charges in Myanmar since the army takeover. Of those arrested, more than 13,000 were still in detention. The association said at least 2,465 civilians had been killed since the 2021 takeover, although the number is thought to be far higher.

Much of the international community, including Myanmar’s fellow ASEAN members, have expressed frustration at the generals’ hard line in resisting reform. Myanmar’s rulers agreed to ASEAN’s plan in April 2021 but have made little effort to implement it.

The plan calls for the immediate cessation of violence, a dialogue among all concerned parties, mediation of the dialogue process by an ASEAN special envoy, provision of humanitarian aid through ASEAN channels and a visit to Myanmar by the association’s special envoy to meet all concerned parties. Current U.N. special envoy Noeleen Heyzer and ASEAN special envoy Prak Sokhonn, a Cambodian minister, have both visited Myanmar but neither was allowed to meet Suu Kyi.

The resolution “acknowledges ASEAN’s central role in helping to find a peaceful solution to the crisis in Myanmar” and encourages the international community to support ASEAN’s efforts, including in implementing the five-point consensus.

Noting that Myanmar’s military
cont’d on pg 23

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committed to supporting the five-point consensus, the U.N. resolution calls for immediate action to implement it and urges all parties in Myanmar to work on starting a dialogue aimed at peacefully resolving the crisis.

It also underlines the need “for a peaceful, genuine and inclusive process to de-escalate violence and reach a sustainable political resolution.”

The resolution also expresses “deep concern” at the ongoing state of emergency imposed by the military, the arrest of Suu Kyi and former president Win Myint who should be released immediately, and at “the increasingly large numbers of internally displaced persons and dramatic increase in humanitarian need.” It reiterates the council’s condemnation of the execution of activists in July.

Elaine Pearson, Asia director at Human Rights Watch, said: “The Security Council resolution is a momentous step on behalf of the people of Myanmar, opening the door toward holding Myanmar’s brutal generals to account.”

But Tom Andrews, the independent U.N. special investigator on Myanmar, tweeted that as well-meaning as the resolution is, “without consequences” in the resolution “these important sentiments will not stop the junta from attacking and destroying the lives of the 54 million in Myanmar.”

Since the Security Coun-

cil won’t authorise action against the military, he said, “those nations who support the people of Myanmar must immediately step forward with coordinated action to end the carnage.”

Britain’s Woodward said the resolution was the result of many weeks of consultations with members of the council and ASEAN and key regional partners. Diplomats said the final negotiations were between Britain and China, Myanmar’s neighbour and ally.

Louis Charbonneau, Human Rights Watch’s U.N. director, said: “China and Rus-

sia’s abstentions signal that even the junta’s few friends have lost interest in sticking out their necks to defend its atrocities.”

China’s U.N. Ambassador Zhang Jun said he abstained because the resolution’s “tone still lacks balance.”

Stressing that China’s “policy of friendship towards Myanmar is for all its people,” he said “there is no quick fix” to the current crisis which requires all parties and factions to pursue dialogue and achieve political reconciliation.

“Neither democratic

transition nor national reconciliation can be achieved overnight, and both require time, patience, and pragmatism,” Zhang said. He urged the international community to listen to ASEAN’s views and allow time for ASEAN to build consensus.

On another Myanmar issue, the resolution underscored the need to address the crisis in Rakhine state and to create conditions for the return of Rohingya Muslims who were chased out of the Buddhist-majority country and now live as refugees in neighbouring Bangladesh and elsewhere.



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Seoul: North Korean hackers stole \$1.2B in virtual assets

AP - North Korean hackers have stolen an estimated 1.5 trillion won (\$1.2 billion) in cryptocurrency and other virtual assets in the past five years, more than half of it this year alone, South Korea's spy agency said Thursday.

Experts and officials say North Korea has turned to crypto hacking and other illicit cyber activities as a source of badly needed foreign currency to support its fragile economy and fund its nuclear program following harsh U.N. sanctions and the COVID-19 pandemic.

South Korea's main spy agency, the National Intelligence Service, said North Korea's capacity to steal digital assets is considered among the best in the world because of the country's focus on cybercrimes since U.N. economic sanctions



In this photo provided by the North Korean government, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, bottom centre, attends a ruling party congress in Pyongyang, North Korea, on Jan. 12, 2021. (Korean Central News Agency/Korea News Service via AP, File)

were toughened in 2017 in response to its nuclear and missile tests.

