

# THE NATION VOTES!

*Story on Page 2*



*On Tuesday, officials representing the Government of Antigua and Barbuda, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and University of the West Indies signed off on a US\$80 million loan provided by the Saudi Development Fund which will allow the expansion of the UWI Five Islands Campus to proceed. It is expected that the work will be completed by 2027. [Photo: UWI FIC] **Story on page 5.***

## Seychelles' former president urges voters to exercise their "fundamental human right"

Danny Faure, former president of Seychelles and leader of the Commonwealth Secretariat's election observer mission in Antigua and Barbuda has encouraged voters to participate in the democratic process of selecting a new government today.

In meetings with the press following the Commonwealth team's arrival last week, Faure noted that a nation's ability to choose its government as part of a democratic process is a most important human right.

"The importance of the elections in a democracy as the ultimate expression of

the will of the people cannot be understated.

"Casting a vote is a fundamental human right and we hope the citizens of Antigua and Barbuda will keenly exercise this right on elections day."

He also commented on the seriousness of the job that his observer team, and the four others monitoring today's elections, are undertaking.

"The task we have been given is one we take seriously and will undertake solemnly in compliance with international standards for the conduct of international



Former president of Seychelles, Danny Faure observers."

The election observer

teams from the Commonwealth, CARICOM and the Organization of American States all arrived in Antigua and Barbuda last week. Their duties commenced on Monday as they held extensive meetings with all stakeholders in today's elections and travelled throughout the county's seventeen constituencies to observe preparations for the election.

Today, the overseas observers will continue their duties, joined by national observer organisations, the Free and Fair Elections League and United Evangelical Alliance.

Following the election, they will submit preliminary reports on their observations of the conduct of today's elections.

Detailed written reports will be submitted at a later date.



Chairman of the Antigua Barbuda Electoral Commission, John Jarvis (centre) with members of the Commonwealth Observer team led by Danny Faure, (right of Jarvis)

<b>Wed 18   Day</b> <b>81°</b> ☀️ Mostly sunny skies. High 81F. Winds E at 10 to 15 mph.		<b>Wed 18   Night</b> <b>74°</b> 🌙 A mostly clear sky. Low 74F. Winds E at 10 to 15 mph.	
☔ 17% 🌬️ E 11 mph	☔ 21% 🌬️ E 11 mph	💧 Humidity <b>72%</b> ☀️ UV Index <b>9 of 10</b>	💧 Humidity <b>78%</b> ☀️ UV Index <b>0 of 10</b>
🌅 Sunrise <b>6:40 am</b> 🌇 Sunset <b>5:55 pm</b>	🌕 Moonrise <b>3:13 am</b> 🌑 Moonset <b>2:34 pm</b> ● Waning Crescent		

## Employers must grant employees time off work to vote

The Labour Department is reminding employers of the time that is to be given to employees to allow them to vote in today's general elections.

In a statement, Labour Commissioner Eltonia Rojas reiterated that four consecutive hours must be granted to workers in which they may cast their ballots.

"The Labour Department wishes to inform the general public that a period of four consecutive hours for voting implies that every worker, between the hours of 6:00am and 6:00pm should have four uninterrupted hours to exercise their franchise," the statement detailed.

Rojas added that not every worker will require time off to vote and that the requirement applied mainly to employers that operate shift systems that are in line with the voting period.

"Workers employed from 8:00am to 5:00pm would only have 2 voting hours ahead of their shift and 1 voting hour after their shift.

"This employer must therefore adjust the work-day to allow workers 4 consecutive hours to vote, whether prior, during or after the shift."

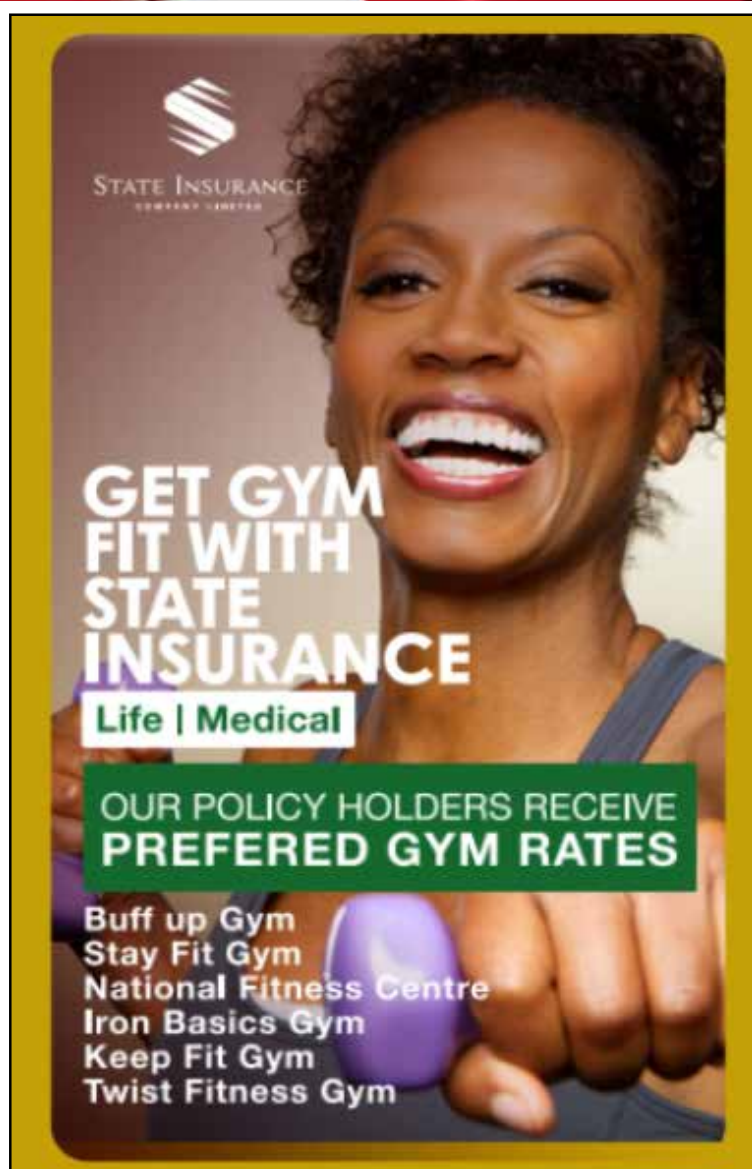
The requirement is in accordance with section



34 of the Representation of the People (Amendment) Act 2001, which states:

1. Every employer shall, on polling day, allow every voter a period of four consecutive hours for voting and no employer shall make any deduction from the pay or other remuneration of any such voter or impose upon or exact from him any penalty by reason of his absence during such period.

2. Any employer who, directly or indirectly refuses or by intimidation, undue influence or in any way, interferes with the granting to any voter in his employ of such period of voting, as this section provided, shall be guilty of an offence, and on summary conviction liable to a fine not exceeding three thousand dollars, or to imprisonment not exceeding twelve months.



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## ABEC's PRO says nation can be proud of the country's electoral system

Public Relations Officer of the Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission (ABEC) Elisa Graham says citizens and residents can be proud of the country's electoral system.

Ahead of the elections, Graham told Pointe FM that ABEC is impervious to external influences with respect to the way it conducts its business on behalf of the people of Antigua and Barbuda, encouraging news, as the nation heads to the polls to elect a new government in its general elections today.

"Holding an election in any jurisdiction, the process is a tedious one, because you have to be so careful and the electoral commission is an independent body; there is no influence at all when it comes to how we conduct our business," Graham told Pointe FM's Talking Your Mind.

