

MARINAS ACROSS ANTIGUA ENJOYING 'BUMPER SEASON'



An aerial view of the Falmouth Harbour Marina

Marinas across Antigua enjoying 'bumper season'

The several marinas that operate in Antigua are all reporting brisk business at the start of the 2023-2024 winter season.

Minister of Tourism Charles Fernandez has reported to the Cabinet that all the marinas across Antigua are 'full to the brim.' He said superyachts are in plentiful supply and are purchasing goods and services from the marinas.

The Parliamentary Representative for St. Paul, Foreign Affairs Minister E.P. Chet Greene has, however, cautioned that water supply though not now a challenge, may be problematic in the dry months ahead.

It was noted that Tropical Storm

Phillipe and Hurricane Tammy brought significant rainfall that inundated Potworks Dam and other water catchment systems; APUA Water Division is now capable of producing more than seven-and-a-half million gallons of reverse osmosis water daily, and four million gallons of potable water from dams and reservoirs.

Minister of Public Utilities, Melford Nicholas, gave Cabinet the assurance that more reverse osmosis plants will be added in the coming months and that the stored water supplies are likely to last until Easter.

Additionally, the Minister advised that the plant at Pigeon Point can also be tasked to provide suffi-

cient water to the vessels moored in Falmouth Harbour and Nelson's Dockyard.

There are 7 reverse osmosis plants in Antigua while there is 1 in Barbuda; there are two fresh water treatment plants in Antigua that prepare potable water from stored sources.

The Government of Antigua and Barbuda has spent over \$100 million to purchase reverse osmosis plants and to improve the water supply in the country.

More money will be invested to ensure that sufficient water is provided to homes, hotels, institutions, and businesses in the New Year.



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PM Browne says responding to climate change is costly

Antigua and Barbuda's Prime Minister Gaston Browne says his country is aware that responding to the effects of climate change comes with a price, and that developing countries lack the financial resources to adapt and mitigate against climate change.

"Our challenges become even more daunting, with an unresponsive international financial architecture, that fails to prioritize concessional funding to assist SIDS (Small Island Developing States) to rebuild in the aftermath of these climate-related incidents or shocks," Browne told the

three-day 114th Session of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) Council.

It is being held under the "Climate Impact on Human Mobility: A Global Call for Solutions" and Browne in a video presentation, said consequently, SIDS have had to borrow repeatedly to repair damaged infrastructure and restore economic losses.

"We do this repeatedly to keep our countries viable, and to avert the possibility of our people becoming climate migrants or refugees. SIDS suffer the greatest financial burden to climate



Prime Minister Gaston Browne

change on a per capita basis, despite the fact that they contribute the least CO2 emissions globally, a mere 0.5 percent," he told the Council.

"They are the greatest victims, not only because of unattended loss and damage to lives and livelihoods but also because the very existence of these countries is fatally endangered," Browne said, questioning "why should citizens and residents of large polluting countries live in luxury while our peoples live in climate misery?"

The Prime Minister said he has a particular objective at the upcoming United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28) to be held in Dubai from November 30 to December 12, to focus on the Loss and Damage Fund.

Browne said he had championed the fund during Antigua and Barbuda's chairmanship of the Alliance of Small Islands States (AOSIS) last year, recalling that at COP27, the world's greatest polluters agreed that such a fund was important and decided to establish a transitional committee to make recommendations for consideration at COP28.

"As we approach COP28, we must insist that the loss and damage fund be made operational without any further delays. The fund must provide adequate financing to help SIDS withstand the seas as they rise, the winds as they increase in strength; and resources to rebuild when all our efforts to build resilience against climatic events fail." (CMC).

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Local News



Trade Minister welcomes expanded regional trade through visit by TTMA

Antigua and Barbuda's Trade Minister, E.P. Chet Greene has welcomed the visit by a team from the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturer's Association (TTMA) as it signals the importance of regional trade within the global economy.

Greene was at the time speaking at a seminar organized by the Antigua and Barbuda Chamber of Commerce and Industry to facilitate greater person-to-person contact between the TTMA team and local business people.