The U.N. sanctions imposed in 2016-17 ban key North Korean exports such as coal, textiles and seafood

and also led member states to repatriate North Korean overseas workers. Its economy suffered further setbacks after it imposed some of the world's most draconian restrictions against the pandemic.

The NIS said state-sponsored North Korean hackers are estimated to have stolen 1.5 trillion won (\$1.2 billion) in virtual assets around the world since 2017, including about 800 billion won (\$626 million) this year alone. It said more than 100 billion won (\$78 million) of the total came from South Korea.

It said North Korean hackers are expected to conduct more cyberattacks next year to steal advanced South Korean technologies and confidential information on

South Korean foreign policy and national security.

Earlier this month, senior diplomats from the United States, South Korea and Japan agreed to increase efforts to curb illegal North Korean cyber activities. In February, a panel of U.N. experts said North Korea was continuing to steal hundreds of millions of dollars from financial institutions and cryptocurrency firms and exchanges.

Despite its economic difficulties, North Korea has carried out a record number of missile tests this year in what some experts say is an attempt to modernise its arsenal and boost its leverage in future negotiations with its rivals to win sanctions relief and other concessions.

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French serial killer Charles Sobhraj to leave Nepal prison

AP - Confessed French serial killer Charles Sobhraj, who was convicted and sentenced to life in prison in Nepal, was ordered Wednesday to be released because of poor health, good behaviour and having already served most of his sentence.

The Supreme Court ruling also said he had to leave the country within the next 15 days but did not specify to where.

He was serving two life sentences in Nepal for the murders of American and Canadian backpackers. Life sentences in Nepal are 20 years.

The court document said he had already served more than 75% of his sentence, making him eligible for release, and he has heart disease.

The Frenchman has in the past admitted killing several Western tourists and he is believed to have killed at least 20 people in Afghanistan, India, Thailand, Turkey, Nepal, Iran and Hong Kong during the 1970s.

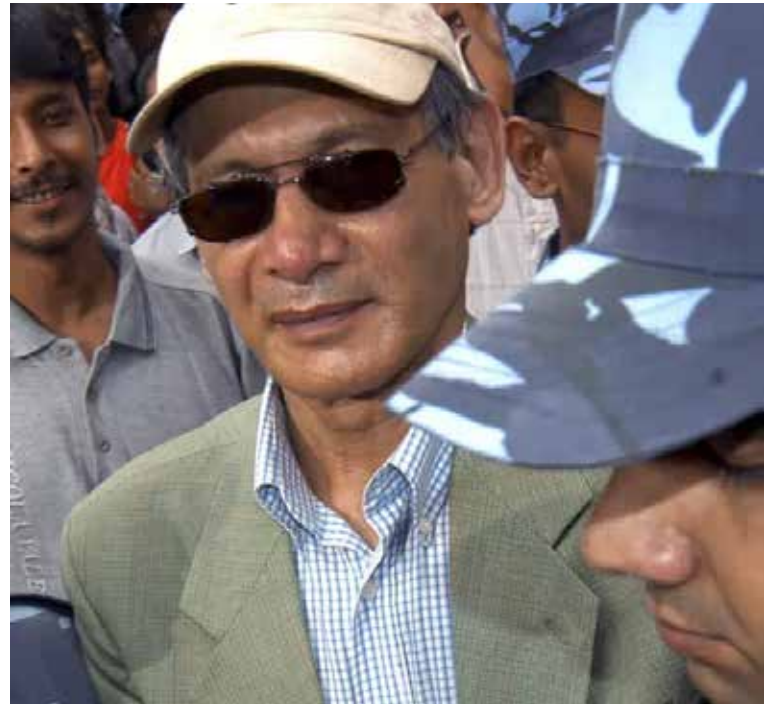
However, his 2004 conviction in Nepal was the first time he was found guilty in court.

Sobhraj was held for two decades in New Del-

hi's maximum-security Tihar prison on suspicion of theft but was deported without charge to France in 1997.

He resurfaced in September 2003 in Kathmandu.

His nickname, The Serpent, stems from his reputation as a disguise and escape artist.