"It says so clearly in the law as well. The 1999 Commonwealth Observer Group, they were the ones who called for the establishment of an independent body that conducts the affairs of the elections."

Graham said the public can trust the electoral system, which has been further strengthened by the presence of five local, regional and international election

observer teams who are in Antigua and Barbuda to witness the general elections.

"It is very critical as a democratic country in the Commonwealth - as a democratic country in the world - that we have some level of trust in our system because it is our system and at the end of the day, we have observers," Graham stated.

"We have the Free and Fair Election League, we have the Antigua and Barbuda Evangelical Alliance, we have the Organization of American States (OAS), we have CARICOM, we have the Commonwealth [observer missions]."

"Those are individuals that are currently on the ground observing the processes, observing our system, reading our laws, going on our website, going on our Facebook page, monitoring to see exactly what is happening in the country.

"So, we should be proud of the system that we have, not necessarily that we are perfect, because we are not. We know we have improvements to make, we know there are laws that are probably need to change to allow certain things, however, where the democratic process is concerned, we should have trust in our system."

## US\$80M for UWI FIC expansion “a significant investment”

“A significant milestone in the development of the UWI Five Island Campus” is how Vice Chancellor of The University of the West Indies, Sir Hilary Beckles, described Tuesday’s signing of the US\$80 million loan for the expansion of the campus over the next five years.

Noting that the event occurred on the eve of the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the University of the West Indies, Sir Hilary said the move to develop UWI FIC comes on the heels of UWI’s recognition among the top universities in the world.

UWI is already the top university in the region.

Sir Hilary revealed that UWI’s 75th anniversary



celebrations are being held under the theme, Rooted, Ready and Rising to signify the university's place among the people of the Caribbean.

“While our university is an elite institution, we are not elitist!” he declared.

The Vice Chancellor said The UWI’s mandate is to make education accessible to all as part of the process of democratising the region.

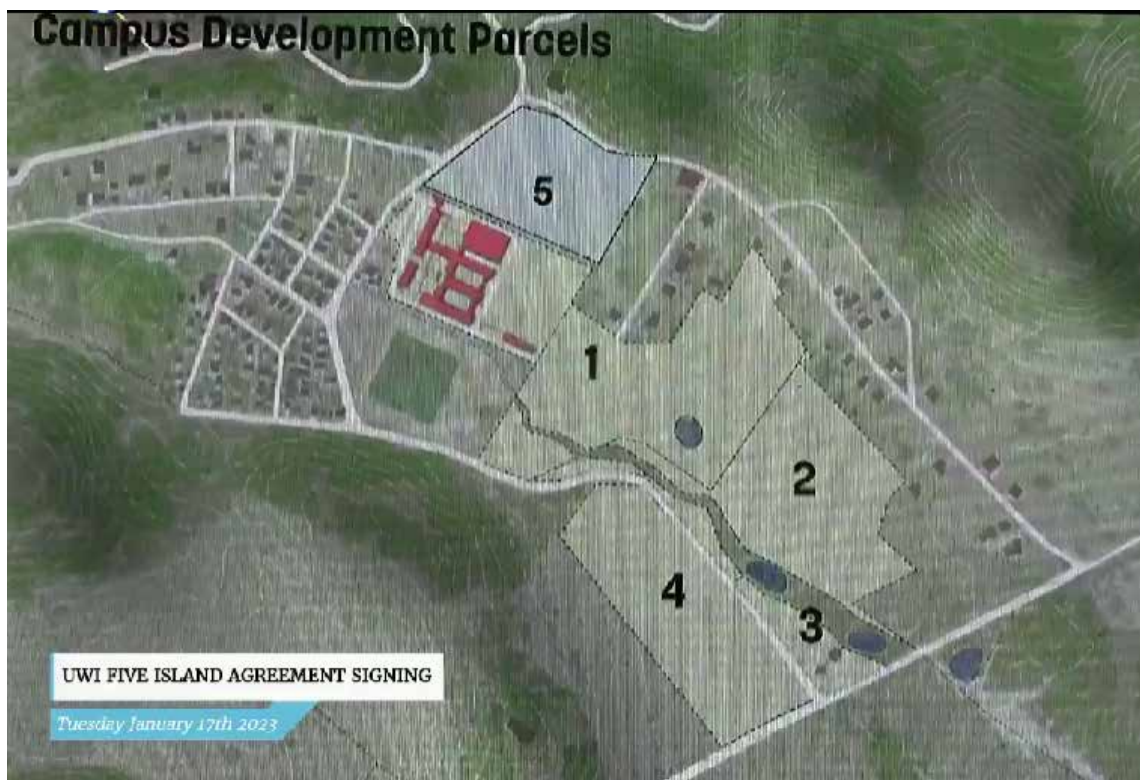
Also addressing the ceremony was the Campus Chairman, Aziz Hadeed,

who drew parallels between the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud and Prime Minister Gaston Browne’s shared commitment to education.

Unlike Crown Prince Mohammed, Hadeed said Prime Minister Browne has had to work hard to achieve the goal of making education more affordable and accessible to the people of Antigua and Barbuda within a much smaller space and with significantly less resources.

“Today, we see the vision of our prime minister and that of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman coming together in this loan agreement for UWI FIC. It represents a national investment with national, regional and potentially global impact,” he stated.

Meanwhile, UWI FIC’s  
*cont’d on pg 6*



UWI FIVE ISLAND AGREEMENT SIGNING

Tuesday January 17th 2023

# Local News



*cont'd from pg 5*

Principal, Dr. Densil Williams, outlined the short, medium and long-term development plans for the institution and a projected timeline within which these plans are expected to come to fruition.

He said securing the money necessary to finance the expansion of the univer-

sity is an investment in the future of Antigua and Barbuda and the OECS.

Dr. Williams also underscored the direct correlation between the increase in the number of students attending the university and the country's economic growth.

In the presentation of a PowerPoint themed, "Building for the future: Let

the Revolution Begin", Professor Williams provided insight into the master plan for the expansion and development of the university. These include increased and improved student facilities, a food court, administration block, state of the art classrooms, and several sporting facilities.

A modern theatre build-

ing capable of accommodating live performances is also a new feature.

As part of the development, which is projected to be completed by 2027, the Five Islands Primary School will be relocated, and its campus will be subsumed by the UWI FIC.

In his presentation, Education Minister, Daryll Matthew, explained the Government of Antigua and Barbuda's philosophy regarding education and the role of The UWI FIC in these plans.

"The purpose, the mission, and the vision of The UWI FIC are fully aligned with the priorities of the Ministry of Education and Sports and my personal conviction that access to education is a right for everyone.

"At the national level, there is consensus about the social and economic benefits of education in developing countries for current and future generations.

"UWI FIC aims to improve and expand access to this process of education in the Eastern Caribbean states by offering high-demand, high-quality programmes, targeting the local and regional populations and in collaboration with like-minded partners, including the Saudi Development Fund," Matthew stated.

With the funding fully secured, it is anticipated that the expansion of the university will begin shortly.

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## Commissioner Rodney denies allegations of police misconduct

Commissioner of Police, Atlee Rodney, has issued a statement in which he has “categorically” denied all claims of misconduct on the part of a senior police officer surrounding the ongoing investigations involving Indian national, Mehul Choksi.

The commissioner’s statement is in response to an article written by internet blogger, Kenneth Rijock, and published on the website belonging to The Economic Times of India on 13th January, 2023.

In the article, Rijock made damning allegations against a senior member of the Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda (RPFAB), Inspector Adonis Henry, and a senior magistrate, Conliffe Clarke.