"This also signals that economic integration under CSME-CARICOM Single Market and Economy continues to facilitate the free movement of goods and services, among member countries, providing opportunities for

our citizens while fostering economic growth and development. This corporation will benefit our citizens in the form of reduced tariffs and trade barriers within the community," he noted.

According to Greene trade has been seen as the engine of economic growth that creates jobs, reduces poverty, and increases economic opportunity for any country; as trade liberalization increases market access, by lowering trade barriers and reducing discrimination between trading partners.

"As such, this initiative brings together a collaboration between the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association and the Antigua and Barbuda Chamber of Commerce in order to maximize trade and investment op-



Trade Minister, E.P. Chet Greene opportunities. This event will also assist in driving the local manufacturing *cont'd on pg 5*

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HC Karen Mae-Hill elected as President of BIE sub-committee

Antigua and Barbuda’s High Commissioner in London, Karen-Mae Hill has been elected as President of the Administration and Budget Finance Committee of the Bureau International des Expositions (BIE) which held its 173rd General Assembly on Tuesday in Paris, France.

The BIE is the Intergovernmental Organisation overseeing and regulating all international exhibitions that last more than three weeks and are non-commercial (“Expos”). Today, 4 types of Expos are organized under its auspices: World Expos, Specialized Expos, Horticultural Expos, and the Triennale di Milano.

Delegates representing the 179 Member States of the BIE attended the Assembly which included progress reports on upcoming Expos, pre-



Karen-Mae Hill

sentations from candidates for World Expo 2030 and culminated in the overwhelming election of Saudi Arabia as the 2030 host.

The Administration and Budget Commission, which HC Hill now heads, is one of four of the Bureau’s main committees and comprises rep-

resentatives from nine Member States including Andorra, Angola, Bangladesh, Cyprus, France, Gabon, Switzerland, and Turkmenistan.

The Commission’s main functions are to prepare the BIE’s annual budget and guarantee compliance with the budget. The President of each commission is elected for two years from among the delegates of the Member States and he or she is eligible for a second period of two years, without interruption.

The Presidents of the committees are also the Vice-Presidents of the General Assembly of the BIE. The other three committees are the Executive Committee, the Rules Committee, and the Information and Communication Committee. High Commissioner Hill also completed one term on the Information and Communication Committee.

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sector and associations to vibrancy,” he added.

The trade minister sees the collaboration between TTMA and the Antigua and Barbuda Chamber of Commerce as making it easier for local manufacturers and local businesses to network and trade and remain sustainable in the global market.

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Ambassador Black Layne commits to fostering a sustainable future

Ambassador Diann Black Layne, serving as the Director of the Antigua Barbuda Department of Environment, showcased her leadership and commitment to fostering a sustainable future, by actively participating in a conference focused on redesigning international financial infrastructure for the advancement of the green economy.

The session took place in Dubai, ahead of the opening of COP28 on November 30th, 2023. The initiative, which saw the convergence of distinguished leaders and experts in environmental and financial sectors, focused on innovating and reshaping the global financial framework to support and accelerate the

transition towards a more sustainable and eco-friendly economy.

Ambassador Layne, known for her unwavering dedication to environmental causes and her influential role in driving meaningful change, emphasized the importance of collaborative efforts in reimagining financial structures that prioritize environmental sustainability.

Her insightful contributions during the regional cooperation sessions underscored her vision for an inclusive and environmentally conscious financial ecosystem, demonstrating her commitment to finding viable solutions that align with global environmental goals.



Ambassador Layne's proactive involvement in this initiative signifies a pivotal step forward in the pursuit of a more environmentally sustainable global economy.

Her leadership continues to inspire and drive positive change, fostering a hopeful vision for a greener and more prosperous future for generations to come.

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ABHTA in line for a prestigious award

The Antigua and Barbuda Hotels and Tourist Association (ABHTA) says it is pleased about its nomination as one of the top three finalists in the Caribbean Hospitality Industry Exchange Forum (CHIEF), under the category People Development, hosted by the Caribbean Hotels and Tourism Association (CHTA).