Police escort convicted French serial killer Charles Sobhraj from court in Kathmandu, Nepal on Aug. 12, 2004. (AP Photo/Binod Joshi, File)



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Argentina only No. 2 in new FIFA rankings led by Brazil

AP - Winning the World Cup was not enough to lift Argentina atop the FIFA world rankings with Brazil keeping the No. 1 position on Thursday.

Brazil was eliminated in the quarterfinals by Croatia but built enough rankings points from results over recent years that feed into FIFA's calculation.

Argentina moved up one place to No. 2 and beaten finalist France also rose one to No. 3.

Belgium is still at No. 4, a fall of two places, despite winning only one game in Qatar and failing to advance from the group stage.

England and the Netherlands, both beaten quarterfinalists, stay at Nos. 5 and 6 respectively.

Croatia climbed five places to No. 7.

European champion Italy is at No. 8 despite failing to qualify for the World Cup.



Argentina's Lionel Messi celebrates with the trophy in front of fans after winning the World Cup final soccer match between Argentina and France at the Lusail Stadium in Lusail, Qatar, Dec. 18, 2022. Argentina won 4-2 in a penalty shootout after the match ended tied 3-3. (AP Photo/Martin Meissner)

Morocco is the best-placed African nation at No. 11, up 11 places, for its historic run to the semifinals.

The United States at No. 13 is the best of the CONCACAF region teams,

rising three places after advancing to the round of 16. Mexico is No. 15.

Japan leads the Asian confederation teams at No. 20, up four places, and Australia rises 11 places to No. 27. Both reached the round

of 16.

Cameroon, which beat Brazil in the group stage, rose 10 places to be No. 33.

Qatar dropped 10 places to No. 60 after losing all three games as the home team at the World Cup.

Andre Coley appointed Interim Head Coach for tours of Zimbabwe and South Africa

Andre Coley has been named as the Interim Head Coach of the West Indies Men's team for the upcoming tour of southern Africa. Following a meeting of the Cricket West Indies' (CWI) Board of Directors on Monday 19 December, CWI announced that Coley will oversee the two-Test tour of Zimbabwe from 28 January to 16 February, as well as the multi-format tour of South Africa, which includes

two Tests, three One-Day Internationals (ODIs) and three T20 Internationals (T20Is) from 21 February to 28 March.

Coley said, "To be asked to oversee the West Indies team on the upcoming tours of Zimbabwe and South Africa is a special honour. West Indies cricket holds a special place in my heart. The upcoming assignment will be challenging as we will come up against

two teams in their home conditions. We will need to ensure that our planning and preparation are appropriate, and demonstrate consistency in the execution of these plans, to give ourselves the best opportunity to achieve positive results."

He added, "The players, I'm sure, are enthusiastic about the opportunities that both series should offer and are eager to contribute to our team's

cont'd on pg 27

West Indies to face Zimbabwe in two Tests in Bulawayo

The West Indies Men's team will start their 2023 international year with two Test matches against Zimbabwe. The visitors will play both matches at the Queens Sports Club in Bulawayo.

Zimbabwe Cricket (ZC) confirmed the schedule on Wednesday, with the first Test slated for 4-8 February, and the second Test match for 12-16 February.

Ahead of the two-Test rubber West Indies will have a four-day warm-up match against a local side set for 28-31 January at Bulawayo Athletic Club.

All matches start at 10am local time (4am Eastern Caribbean/3am Jamaica).

Jimmy Adams, CWI's Director of Cricket said: "The tour to Zimbabwe early in 2023 will be an important part of our 2023 Test programme, which also includes series against South Africa and India. Having produced some good results early in 2022, the team will be eager to begin the year with strong performances in Zimbabwe."

Zimbabwe's last Test match was way back in July

2021 against Bangladesh in Harare and, according to ZC Director of Cricket Hamilton Masakadza, they will be eager to make the most of the upcoming series.

"We are pleased to confirm the West Indies will be visiting us for two Test matches that will be played in Bulawayo," Masakadza said.

"Although it's been a while since we last played Test cricket, our boys will be hungry and ready for some red-ball action and I believe an exciting series against one of the game's top sides is on the cards."

The last Test Series between Zimbabwe and the West Indies was also played at Queens Sports Club in October 2017. West Indies clinched the two-match series having won the first game by 117 runs while the second match ended in a draw.