Commissioner Rodney

said, “It is most unfortunate that Mr Kenneth Rijock, on his internet blog, made several false statements, concerning the Antigua and Barbuda Police Force in relation to Mr Mehul Choksi without ascertaining the facts.

“The entire blog is false with inadequate or no research of the facts and has a malicious purpose and ought not to have been posted.”

The commissioner said the RPFAB has no interest in assisting Choksi in avoiding extradition from Antigua and Barbuda as alleged by Rijock in his article.

Commissioner Rodney said the police force has no power to prevent Choksi’s extradition at all.

*cont’d on pg 8*



*Kenneth Rijock, a disbarred attorney, was sued by Northland Wealth Management Inc. in the District Court of Florida in 2017 for penning more than forty articles in which he published "defamatory" "fake news and misinformation" intended to defame and destroy the wealth management and investment company. Rijock has been hit by similar lawsuits for his blog posts over the years and was forced to apologise to Range Developers which he launched a similar campaign against.*



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# Local News



*cont'd from pg 7*

Commissioner Rodney explained that after the Red Notice had been issued by INTERPOL stating that Choksi was wanted by Indian law enforcement authorities and a request made to the Attorney General for his extradition, an extradition order was issued in accordance with a Commonwealth Treaty, governing extradition of wanted persons.

Choksi challenged his extradition in court and he has delayed his extradition by that process.

“Antigua and Barbuda is a democratic nation in which the rule of law prevails.

“Under the Constitution

of the country, Mr Choksi has the right to seek a hearing by the Court, and only the Court can order his extradition by judicial process.

“His matter is still before the Courts because of his legal interventions,” the commissioner’s statement said.

In the article, Rijock claims that Inspector Henry and Choksi, “have been meeting at the Al Porto Restaurant at Jolly Harbour, alleging bribery”.

The police have countered, however, that Choksi and Inspector Henry only met twice.

“Both engagements occurred around August 2021 and June 2022 during an

investigation where Mr Choksi alleged he was kidnapped from Antigua and transported against his will to Dominica.

“Besides, the two interviews were not conducted at the Al Porto Restaurant in Jolly Harbour as Mr Rijock claims, but at Mr. Choksi’s office, upstairs in the same building of the Restaurant in the presence of his attorney,” Commissioner Rodney said.

Rijock also alleged in the online article that Magistrate Conliffe Clarke conspired” with Inspector Henry to interfere with INTERPOL’s efforts to detain Choksi for extradition to India.

“The only connection

between Inspector Henry and Magistrate Clarke in this matter was to secure a warrant requesting INTERPOL to issue a Red Notice for three foreign persons who Mr Choksi claims were participants in his alleged kidnapping.

“Those Red Notices were approved and issued by INTERPOL,” the statement explained.

The Commissioner concluded in his statement on the matter that, “It is most regrettable that without offering any proof whatsoever, Mr Rijock has included judges and law enforcement agencies in allegations of bribery by Mr Choksi, obviously to delay his extradition to India.”

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## Rotary Clubs of Antigua host Youth Leadership Awards

On Saturday, the Rotary Clubs of Antigua - Rotary Club of Antigua and Rotary Club of Antigua Sundown - hosted their annual Rotary Youth Leadership Awards (RYLA) under the theme: Imagine, Believe, Achieve at the Sir Vivian Richards Cricket Stadium.

RYLA is an intensive training programme that brings together youth and young adults between the ages of 14 and 30 to further develop character and leadership skills and learn about Rotary.

RYLA attracted over 100 Interactors from the five Interact Clubs on island along with Interactors from Montserrat.

The Assistant Governor for Antigua and Montserrat, Evangeline Allen, Rotary Club of Antigua Sundown President, Nircrea Mills-Jno Baptiste and Rotary Club of Antigua President, Ilean Ramsey all offered words of welcome and encouragement to those in attendance.

Presentations included

Leadership by Naeemah Hazelle, Ag. Permanent Secretary in the Prime Minister's Office of St. Kitts and Nevis; Mental Health and dealing with issues such as Cyber Bullying by Alaina Gomes; Dining Etiquette by Rotarian Stacy Cabrall; Dressing for Success by Shirlene Nibbs and Resume Writing and College Applications by Laurie Louard, President HR Professionals of Antigua and Barbuda.

Past President Ato Kentish introduced the Icebreakers and presented on Humble Beginnings.

Due to time constraints, video presentations on Gang Violence by Tian Winter and Rowing the Atlantic by Travis Weste and Joseph Nunes had to be forwarded to the Interact Clubs to be viewed later.

In a statement issued on Monday, the Rotary Clubs thanked their donors, Medpath Clinical Lab/Healthy Choice FM, ABLES, the Minister of Education and Sports, Daryll Matthew, the

Antigua & Barbuda Transport Board, Chef Beard Events, the management of the Sir Vivian Richards Cricket Stadium and Chaso Media.

The Rotary Club of Antigua is a non-profit or-

ganisation which serves the community through various programmes and projects under the motto, "Service Above Self".

The 2022-2023 Rotary International Theme is "Imagine Rotary".



# Nigeria's female bouncers shatter stereotypes

Aljazeera - The all-female Nigerian bouncers' team is honing skills and shattering stereotypes in a male-dominated industry.

Growing up, Emem Thomas's strong body was not the kind that was commonly admired in the city of Uyo, southern Nigeria.

The snarky remarks shook her confidence and natural affability, but one day she claimed her niche and founded the Dragon Squad Limited, a team of strong women bouncers who are shattering stereotypes.

"I love what I see dragons do in movies," the 37-year-old says. "They are also a symbol of power and protection."

In business since 2018, Thomas only employs women with a certain body build, creating a safe space for strong, plus-size women to excel in a traditionally male-dominated field.

The 43 Dragons have worked security at about 2,000 events including house parties, funerals, political rallies and club nights.

"People expect us to be in the kitchen or probably doing makeup and other feminine roles, but joining this squad has really enlightened me," said Peace Vigorous, the youngest of the crew at 23 years old.



*Nsikan Ekandem, Tolulope Ukpanah, Margaret Thomas and Samantha Joseph, members of the female-only security team Dragon Squad Limited, during an exercise session at Camp Gee Hotel in Uyo, Akwa Ibom, Nigeria. [Temilade Adelaja/Reuters]*

Thomas leads her Dragons through gruelling fitness sessions – the women have acquired skills, strength and, most importantly for Thomas, confidence.

"Most of them... were always shy. They couldn't talk," she said, noting that she too used to be introverted because of her weight.

But her newfound confidence has transformed her social and family life with her two children. She no longer considers herself an introvert or shies away from events.

Public behaviour such as standing in front of a

crowd and giving orders can be particularly challenging for women used to avoiding the public eye.

"Face the crowd and be yourself," Thomas tells them when they falter. "You are supposed to be seen and known."

"I see no reason why women (should not be) given a chance," she says. She believes female bouncers "have a way of taking off danger" by listening to troublemakers and victims in a way that most men do not have patience for.

But not all is smooth sailing for the Dragons, In addition to walkie-talkies, boots and dark glasses,

the bouncers carry pepper spray.

The risk of being molested on the job is "always something we have in mind", said Thomas, as is the likelihood of "men looking down on us".

Gender violence is rife in Nigeria, which has one of the world's highest rates of sexual assault. Armed groups in the north are renowned for kidnapping girls and women and trafficking them into sex work and forced labour.

For Thomas, change comes with "breaking the barrier" to show what women bring to all sectors of society.

## Less rainfall in the region as dry season continues

The Caribbean Drought and Precipitation Monitoring Network Monday said as the region moves deeper into its dry season, rainfall will continue to decrease.