In a media statement, the ABHTA is honored to be acknowledged as the nomination recognizes the ABHTA's Unveiling Hospitality Series within the People Development category. It shares the spotlight with esteemed counterparts Half Moon, Jamaica, and Mount Cinnamon Resort & Beach Club, Grenada.

The CHIEF Awards celebrate and commend best practices and exemplary initiatives within the Caribbean hospitality industry. This year's forum, taking place in Miami from November 29 to December 1, will feature dynamic discussions spanning several days, focusing on topics crucial to the growth and advancement of the industry.

Executive Director of the ABHTA, Patrice Simon, has been invited to participate as a panelist in the discussion titled "Building the Future Workforce: Strategies for Attracting, Engaging, and Retaining Top-Tier Tourism Professionals."

Craig Marshall, Chairman of the ABHTA, expressed pride in the Association's nomination, stating, "It is already an honor to be recognized as a finalist in this category. The work of the Association over the past four months, following our Annual General Meeting, has been squarely focused on people development and building awareness of the diverse roles within the industry. Tourism is the lifeblood of the twin-island state, and we want the people of Antigua and Barbuda to feel the vibrancy of the sector and get excited about all the possibilities available in Tourism

and Hospitality."

Marshall added, "We have a lot of work to do to reignite the fire in the sector, but we are here and committed to working with our partners to put the plans and programs in place to see it happen."

Expressing gratitude for the nomination, Simon said, "Preparing this series to be featured every week was indeed a

labor of love for the team. We've met so many exciting individuals with a depth of knowledge and love for the industry. It has been a delight to see them gain the much-needed recognition for their years of service, and we hope that continuing with this series will inspire the next generation of hospitality professionals."

Simon also extended her gratitude to the *cont'd on pg 8*

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Scores attend free health fair to update health status

Scores of people turned up on Wednesday for a health fair organized by MOS Medical Services in collaboration with several organizations and other health professionals.

The driving force behind the event is Dr. Monica Osborne-Stevens, who operates MOS Medical Services and is a family medicine and diabetes specialist. She told Point Express this year's event is

the second installment of the health fair. She said the inaugural event held last year attracted 125 persons, and the aim this year was to reach 200 persons.

"We believe here at MOS that 'an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure' and we also believe that if you know your status you can do something about it. This is why we want persons to come out to get their blood



Dr. Monica Osborne-Stevens pressure, blood glucose, blood cholesterol checked as well as eye exams and prostate checks done," she stated.

There were also breast examinations and Body Mass Index (BMI) tests done on-site. "We are covering an array of health screenings and it's all for free because this is our way of giving back to the community. People are always looking to the government to provide services, but the government cannot do



it all, and here is where our health fair comes in," Stevens remarked.

Dr. Osborne-Stevens said MOS partnered with several organizations to make the health fair a success. These include the Antigua and Barbuda Diabetes Association, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, Dr. Diaz, Dr. Garraway, two nutritionists, as well as patients of MOS. The eye examinations were done by Dr. Diaz and Dr. Janil Allen while Chase Supermarket provided lunch for the 25 volunteers assisting with the health fair. There was a total of 150 participants this year, 50 short of the 200-person target.



cont'd from pg 7

media and hospitality partners, including The Antigua and Barbuda Workers Union, The Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority, The Ministry of Tourism, Civil Aviation, Transportation, and Investment, the Hospi-

tality Training Institute, and Global Ports Holding. She also recognized the contribution of partners on the project, Love Media and GProductions.

Winners of the CHIEF Awards will be announced on Friday, December 1.

The home and business lighting competition returns for Christmas 2023

The Department of Creative Industries has announced that the Christmas Home and Business Lighting Competition will take place this year.

The Department of Creative Industries says the competition is designed to evoke the spirit of the season through the creative and illuminating displays of our 2023 Christmas Home and Business Lighting competitors, thus, it is encouraging all interested homeowners to register for this competition on or before Friday 8th December 2023.