MATCH SCHEDULE

28-31 January: four-day warm-up match at Bulawayo Athletic Club

4-8 February: 1st Test at Queens Sports Club, Bulawayo

12-16 February: 2nd Test at Queens Sports Club, Bulawayo

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success. I look forward to the tours ahead and the opportunity to make a tangible and meaningful contribution to the growth of West Indies cricket."

Jimmy Adams, CWI Director of Cricket said, "We welcome Andre back to the West Indies dressing room and with his wealth of knowledge of the game, player-management skills, dedication and hard work, as well as attention to detail, we know he is well equipped. He is a highly experienced coach who has functioned at every level within the CWI High-Performance Pathway. This has prepared him for the job at hand and we expect he will again approach this new role with the same vigour and zeal which have characterised his time in the CWI coaching system and has earned the respect of players and everyone who he has interacted with."

Coley, a former Jamaica wicket-keeper/batter, is currently Head



Andre Coley

Coach of the CWI Academy programme. While Andre Coley fulfils the interim role, CWI's High-Performance Manager Graeme West will oversee the West Indies Academy programme, supported by the Director of Cricket, Jimmy Adams to ensure there are no disruptions to the Academy programme during the period.

Coley previously served as the Assistant Academy Head Coach and

Interim Academy Head Coach when the Sagcor Academy was launched in 2010. He was also Head Coach of the West Indies U19 Team; Assistant Coach of the West Indies Men's and Women's Teams, as well as Head Coach of Jamaica Scorpions and Windward Islands Volcanoes, who were the 2018 Super50 Cup Champions.

In 2016 he was Assistant Coach of the West Indies Men's Team which won the ICC Men's T20 World Cup and earlier this year he was Assistant Coach of Jamaica Tallawahs when they captured the Caribbean Premier League title.

CWI also confirmed that the contracts of Assistant Coaches Roddy Es-twick and Monty Desai had ended.

Adams said, "I'd like to thank Roddy and Monty for their hard work and dedication in supporting the team over the last few years and wish them the very best in the future."

Pelé's cancer worsens, kidneys and heart affected

AP - Pelé's health has worsened during his hospital stay to regulate his cancer medication, doctors said Wednesday.

The Albert Einstein hospital in Sao Paulo said in a statement Wednesday that Pelé's cancer has advanced and that the 82-year-old Brazilian soccer great is under "elevated care" related to "kidney and cardiac dysfunctions."

The hospital did not mention any signs of the three-time World Cup winner's recent respiratory infection, which was aggravated by COVID-19.

Edson Arantes do Na-

scimento, who is globally known as Pelé, is undergoing chemotherapy in his fight against cancer since he had a colon tumour removed in September 2021. Neither his family nor the hospital have said whether it had spread to other organs.

Kely Nascimento, one of his daughters, said Pelé will stay in the hospital during Christmas.

"We decided with doctors that, for many reasons, it will be best for us to stay here, with all the care that this new family at Einstein gives us," she wrote on Instagram. "We will even



A fan displays a sign in support of Pelé at a Brazilian fan party before the World Cup round of 16 soccer match between Brazil and South Korea, in Doha, Dec. 5, 2022. The 82-year-old Pelé remained in a hospital in San Paulo recovering from a respiratory infection that was aggravated by COVID-19, but the news coming from Brazil early Monday was good. (AP Photo/Ashley Landis)

make some caipirinhas (no kidding). We love you and

we will give you an update next week."

Newspaper Folha de S.Paulo reported Saturday that Pelé's chemotherapy is not working and that doctors had decided to put him on palliative care. Pelé's family denied that report. The Associated Press could not confirm the newspaper's information.

Pelé led Brazil to victory in the 1958, 1962 and 1970 World Cups and remains one of the team's all-time leading scorers with 77 goals. Neymar tied Pelé's record during the latest World Cup.

Several tributes and get-well soon wishes were made for the former footballer during the Qatar tournament, which was won by Argentina on Sunday.

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NFL 'Sunday Ticket' headed to YouTube beginning next season

AP - Fans will have to Google it beginning next season if they want to access the NFL's "Sunday Ticket" package.

The NFL announced a multiyear agreement on Thursday for Google to distribute the package of out-of-market Sunday afternoon games on YouTube TV and YouTube Primetime Channels.