“With the likelihood of normal to below normal rainfall in the northwest Caribbean during January to March 2023, the likelihood for below normal rainfall in Cuba can result in short- and long-term drought, by the end of March and May respectively, particularly in western areas,” the network said in its latest bulletin.

It said like Cuba, the other countries in the northwest including Belize and Cayman Islands, should closely monitor their water resources.

“Puerto Rico and Guadeloupe in the eastern portion of the Caribbean, should also monitor their resources for a short-term drought that can impact streams and small rivers, irrigation ponds and other small reservoirs,” the network added.

It said that long-term drought by the end of May might possibly develop or continue in western Belize, Grand Cayman, Central and Eastern Cuba and eastern

Jamaica.

“Areas ending up in long term drought by the end of May are likely to experience lower than usual water levels in large reservoirs, large rivers and groundwater,” the network said, adding that short term drought might possibly develop in southwest Belize, Grand Cayman and southwest Puerto Rico”.(CMC)



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## Dominica PM laments the number of domestic violence incidents

CMC - Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit Monday appealed to Dominicans to ensure that the island remains the “most peaceful and secure nation” in the world adding that his administration will be reviewing measures and embarking on new actions to ensure total peace and safety.

Skerrit told a news conference that Dominica, unfortunately “has seen a number of tragic domestic and public incidents” in recent times, which has put focus on the peace and security of the nation.

He said these incidents highlight the fragility of a democratic society where members of society have to observe decency and respect in dealing with each other.

“Especially, with this emerging period of Carnival, where our communities are coming together to enjoy this unique festival, there



Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit

might be a few who may be inclined to use this period of revelry for acts of violence, and to otherwise instill a level of fear in the society,” Skerrit said, warning “we shall have zero tolerance for any decadent behaviour”.

He said in this context the Dominica Police Force will show zero tolerance to acts of violence related to events surrounding Carnival.

“In turn any event or band which cannot maintain an atmosphere of peace and

civility will be stopped (and) curtailed where there is tangible threat to any citizen of our island.

Organisers of all events are compelled to ensure security for events is in place and that patrons are secure.”

Regarding the issue of domestic violence, Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit said this requires a more fundamental approach “which is a priority for us as a society and a people.

“Legislation and en-

forcement are critical parts of this, but ultimately it is in the community and in the family that the solution lies.

“We will seek to engage a number of stakeholders across the communities before unveiling additional avenues and safety measures for those who are most vulnerable.”

Skerrit said he was also urging victims of domestic violence to reach out for help before it gets too late.

“We understand sometimes it takes a level of courage to do so, but this caring society of ours must be able to act on the behalf of every victim. Additionally, we have various agencies of state, whose purpose is to aid intervention, action and protection,” Skerrit said, adding that in the near future, the government will mandate these agencies to develop greater awareness about their facilities and their services.

## PM says Grenada under threat from the illegal importation of guns

CMC - Grenada’s Prime Minister Dickon Mitchell has admitted that the island is under threat from the illegal importation of guns and ammunition, less than a week after one Caribbean Community (CARICOM) leader urged the United States to help curb the importation of illegal guns into the region

He is promising that his six-month-old administration will be adopting a zero-tolerance approach to

having firearms in communities.

“I want us to understand that our island(s) are under constant threat from the importation of small firearms in particular, they are coming in barrels, they are coming in containers, and don’t be fooled, we are probably the last bastion of little or no gun violence in the region,” he told a town hall meeting.

“St. Lucia is rampant with shootings left, right, and centre, we don’t



need to talk about our neighbours to the south, Trinidad, we don’t need to  
*cont’d on pg 13*

## Barbados media under fire regarding coverage of crime

CMC - A junior government minister is pointing an accusing finger at the media in Barbados noting that its coverage of the crime situation in the country is giving a false impression.

“We have a relatively safe place but the conundrum is this, there is a massive disconnect between crime in Barbados and the perception of crime in Barbados. And you know what dictates our perception? What pushes us to have a perception that crime in Barbados is a lot? The media,” said the minister of state in the Office of the Attorney General with responsibility for Crime Prevention, Corey Lane.

Lane said, “crime has been relatively stable over the years” and the perception crime is high is largely due to media reports, even as he acknowledged he was not asking the media to “hide anything.”



Corey Lane

“Crime against tourists are down 142 percent,” he said, telling the audience at a joint meeting of the St. James branches of the ruling Barbados Labour Party (BLP) that at least one radio station will “come and tell you two tourists get shoot today, tomorrow and the next day and you would swear that crime is the biggest thing against tourists”.

Lane, who compared the island’s crime statistics to those in neighbouring islands, said Barbados was among the safest but suggested that media reports had inflated the issue, citing

reports of violent incidents involving students.

“Things does happen in schools all the time, if you report incidents back-to-back your perception is that the schools in chaos but things happen at schools all the time, it’s just how and when and how regularly them report it.”

Last Friday, two 15-year-old secondary school students were involved in an altercation, resulting in one of them nursing multiple stab wounds.

Lane, who is also the chairman of the National Crime Prevention Plan

maintained that he was not prompting journalists to “hide anything” on behalf of his party or the country but urged them to be responsible in their reporting.

He pointed to another island, with a lower population that recorded a higher murder rate than Barbados in 2022 and suggested that the media there were more responsible in its reporting.

“Their media down there tend to understand tourism is important so they got lead stories like ‘Big regatta next week’ in the front of them thing [news]. In Barbados when they reporting ‘Two dead last night’.”

Lane voiced concern about the potential implication that the publishing of such news stories can have on tourists looking for respite from the cold.

Last year, Barbados recorded more than 40 murders surpassing the 32 recorded the previous year.

*cont’d from pg 12*

talk about Barbados or Jamaica,” he said, telling the audience that they should not take safety for granted.

“So, I don’t want us to take our safety for granted, firearms are also seen as sports, there are ranges people will go to shoot the guns on the range and then go home but the idea that we should be walking around with firearms in my view is inimical to our culture, to our way of life,” he added.

Mitchell was at the time respond-

ing to a question from a former police officer who was pleading to have the cost of the firearm licence fee waived.

“I am not a fan of private people holding firearms, and that actually includes ex-police officers, and so to me and I am making this clear and I hope that I can get support from my colleagues, I intend to take a zero-tolerance approach to firearms in our communities,” said Prime Minister Mitchell, who is also the Minister for National Security.

“I accept that because of the na-

ture of the work carried out by police officers there will come a time when they should have an exceptional need to be issued with a firearm, but I will say to you honestly that it will be a hard thing for me to suggest that they don’t pay the licensing fee.

In recent weeks, guns and ammunition were discovered after searches were conducted by customs and police officers at the main St. George’s Port. Last year, the police confiscated several illegal firearms as part of drug bust operations and search warrants.

## Honduran activists demand action after killing of water defenders

Aljazeera - President Xiomara Castro's government must do more to protect those fighting for environmental rights, critics say.

The killing of two Honduran water defenders this month has sparked international outrage, with the United Nations calling for an investigation and locals questioning the government's commitment to protecting environmental activists.

Aly Dominguez, 38, and Jairo Bonilla, 28, were members of the Guapinol water defenders movement, organising to protect their rivers from a controversial open-pit iron oxide mining project in Carlos Escaleras National Park. In recent years, several activists have been killed in unclear circumstances amid community opposition to the mine.

The families of Dominguez and Bonilla say they were killed by unidentified gunmen after weeks of threats related to their activism. Reinaldo Dominguez, Aly's brother, told Al Jazeera that the killing capped off a long process of intimidation.