Registration Forms are available Mondays to Fridays, 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the Department of Creative Industries Headquarters on Old Parham Road, upstairs INET, or the National Festivals Office, 1st Floor, Cecil George-John Building, Redcliffe Street and Corn Alley.

Pre-judging will commence on December 19 and end on December 22, 2023, while the final displays will be judged on December 28 and 29, 2023. Winners will be announced via Good Morning Antigua Barbuda on Friday 5th January 2024.

Home entries will be categorized and judged according to the zones – East, West, North, and South. All Home participants will receive a 100% waiver on electricity service for December 2023, Duty-Free concessions on Christmas Lights and or Decorations, and a Cash component for the top three winners in each zone as outlined below.

- First Place - \$ 3,000.00 XCD
 - Second Place - \$ 2,000.00 XCD
 - Third Place - \$ 1,000.00 XCD
- Business entries will receive a 50%

waiver on electricity service for December 2023, DutyFree concessions on Christmas Lights and or Decorations, and a Cash component for the

top three winners as outlined below.

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IDB Invest supports Four Seasons Resort in the Dominican Republic

IDB Invest has partnered with Cisneros Real Estate to provide \$134.6 million in financing to Four Seasons Resort and Residences which is part of Tropicalia, a sustainable mixed-use resort under development in the Dominican Republic.

The financing consists of \$49 million from IDB Invest complemented by \$85.6 million mobilised from local banks and international financial institutions.

The mixed-use tourism complex, which blends multiple uses such as commercial and cultural in one space, and totalling \$212.4 million, is expected to create more than 2,000 jobs during construction, 400 jobs during operations and an inclusive supply chain that will connect with dozens of local entrepreneurs and farmers.

Up to 70 per cent of produce and services will be sourced in the country, with more than a third coming from local micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, contributing to a circular economy and the region's prosperity.

Tropicalia is located in the municipality of Miches, an emerging beach desti-



nation distinguished by its unique ecological features on the southern shores of the Samaná Bay, just 80 kilometres (50 miles) west of Punta Cana.

The resort, to be operated by Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts, will include a 95-room hotel, 25-branded private residences and a host of related amenities.

“We believe this sustainable mixed-use resort reflects a unique value proposition for the expansion of responsible low-density tourism in the Dominican Republic. Our aspiration is that its high development standards anchored by strong sustainability principles could have a demonstrative effect in serving as a model for responsible

tourism development in the Caribbean and beyond,” said James Scriven, CEO of IDB Invest.

Tropicalia builds upon the legacy of Cisneros' long-term commitment and development approach, supporting the socioeconomic sustainability of the community of Miches and surrounding region. “Over the past 15 years, Fundación Tropicalia has sponsored a broad range of regional programs that promote education, gender equality, economic participation, cultural identity and environmental awareness,” Adriana Cisneros, CEO of Cisneros said. “One of our flagship programs “Soy niña, soy importante,” strives to empower young at-risk girls

by providing the tools to stave off early pregnancy, gender-based violence and low self-esteem, fomenting gender equality and inclusion from an early age in the region.”

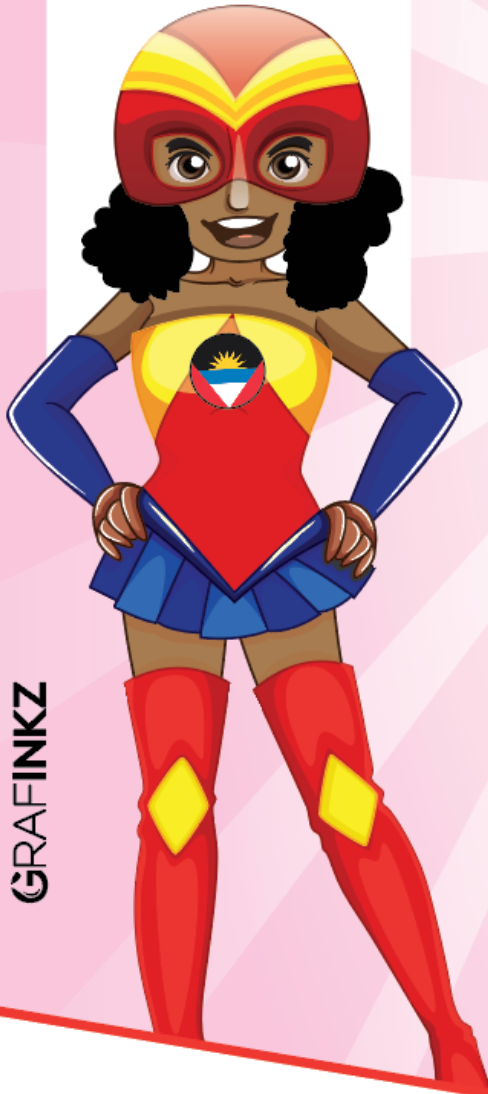
As part of its development impact mandate, IDB Invest is providing technical assistance to this program to increase women's participation in economic activities and expand their access to the labour market.