The NFL was seeking \$2.5 billion per season for the package, which has been on DirecTV since 1994. The satellite provider has paid \$1.5 billion per year on an eight-year contract that expires at the end of this season.

Commissioner Roger Goodell said during an interview with CNBC over the summer that the next move for "Sunday Ticket" would be to become a streaming service because that would be the best option for fans.

Goodell reiterated that with Thursday's announcement.

"For a number of years we have been focused on increased digital distribution of our games and this partnership is yet another example of us looking towards the future and building the next generation of NFL fans," he said in a statement.

It is the second time in less than two years that the NFL has partnered with a streaming service to air

games. The league's 11-year contract with Amazon Prime Video for Thursday night games started this season.

Besides Amazon, Apple and ESPN also expressed interest in "NFL Sunday Ticket."

"As the ways fans enjoy NFL football evolve in a changing media landscape, partnerships with innovators like YouTube will ensure that more games are available to more fans," said New England Patriots owner Robert Kraft, who is also chairman of the NFL's media committee. "This partnership will grow our game for future generations and allow them to follow their favourite sport."

The NFL has had a presence on YouTube since 2015, when it launched its official NFL channel. That has increased to include channels for all 32 teams and 10 official league channels, including NFL Films, NFL Network and Mundo NFL.

NFL Network and NFL RedZone have been available to subscribers of YouTube TV since 2020.

"Through this expanded partnership with the NFL, viewers will now also be able to experience the game they love in compelling and innovative ways through YouTube TV or YouTube Primetime Channels," You-



NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell answers questions from reporters at a press conference following the close of the NFL owner's meeting, Tuesday, March 29, 2022, at The Breakers resort in Palm Beach, Fla. Indianapolis Colts owner Jim Irsay said Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2022 he isn't ready to oust Daniel Snyder as owner of the Washington Commanders and wants to discuss the possibility with other NFL owners. (AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell, File)

Tube CEO Susan Wojcicki said in a statement. "We're excited to continue our work with the NFL to make YouTube a great place for sports lovers everywhere."

Starting next season, "NFL Sunday Ticket" will be available as an add-on package on YouTube TV and standalone a la carte on YouTube Primetime Channels.

Google said in June that YouTube TV, which was launched in 2017, had surpassed 5 million accounts and was the biggest internet-based pay TV service in the U.S. That number includes users on free promotional trials.

YouTube Primetime Channels, which launched in November, is a service that allows users to sub-

scribe and watch content from streaming services on the YouTube app.

Even with "Sunday Ticket" moving to YouTube, the price is not expected to substantially decrease due to contracts with CBS and Fox, which carry the Sunday afternoon games.

Viewers pay around \$300-\$400 a season for the package, which averages 2 million subscribers.

The league also said it would work with YouTube to determine additional ways to support distribution of "Sunday Ticket" in commercial establishments.

Earlier this year, Amazon reached an agreement with DirecTV to make sure Thursday night games were available in bars and restaurants.

Sports News



Wadadli Elites1 continue impressive scoring run in Division II basketball

For the third consecutive game, the Wadadli Elites1 have scored at least 100 points as they continued their impressive start to their campaign in the Antigua and Barbuda Basketball Association's (ABBA) Second Division on Wednesday night.

The Wadadli Elites1 recorded their third win in as many outings by trouncing Cuties Ovals Superiors by an 84-point margin in the first game of a Zone 1 double-header at the JSC Sports Complex.

Tequan Brodie shot a game high 49 points,

grabbed eight rebounds and six steals, while distributing six assists to lead Wadadli Elites1 to their 128-44 emphatic victory.

Team mates Jamil Charles scored 23 points and grabbed 17 rebounds; Jevon Andrew also sank 23 points, grabbed 12 rebounds and dished out eight assists; Dominick Anthony scored 13 points and pulled down six rebounds, while Najae George converted 11 points and snapped up 11 rebounds for Wadadi Elites1.

Shamori Bascus scored 18 points and claimed sev-

en rebounds, while Daniel Thomas sank 14 points and secured 11 rebounds for Cuties Ovals Superiors who slumped to their third loss in four games.

Old Road Daggers notched up their second win in four games by prevailing 78-69 against Jan Serve Fearless Crew2 in the second game of Wednesday night's double-header.