"We need action here," he said after the funeral last week, which was attended by hundreds of residents. "The public ministry needs to investigate and put arrest warrants out for the armed groups ... They say, 'We



Family members of slain Honduran environmentalists Aly Dominguez and Jairo Bonilla mourn over their coffins [Seth Berry/Al Jazeera]

lament this.' We want action."

Upon taking office a year ago, Honduran President Xiomara Castro promised to undo more than a decade of corruption since the 2009 coup against her husband, former President Manuel Zelaya.

She promised to end violence against land and water defenders, who have been targeted by hit squads linked to corrupt business interests and state security forces. For years, Honduras has been one of the most dangerous places in the world for environmental activists.

Among Castro's first moves as president was

freeing a group of imprisoned Guapinol activists in February 2022. Soon afterwards, her government declared the country "free of open pit mining" and said it would cancel mining permits, though activists say there have been no cancellations since then.

In a statement, the Honduran human rights secretariat condemned the killing of Dominguez and Bonilla and called for a transparent investigation. Representatives for the Castro government either declined Al Jazeera's requests for comment or did not respond to inquiries.

Meanwhile, activists are questioning the state's

commitment to Castro's lofty promises.

"I can't believe everything Castro says," Daniel Marquez, one of the Guapinol environmentalists released last February, told Al Jazeera in an interview last summer. "She said we were going to leave prison, and we did. But she also said she was going to eliminate the mining concessions ... [The government] hasn't done what it promised."

Threats and violence  
Honduran police have said that Dominguez and Bonilla died in a robbery gone wrong, but family members say their motorcycles and personal be-  
*cont'd on pg 15*

*cont'd from pg 14*

longings were not taken. A UN special rapporteur last week called for an independent probe of their deaths, “which must take into account the possibility that they have been retaliated against for their work defending human rights”.

The mining company they resisted, Inversiones Los Pinares, is co-owned by Lenir Perez, one of the most powerful business magnates in the country.

Pinares, which did not respond to Al Jazeera’s requests for comment, has long argued that it practises “environmentally responsible” mining, bringing jobs and development to an impoverished region.

Perez has said in the past that opposition to the iron oxide mine was being driven by left-wing groups financed by actors from outside the re-

gion.

Meanwhile, land and water defenders continue to face threats and violence in Honduras.

In December, activist Mauricio Esquivel, a member of a local farm cooperative that had been occupying a corporate palm plantation, was found dead in the village of Quebrada de Arena, just kilometres from where Dominguez and Bonilla were killed, residents told Al Jazeera.

Esquivel’s killing came after months of threats by a local armed group, according to members of the cooperative who spoke with Al Jazeera. Some said they still had faith in the Castro government but maintained a deep distrust towards police and military forces.

“We can’t go out of the cooperative because of fear that we’ll be killed,” one member told Al Jazeera

on condition of anonymity.

Earlier in December, an Indigenous Lenca leader, Nery Gonzalez, was the victim of an apparent assassination attempt, suffering a bullet wound to the head after organising his community against displacement by wealthy landowners. And in November, police and military forces evicted members of the Afro-Honduran Garifuna community from their ancestral village of Punta Gorda.

According to Esly Banegas, an activist in Tocoa, many areas of land and water across Honduras are under threat from corrupt business interests, and a unified struggle is needed.

“This is about human rights. All life is at risk in Honduras,” Banegas told Al Jazeera. “We’re facing a monster that looks to destroy all of the defences, so that no one opposes these death projects that they’re bringing.”



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## Nations express 'deep concern' at Israeli punitive measure

AP - More than 90 countries have expressed "deep concern" at Israel's punitive measures against the Palestinian people, leadership and civil society following a U.N. request for an advisory opinion by the International Court of Justice on the legality of Israeli policies in the occupied West Bank and east Jerusalem.

In a statement released Monday by the Palestinians, the signatories called for a reversal of the Israeli measures, saying regardless of their position on the General Assembly's resolution, "we reject punitive measures in response to a request for an advisory opinion by the International Court of Justice."

The 193-member General Assembly voted 87-26 with 53 abstentions on Dec. 30 in favour of the resolution which was promoted by the Palestinians and opposed vehemently by Israel. Even though rulings by the International Court of Justice are not legally binding, they can be influential on world opinion.

Israel's new hard-line government responded on Jan. 6, approving steps to penalise the Palestinians in retaliation. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told a meeting of his Cabinet two days later that the measures against the Palestinians were aimed at what he called "an



extreme anti-Israel" step at the United Nations.

The government's Security Cabinet decided to withhold \$39 million from the Palestinian Authority and transferring the funds instead to a compensation program for the families of Israeli victims of Palestinian militant attacks.

It also decided to deduct the amount of revenue Israel typically transfers to the cash-strapped Palestinian Authority by a sum equal to the amount paid last year to families of Palestinian prisoners and those killed in the conflict, including militants implicated in attacks against Israelis. The Palestinian leadership describes the payments as necessary social welfare, while Israel says the so-called Martyrs' Fund incentivizes violence.

The Security Cabinet also targeted Palestinian officials directly, saying it would deny benefits to "VIPs who are leading the political and legal war against Israel."

The first Palestinian affected was Foreign Minister Riad Malki who said in a statement on Jan. 8 that he was returning from the Brazilian president's inauguration when he was informed that Israel rescinded his VIP travel permit, which allows top Palestinian officials to travel more easily in and out of the occupied West Bank than ordinary Palestinians.

The statement released Monday was signed by representatives of Arab nations and the 57-member Organization of Islamic Cooperation and 37 other countries - 27 of them from Europe,

including Germany, France and Italy, as well as Japan, South Korea, Brazil, Mexico and South Africa.

Palestinian U.N. Ambassador Riyad Mansour welcomed the statement of support, telling The Associated Press that "we exercised our democratic rights to go to the General Assembly in a peaceful way, a legal way, and put a question to the ICJ to seek an advisory opinion."

"What is amazing about that statement," he said, is that it was signed by some countries that abstained or voted against the resolution referring the question to the court.

"But to punish people for going to the General Assembly in an adoption of a resolution is something

*cont'd on pg 17*



## Belarus' opposition leader denounces her trial as farce

AP - A trial in absentia opened Tuesday for Belarus' top opposition leader, who denounced the proceedings as a farce and urged the West to bolster support for the country's beleaguered opposition.

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya was the main challenger in the August 2020 presidential election that extended President Alexander Lukashenko's rule and was rejected by the Belarusian opposition and the West as a sham.

Tsikhanouskaya, who left the ex-Soviet nation shortly after the vote under pressure from authorities, is being tried in absentia along with four other leading opposition figures. She is facing charges of high treason, conspiracy to seize power and undermining national security and could face up to 20 years in prison if convicted.

Tsikhanouskaya said that she learned from media reports about the trial, which is being held behind closed doors, adding that she was unable to reach her lawyer appointed by the Be-



*Belarus opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya attends a session at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland Tuesday, Jan. 17, 2023. The annual meeting of the World Economic Forum is taking place in Davos from Jan. 16 until Jan. 20, 2023. (AP Photo/Markus Schreiber)*

larusian authorities.

"It looks like a farce," Tsikhanouskaya told The Associated Press in an interview in Davos, Switzerland, where she is attending a global economic forum. "I will be sentenced to years and years. The judge will give me so many years as he is ordered to do."

In December 2021, Tsikhanouskaya's husband, Siarhei Tsikhanouski, was convicted and sentenced to 18 years in prison on charges of organising mass unrest and inciting hatred, which he rejected. On Monday, the

authorities levelled new accusations against him.

"The lawyer visits him once a week just to check if he's at least alive, because the conditions in prisons are awful," Tsikhanouskaya told the AP. "He was put very often in punishment cells and when you are in prison, you do not have rights at all."