Ariel Quallis produced 25 points, 13 rebounds, seven assists and seven steals; Devea Aaron sank 14 points, grabbed 13 rebounds and dished out six assists; Victor Osborne

also scored 14 points; Ezekiel Francois snapped up 18 rebounds and scored 12 points, while Kareem Jacobs chipped in with 10 points for Old Road Daggers.

Tshorn Gage scored 25 points; Daysher Samuel had 14 points, eight rebounds and seven assists; Delroy Foster sank 10 points and pulled down 11 rebounds, while Ciaran Marcelle also chipped in with 10 points, seven rebounds and five assists for Fearless Crew2 who suffered their third loss in as many games.

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Villa Lions aim to rebound with win in premier league



Coach Auckland 'Pin Up' Jarvis, right, oversees a Villa Lions team training session at the Fort Road playing field on Wednesday, 21st December, 2022. (Photo by Elwin Francis)

Villa Lions will be seeking to return to winning ways in the Antigua and Barbuda Football Association's (ABFA) Premier Division League today.

Villa Lions and All Saints United will meet in a top of the table clash at the ABFA's Technical Centre at 7 pm in the first game to kick-off the fifth week of matches in the nation's top domestic league.

All Saints United will be in confident mood after inflicting a 6-3 drubbing of Ottos Rangers in their previous encounter to advance to the top of the league on goal difference.

All Saints United's victory last Sunday ensured they join Villa Lions, Jennings Grenades and Tryum on nine points at the top of the 16-team round-robin league competition.

Following an impressive start to their campaign in the top flight by winning their first three matches, Villa Lions will be heading into today's match on the back of their first defeat in their previous outing after conceding a late goal to suffer a one-nil loss to Jennings Grenades last Saturday.

Head coach Auckland "Pin Up" Jarvis said Villa Lions will be aiming

to rebound with victory over All Saints United today.

"Yeah, most definitely. We lost a game after a three-game winning streak. We are still at the top of the table, but I think we played an okay game (against Jennings Grenades), but we want to keep at the top. We want to keep leading," Jarvis said.

"We put in some training this week and we will go out fighting on Friday, fight for everything to try and get the three points."

Jarvis said Villa will be boosted for today's clash with All Saints United by the welcome return of national youth team striker Eroy Gonsalves, who missed the Lions' last encounter against Jennings Grenades.

"Yes he was a big miss the last game. I tell you, the day that we really heard that he wasn't going to play, we were already doing training sessions with him in place to do good work in that game because we wanted to play tight defensively and hit them on the counter, especially with him down the middle," Jarvis stated.

"In the last game it didn't work out because he had been suspended. But most definitely, he will be here and he

will be back in the team on Friday.

"He trained yesterday and we had a review of the game, we watched the game and we had some discussions on the way we go forward for the next game so most definitely, I should have him for Friday's game."

Following a break for the Christmas day festivities, the fifth round of premier league matches will continue with a triple-header on Boxing Day, Monday, 26th December.

Ottos Rangers will take on Five Islands at 4 pm, Parham will tackle Jennings Grenades at 6 pm and Empire are slated to meet the Liberta Black Hawks at 8 pm.

There will then be a three-day break in the fifth week of premier league fixtures to facilitate matches in the first and second divisions.

This means the fifth week of fixtures will then be completed next weekend. SAP and Tryum will clash at 7 pm on Friday, 30th December.

It will round off with a triple-header on Saturday, 31st December. Swetes will face Pigotts Bullets at 4 pm, Greenbay Hoppers will oppose Cedar Grove Blue Jays at 6 pm and Old Road will clash with Willikies at 8 pm.



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Sea View Farm extend unbeaten run in second division league

Sea View Farm maintained their perfect start to their campaign in the Antigua and Barbuda Football Association's (ABFA) Second Division by surging to their fourth win in as many matches on Wednesday, 21st December.

Sea View Farm romped to a 3-0 victory over Blackburn Palace at the ABFA's Technical Centre at Paynters to join unbeaten Jennings United at the top of the standings with maximum 12 points from four matches.

Markland Wright opened the scoring with a 30th minute conversion and an own-goal which was scored by Malcolm Samuel in the 36th minute that gave Sea View Farm a 2-0 half-time lead.

Kevin Warner then scored his team's final goal in the 60th minute to wrap up Sea View Farm's comfortable victory. It was the second loss in three matches for Blackburn Palace.

Freemans Village secured their second win in three encounters by coasting to a 3-0 victory against Belmont FC at the Freemans Village playing field.

Andre Kellman converted a penal-



Sea View Farm maintained their perfect start to their campaign in the Antigua and Barbuda Football Association's Second Division by surging to their fourth win in as many matches with a victory over Blackburn Palace at the ABFA's Technical Centre at Paynters on Wednesday, 21st December. (File photo)

ty in the 25th minute and two minutes later, Malik Charles scored his team's second goal to give Freemans Village a 2-0 halftime lead.

Dylan George also scored his team's final goal via a penalty, which he converted in the 52nd minute. It was the second defeat suffered by Belmont FC in four appearances.

FC Master Ballers picked up their first point, but are still awaiting their first win in the second division.

After losing all three previous matches this season, FC Master Ballers pulled off a nil-nil draw with Bethesda at the Bethesda playing field.

Wednesday's other scheduled second division match between host Golden Grove and CPTSA Wings was postponed.

The game has been rescheduled to take place at the ABFA's Technical Centre at 5 pm today, Friday, 23rd December.

cont'd from pg 32

ed in the CFU U-14 Challenge Series and benefitted from the referee development training. Pennyfeather was also in the first cohort of the CFU Next Generation Course, which has an overarching aim to help Caribbean match officials matriculate to the next level.

Pennyfeather knew he was on the cusp at the end of last year when he earned a Concacaf badge and was appointed to matches in Na-

tions League and the Dallas Cup. Now it feels good to meet the FIFA mark.

"It feels amazing. All my hard work and dedication paid off. In 2023 I want to do big things in refereeing, so now that I'm accepted on the FIFA list, the real work starts and I am super excited and humbled," Pennyfeather said.

Presently, Pennyfeather, who has been honing his skills for almost six years, is the only FIFA center referee

in Antigua and Barbuda. His intentions come as no surprise. "My ultimate goal in refereeing is to do a youth or senior World Cup, he said.

McKenzie, meanwhile, has been at it for four years — three years and 11 months to be exact, she notes. She made her regional debut at the CFU Boys' U-14 Challenge Series in August, in the Dominican Republic.

"My aim is to become more sharp, focused and fit, because in this field of being

a referee and, by extension, in other areas in life, you always have to seek improvement to become better at your skill," McKenzie said.

As for her ultimate refereeing goal, the teacher at Irene B Williams Secondary School is no different from her peers.

"Like many of my refereeing colleagues, my aim is to perform at a World Cup, specifically a Women's World Cup," McKenzie said.

Abigail McKenzie and Ken Pennyfeather earn FIFA badges

Referee Ken Pennyfeather and assistant referee Abigail McKenzie are amongst a list of 23 Caribbean match officials who made the 2023 FIFA International Refereeing Lists.

The duo joins assistant referees Iroots Appleton, Wasnah Barnarde, Nikesha Gage and Kevin Peters, who were all reappointed.

General Secretary of the Antigua and Barbuda Football Association (ABFA) Rohan Hector congratulated McKenzie, Pennyfeather, and the match officials who were reappointed.

“Abigail and Ken put in the work at the local and regional level over the years, and their commitment earned them their recent appointments. We are pleased to have six match officials on the FIFA list. We commend them all and encourage them to stay the course because the opportunities are there, and they all can go far,” Hector said.

He also noted the work of the ABFA Referee Department and the myriad of initiatives, advising current and prospective local referees to get onboard to master



Ken Pennyfeather

all the possibilities.

“We are just coming off a FIFA World Cup where there were three—and I could say just three—Carib-

bean match officials appointed to the Qatar games. Next year, for the FIFA Women’s World Cup, we have two Caribbean assistant referees appointed. We know that the next Men’s World Cup in 2026 is in our region. An overarching Caribbean aim is to have greater representation at all levels, from teams to referees and all aspects in between. I am saying to our match officials in Antigua and Barbuda, the chant ‘we got next’ includes us, and they must marry intentionality with their ability so that they can be considered for the big stage and the many regional and confederation events between now and then,” Hector said.

Both McKenzie and Pennyfeather have officiat-

cont’d on pg 33



Abigail McKenzie (AR)