Her husband, a popular video blogger and activist, planned to challenge Lukashenko in the August 2020 vote, but was arrested in May 2020, two days after he declared his candidacy. Tsikhanouskaya, a former English teacher, ran in his place.

Tsikhanouskaya and other opposition activists rejected the official results that handed Lukashenko a sixth term in office as fraudulent. The vote triggered a months-long wave

of unprecedented mass protests, the largest of which saw about 200,000 people taking to the streets of the Belarusian capital, Minsk. Lukashenko's government responded with a violent crackdown on demonstrations, arresting more than 35,000 and brutally beating thousands.

The authorities have continued their repression, and 1,438 people in Belarus are currently in prisons on politically motivated charges, according to human rights groups.

Tsikhanouskaya urged the West to come out with a clear strategy on Belarus and boost support for the country's opposition.

She emphasised that backing the opposition is particularly important as Russia used Belarus' territory to invade Ukraine on Feb. 24 and continues to station its troops and weapons on the Belarusian territory. Tsikhanouskaya noted that opposition activists in Belarus help gather information about Russian troops movements in the country, adding that "we deliver this information to Ukraine."

"I don't want the world to overlook Belarus, to explain once again why Belarus is important, that without a safe, free, democratic Belarus, there will not be stable peace in the region," Tsikhanouskaya said.

**cont'd from pg 16**

else," Mansour said. "That's why they stood with us and opposed this policy of the Israeli government, and they are demanding a reversal of this decision."

He predicted more countries will support the statement when the Security Council holds its monthly meeting on the Middle East focusing on the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict on Jan. 18.

## Novak Djokovic gets warm Australian Open welcome, then wins

By Howard Fendrich

AP - The supportive signs and dozens of Serbian flags and loud chants of Novak Djokovic's nickname filled Rod Laver Arena, providing a warm welcome marking his return to the Australian Open - a tournament he has dominated in the past but one he could not enter a year ago.

Djokovic acknowledged the greeting with a quick wave of his left hand when he stepped out onto the court at 10:30 p.m. Tuesday, then got down to business by playing quite well and only briefly showing a hint of trouble from the balky left hamstring that was heavily taped.

With his parents and brother in the stands at Melbourne Park for the first time since he won his first Grand Slam title there 15 years ago, Djokovic began the first-round match with an ace at 125 mph (201 kph). He held at love there, took control of that set with a 12-point run and was on his way to a 6-3, 6-4, 6-0 victory over 75th-ranked Roberto Carballes Baena that finished after midnight.

"Unbelievable atmosphere. Thank you so much for staying this late, everybody. Also, thank you for giving me such a welcoming and a reception I can only dream of," Djokovic told the crowd in an on-court interview. "I really feel very happy that I'm back in Australia and I'm back here on the court where I had the biggest success in my career."

Djokovic's participation is one of the chief story lines, perhaps the MAIN one, of the first Grand Slam tournament of 2023. That's because Djokovic never got to play a point last season at the site of nine of his major championships, because his visa was blocked and he was deported from Australia after a legal saga tied to his



Novak Djokovic of Serbia gestures to his supporters after defeating Roberto Carballes Baena of Spain in their first round match at the Australian Open tennis championship in Melbourne, Australia, Wednesday, Jan. 18, 2023. (AP Photo/Aaron Favila)

lack of any vaccination for COVID-19.

He never did get the shots and also missed the U.S. Open because of it. But Australia's government has since relaxed coronavirus-related restrictions, allowing Djokovic to come to the country, and also waived a rule that could have stopped him from getting in for three years following a visa revocation. He has insisted that the whole episode in January 2022 deeply affected him but that he does not hold a grudge; there certainly did not seem to be any hard feelings toward him Tuesday.

Spectators who politely applauded Carballes Baena when he entered the stadium stood and roared for the 35-year-old Djokovic. A sing-song, soccer-style chant of "Olé, olé, olé, olé!" followed by the two-syllable moniker "Nole!" (pronounced NO-leh) echoed under the arena's closed retractable roof, and would be repeated over and over: during the warmup period; when Djokovic switched sides

of the net after the first game; when he was in the midst of climbing out of a love-40 hole in the first set (the only three break points he would face all night); when he broke to lead 4-3 in the second; etc., etc., etc. There were more of those cheers at the end, and Djokovic smiled broadly.

Grading his play, Djokovic said he found he was "kind of going up and down" in the second set, but didn't give his opponent "too much chance to breathe" in the third. As for his hamstring, Djokovic said he was apprehensive about it going into the match, but afterward this was his assessment: "The leg is good. It's not ideal, but it's getting there."

This was not necessarily Djokovic at his absolute best, and he appeared to show some frustration early on when he kept glaring and muttering in the direction of coach Goran Ivanisevic and the rest of his entourage in the stands. But Djokovic did not neces-

*cont'd on pg 19*

## Belgium imposes tougher sanctions in fan violence crackdown

By Samuel Petrequin

AP - More than 1,800 stadium bans were imposed in Belgium during the 2021-22 soccer season along with larger fines as authorities tried to crack down on fan violence.

The sanctions “are a clear signal that bad behaviour has no place in our soccer stadiums,” Interior Minister Annelies Verlinden said Tuesday.

The sanctions were imposed by a specialised cell at the interior ministry and form part of a clampdown following repeated incidents.

According to the ministry’s figures, the number of citations submitted by police during the 2021-22 season was not significantly higher than in 2018-2019 prior to the coronavirus outbreak, but the penalties were tougher. During the 2021-22 season, stadium bans for individual fans added up to a total of 22,037 months, almost double the 2018-2019 total of 11,229 months, the ministry said.

The total amount of fines also increased significantly, from 540,525 euros (\$585,000) to 910,250 euros



*A steward removes a flare which was thrown onto the pitch at the end of the first leg quarterfinal Europa League soccer match between Club Brugge and FC Dnipro Dnipropetrovsk at Jan Breydel stadium in Bruges, Belgium, Thursday April 16, 2015. More than 1,800 stadium bans and fines above 900,000 euros (\$974,000) have been imposed on hooligans who committed violence during the 2021-22 season in Belgium, local enforcement authorities said on Tuesday, Jan. 17, 2023. (AP Photo/Geert Vanden Wijngaert, File)*

(\$985,000).

Fan violence in Belgian stadiums has continued in recent months. In November, Verlinden met with league and club officials to present them with details of a draft law aimed at reducing incidents.

The meeting took place shortly after a top-tier league game between Charleroi and Mechelen in November was abandoned after Charleroi fans threw flares onto the field. In October, the “Classico” match between Standard Liege and

Anderlecht was also marred by fan disorder and had to be abandoned after 63 minutes.

The Belgian government wants to tighten access to stadiums to keep violent individuals away. In addition, under a new law which needs to be approved by the federal parliament, clubs will be punished more severely if, for instance, they don’t comply with regulations on ticket sales or if they fail to take sufficient precautions to ban the use of flares.

Offences such as physical violence, racism or the use of fireworks would be punishable by stadium bans of up to 10 years, instead of the current five.

And to make sure individuals subject to bans are not allowed at venues, stewards and agents working for private security companies will be able to check that a fan’s identity matches the name on the ticket.

The interior ministry said it started this season an inspection of stadiums to check the efficiency of video surveillance systems installed by professional soccer clubs.

“All 30 professional clubs were audited within three months,” the ministry said. “Deficiencies were found at eight clubs.”

*cont’d from pg 18*

sarily need to be at his absolute best. He certainly produced strong enough tennis to take the initial step toward what he hopes will be a 22nd Grand Slam title to tie rival Rafael Nadal’s record for the most in tennis history by a man.

Djokovic, who has spent more weeks at No. 1 in the ATP rankings than anyone, also has a chance to return to that spot after the upcoming two weeks; the person presently occupying that perch, Carlos Alcaraz, is sitting out the Australian Open with a leg injury.

## French soccer president targeted by sexual harassment probe

AP - French soccer federation president Noël Le Graët is under investigation for “sexual harassment” and “moral harassment,” the Paris prosecutor’s office said Tuesday.

In a message to The Associated Press, the prosecutor’s office said the investigation was opened Monday following a report by the General Inspectorate of Education, Sport and Research. It will be carried out by a special police unit dedicated to crimes against individuals.

The investigation was launched after sports agent Sonia Soudid accused Le Graët of improper conduct over several years, saying he only was interested in her sexually.

Soudid said in an interview with L’Equipe sports daily that Le Graët repeatedly tried to approach her from 2013-17.

The 81-year-old Le Graët agreed last week to step back from his duties as president of the federation following an emergency executive committee meeting into his behaviour.

Le Graët has faced several claims of sexual harassment and the soccer federation is the target of an investigation ordered by French Sports Minister Amélie Oudéa-Castéra.

Le Graët, who has also been criticised this month for a perceived disrespect toward France soccer great Zinedine Zidane, has agreed to step away from his role until the audit’s findings have been fully reviewed by the executive committee, likely by the end of January. Until then, he is being replaced in an interim role by federation vice president Philippe Diallo.

Oudéa-Castéra ordered an investigation into the federation in September after the body said it would



*French Football Federation (FFF) president Noel Le Graet attends a training session at the Jassim Bin Hamad stadium in Doha, Qatar, on Nov. 19, 2022. The Paris prosecutor’s office says it has opened an investigation into “sexual harassment” and “moral harassment” targeting French soccer federation president Noel Le Graet. The Paris prosecutor’s office says in a message to The Associated Press that the investigation was opened following a report by the General Inspectorate of Education, Sport and Research. (AP Photo/Christophe Ena, File)*

file a defamation lawsuit against So Foot magazine, which reported that Le Graët allegedly harassed several female employees.

The French magazine published a six-page investigation quoting anonymous former and current employees, and inappropriate text messages that Le Graët allegedly sent to the women.

Le Graët was re-elected to a four-year term last March. He is currently a candidate for another four-year term on the FIFA Council, the international soccer body’s decision-making committee.

Soudid, who said she first met Le Graët in 2013, told L’Equipe that he

texted her to ask her out or tell her he missed her. Soudid said he never went too far verbally but made clear she should have sex with him to move her ideas forward.

“He never looked at me like an agent but like a piece of candy,” Soudid said.

Soudid said she was hurt by Le Graët’s attitude and that she thought about ending her career as an agent. Asked whether Le Graët helped her professionally at some point, Soudid said he helped her find the phone number of coach Corinne Diacre and that he tried to help her with business class plane tickets for France player Amandine Henry.

## After playoff dud, Brady faces choice of whether to continue

By Rob Maaddi

AP - If Tom Brady retires in the offseason, he'll walk away following one of the worst playoff games of his career.

The seven-time Super Bowl champion had a tough night against Micah Parsons and the Dallas Cowboys, tossing his first red-zone interception with the Buccaneers in a 31-14 loss that ended Tampa Bay's up-and-down season Monday night.

Brady won't be returning home to the Bay Area for a rematch against Brock Purdy and the San Francisco 49ers in the NFC divisional round. He may be going home for good, however.

The 45-year-old, five-time Super Bowl MVP already retired once after last season only to return 40 days later. He said he'll take more time to make his decision this time around.

"It'll be one day at a time, truly," Brady said.

Brady waved his cap to the crowd as he jogged off the field for perhaps the final time and stopped to kiss his parents before heading into the tunnel.

Before leaving the podium, Brady thanked reporters, saying: "Hopefully, you know, I love this organisation. It's a great place to be and thank you everybody for welcoming



Tampa Bay Buccaneers quarterback Tom Brady (12) walks on the sidelines during the second half of an NFL wild-card football game against the Dallas Cowboys, Monday, Jan. 16, 2023, in Tampa, Fla. (AP Photo/Chris O'Meara)

me. ... Very grateful for the respect and hopefully I gave the same thing back to you guys."

Brady had been 7-0 against Dallas before this game, including a 19-3 road win in Week 1.

Though he was only sacked twice, the Cowboys pressured him into several throwaways and forced a bunch of ill-advised passes.

He threw a career-most 66 passes, completing 35 of them for 351 yards, two TDs and one interception. Brady had 65 attempts for New England against San Francisco on Dec. 16, 2012.

After the Buccaneers

went three-and-out on their first two possessions, Brady led a long drive before things fell apart.

On first down from the Cowboys 22, Brady rolled to his right and had open field in front of him but threw incomplete across his body into quadruple coverage in the left corner of the end zone. A few plays later from the Cowboys 5, Brady threw the ball up for grabs in the back of the end zone where the closest player was Cowboys safety Jayron Kearse, who made the pick.

"Not the way we wanted to end it but we didn't deserve it," Brady said. "Give them credit. They

played a good game, made a lot more plays than we did."

Brady hadn't been shut out in the first half of a playoff game since his first one in 2001, the Tuck Rule game on Jan. 19, 2002. The Patriots rallied to beat the Raiders in that game.

Brady and the Bucs (8-10) had no chance for a comeback against Dallas (13-5). Parsons and Co. dominated Brady from start to finish.

"It was typical of the way we played all year, inefficient in the pass game, not very good in the run game, so it's hard to beat good teams like that,"

*cont'd on pg 22*

# Sports News



## New Generation Slam, Raeburn Generators United record wins in Second Division basketball

New Generation Slam and Raeburn Generators United recorded wins in Zone 1 of the Antigua and Barbuda Basketball Association's (ABBA) Second Division at the JSC Sports Complex on Monday night.

New Generation Slam prevailed 83 - 75 against Old Road Daggers in the first game of the double header.

Anjis Anthony recorded 21 points, 16 rebounds and 8 assists for New Generation Slam.

Jahmarie Hastings sank 17 points with 17 rebounds; Kim Casey pro-

duced 15 points, eight rebounds, seven assists and six steals; Keaddy Martin secured 14 points and John Rolland Jr. scored 12 points for the winners.

Ariel Quallis shot a game-high of 30 points, grabbed 15 rebounds and 7 steals for Old Road Daggers.

He was supported by Ezekiel Francis, who scored 18 points and snapped up 16 rebounds along with Victor Osbourne's contribution of 16 points.

Braulio Estrada scored 20 points and snapped up

12 rebounds to lead Raeburn Generators United to their 72 - 53 victory over Cutie's Ovals Superiors.

Jesus Lopez contributed 18 points with 8 rebounds and 7 assists, while Kwame Huntley converted 15 points, 11 rebounds and 7 steals for Raeburn Generators United.

Michael Jeffers scored 18 points with 20 rebounds, Daniel Thomas sank 11 points and Shamori Bascus converted 10 points and snatched 7 rebounds for Cutie's Ovals Superiors.

Twenty-four hours ear-

lier, Wadadli Elites1, Galaxia Bar Spanish Heat and Flyers2 also recorded wins at the same venue.

Unbeaten Wadadli Elites1 defeated Rebels 87 - 69 in a Zone I affair.

Tequan Broodie scored 25 points and snapped up 11 rebounds, Te-Ran Zachariah scored 15 points while Rhonde Davis and Lopez Adams each contributed 13 points to the Wadadli Elites1.

Zuri Nesbitt scored 16 points and Kirwan Peterson sank 12 points for the Rebels.

Spanish Heat prevailed 74 - 63 against Cuties Ovals Young Guns in a Zone 2 match-up.

Jesus Emmanuel converted 26 points and snatched 12 rebounds while Steven Matthew sank 16 points for Spanish Heat.

De-Lornge Jules scored 16 points and Baldwin Anthony chipped in with 10 points for Young Guns.

Flyers2 romped to an 89 - 34 victory over Wadadli Elites2 in another Zone 2 affair.

T-Shawn Lewis scored 27 points, Andre Edwards sank 14 points and Adrian Carnegie converted 12 points for Flyers2.

*cont'd from pg 21*

Brady said.

The Bucs finally found the end zone when Brady connected with Julio Jones on a 30-yard TD pass right before the end of the third quarter. But Tampa's defence gave a TD right back and the Bucs couldn't score after reaching the Cowboys 2 on their next drive.

Brady's worst playoff loss was 33-14 to the Baltimore Ravens on Jan. 10, 2010. This one came close.

It was a tumultuous season personally for Brady. His marriage to Gisele Bündchen ended when they announced in October that their divorce was finalised. He had the first losing season of his 23-year career, though the Buccaneers won the woeful NFC South and earned the No. 4 seed.

Brady is set to become a free agent, so he could choose to continue his un-

precedented career with another team. There will be plenty of interest in a player who turns 46 in training camp next season.

The Buccaneers want him back if he continues to play. Linebacker Lavonte David said he'll wait a few weeks before recruiting him.

Brady showed he has plenty left in the regular season despite playing behind an injury-depleted offensive line and without star tight end Rob Gronkowski, who retired in the offseason. He broke his own NFL record for completions in a single season with 490, led the NFC with 4,694 yards and had 25 touchdowns with nine interceptions.

Brady owns nearly every NFL passing record, has won more championships than any player in the sport and is destined for the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Not bad for a sixth-round draft pick.

## Empire beats Bethesda to book semi-final berth in ABCA 10 Splash

Unbeaten Empire Nation romped to an emphatic 40-run victory over Caribbean Union Bank (CUB) Bethesda Golden Eagles in a rain affected match to book their spot into the semifinals of the Antigua and Barbuda Cricket Association's (ABCA) 10 Splash on Monday, 16th January.

With the two top teams in each group qualifying for the semifinals, Empire Nation secured their fourth win in five matches to end the preliminaries as the unbeaten Zone B winners, cementing their place in the last four knockout round.

In a match already reduced to seven overs due to rain, Bethesda Golden Eagles, who were chasing a victory target of 82 runs, made it to 41 for 1 in four overs when rain brought a premature end to the encounter.

Opener, Shacoy Floyd, was unbeaten on 25 off 13 balls with 2 fours and 2 sixes while captain Gavin Tonge, who opened the

innings, made 10 for the Golden Eagles.

Empire Nation, who were sent into bat after losing the toss, raced to 81 for 2 off their seven overs.

Captain Kenrick Scott slammed an unbeaten 35 off 19 balls with 4 sixes.

Opener, Tyrone Williams Jr., struck 25 off 15 balls with 3 fours and a six.

All Saints Pythons or Jennings Tigers each have the opportunity to capture the vacant semifinal spot in Zone B Empire Nation should they emerge the runner up behind Empire Nation. Jennings Tigers kept their semifinal hope alive by pulling off a 20-run victory over Combined Schools in their final preliminary round match which was affected by rain on Monday.

In a match reduced to seven overs due to rain, Jennings Tigers made 78 for 3 after winning the toss and electing to bat.

Openers Elijah Peters struck 23 and D'Ahri Francis got 20 during a 48-run



Empire Nation's skipper, Kenrick Scott (left) accepts the Man of the Match award from President of the Antigua and Barbuda Cricket Association, Leon "Kuma" Rodney following the match against Caribbean Union Bank Bethesda Golden Eagles in the ABCA 10 Splash at the Sir Vivian Richards Cricket Stadium on Monday, 16th January, 2023. (Photo: ABCA)

first wicket partnership.

Jedidiah Martin made 16 not out while Xaveek Toppin captured 2 wickets for 9 runs.

In reply, Combined Schools were restricted to 58 for 4 off their 7 overs with Paul Miller picking up 2 wickets for 6 runs.

Opener Melique Jacobs slammed 31 off 13 balls with 3 sixes and 2 fours.

Fellow opener, George Elvin and Captain Toppin

each contributed 10 runs.

The win lifted Jennings into second place with 14 points, but the Tigers can be displaced by All Saints Pythons if they secure a victory in their final preliminary match against Freetown and a superior net run rate.

PIC Insurance Liberta Black Hawks and Pigotts Crushers have already advanced to the semi-finals as the two qualifiers from Zone A.

*cont'd from pg 24*

Benjamin said.

"We worked hard, everybody had to double up and I want to say congratulations to all the coaches, the person who is responsible for the bus system to transport the players, Mr (Stanfield) "Shipwreck" Joseph, the Deputy Director, Mr Evans "Jawakie" Jones, and the Director, Mrs Heather Daley for doing a wonderful job.

"Now we turn our attention to the primary school football, and that will be kicking off on the 10th of February."

## “Porridge” apologises to PMS’ winning girls football team

Coordinator of the Ministry of Sports’ Inter-Schools Football Programme, Rohan “Porridge” Benjamin, has issued an apology to Principal Colin Greene, the school’s Under-20 Girls football team and the staff of the Princess Margaret School (PMS).

Benjamin’s apology was issued after a representative of the Ministry of Sports failed to show up to the trophy presentation ceremony awarding the PMS Under-20 Girls football team for winning the knockout title at the King George V Grounds on Thursday, 12th January.

Princess Margaret School hammered the Antigua Girls High School (AGHS) 9 - 0 in the final to capture the Knockout title and add to their victory in the Under-20 Girls’ league which they completed undefeated.

To everyone’s surprise and dismay, however, no official from the Ministry of Sports attended the ceremony to present the trophy at the end of the game.

In his apology, Benjamin said the unfortunate incident was the result of miscommunication with



Coach Divikka Tittle, wearing long grey pants, assembles the Princess Margaret School’s team shortly after defeating AGHS to win the Girls Knockout Final at the King George V Grounds on Thursday, 12th January. (Photo: Elwin Francis)

the Ministry of Sports official who was designated to make the trophy presentation to PMS.

Benjamin, who is also the coach of the Antigua and Barbuda Institute of Continuing Education’s (ABICE) Senior Boys, said he was unable to attend the presentation last Thursday because he had to prepare his team for the Under-20 Boys’ League final the following day.

“I just want to apologise for what happened. I couldn’t be there because I had to prepare the ABICE team for the Senior Boys’ final, but someone else was

supposed to do the business; it never got done,” Benjamin said.

“It’s not really totally their fault. We got it totally mixed up with the people who are really responsible for the trophies and medals and so on, but what we will do, we will ask them (PMS) to prepare a day and the Ministry of Sports, obviously, will have to go there and make the presentation officially.”

The 2022/23 Ministry of Sports Secondary Schools’ Football League came to an end with ABICE defeating All Saints Secondary in the final to win the Under-20

Boys’ League at the ABFA Technical Center on Friday, 13th January.

Benjamin expressed gratitude to all his colleagues for their support through a challenging 2022/23 Secondary Schools Football season due to the lack of key infrastructures at the Ministry of Sports’ headquarters.

“I would say that we had some challenges; we had to work through them. At our workplace we don’t have all the things that we would have needed - the internet and telephone and so on - but we never gave up,”

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