The operation is expected to contribute to the following United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8), Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12) and Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17).

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Caribbean region to get only temporary reprieve from heat stress

CMC - Caribbean weather forecasters began a two-day meeting in Dominica on Wednesday, amid the warning that while the region is beginning to feel some reprieve from the unusually hot weather over the last few months, the heat will be back within the next three months.

Climatologist at the Barbados-based Caribbean Institute for Meteorology and Hydrology (CIMH), Dr Cédric Van Meerbeeck, noted that the Caribbean is accustomed to heat, but warned at the 2023 to 2024 Dry Season Caribbean Climate Outlook Forum (CariCOF) that the higher temperatures are negatively impacting residents of the region.

“Cyclones and heat are hazards that we feel, that we have felt or that we know about. Now, heat, we also understand, is not just a normal thing in the Caribbean, it actually negatively affects us,” he told delegates.

“So it’s time to stop thinking that the only thing about our climate that affects us is rain, flooding and hurricanes,” he said, adding “we know that there are other things that are looming and that have started affecting us.

“Now who cares about sargassum? Who has to deal with Sargassum, right?” he said in highlighting the point, calling attention to the seaweed that is a major problem on some Caribbean beaches, affecting tourism, fisheries and recreation.

“There’s also seasonality of Sargassum bleaching in the Caribbean, but that only started in 2011; there are other hazards that we also need to look at.”

Van Meerbeeck said that to sum up climatological conditions in the region over the last few months, he would say, “recently it was hot.

“I don’t think there’s anybody



doubting that anymore,” he said, noting the accuracy of the forecast issued at the wet season CariCOF, in May, which coincides with the hurricane season.

In May, CIMH predicted 17 named storms, seven of which were likely to become hurricanes with four of them being major storms this year.

However, Van Meerbeeck said then that the “boxing game” between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans as well as Saharan dust over the Atlantic would determine the level of tropical cyclone activity.

He said on Wednesday that there were more tropical cyclones this season than usual.

“But we were fortunate enough this year that most of them avoided the islands. We know that that’s not always the case.

“But you also know that it takes just one,” he said, speaking in a country where five years earlier, Hurricane Maria destroyed 90 per cent of the housing stock and left loss and damage amounting to 226 per cent of the island’s gross domestic product (GDP).

“We are out of the hurricane season officially at the end of this month. But that doesn’t mean that there can’t

be any impacting hurricane or tropical cyclone,” Van Meerbeeck said, adding that if Caribbean people did not think about the heat until last year, they certainly did so this year.

The climatologist noted that as the dry season progresses, rainfall decreases but added that no heat waves are expected over the next three months.

“But lo and behold, if you look at the second part of the dry season, heat will return. It will return. Again, it will return,” Van Meerbeeck said.

He emphasised that the heat will not return merely because the region would not be yet into the wet or hurricane season, adding that for some Caribbean countries, such as in Belize, the driest part of the year is also the hottest.

Van Meerbeeck said that in some parts of the region, there will be less water than is usually the case for that time of year, including in some parts of the Guianas, Grenada and Trinidad and Tobago, which are expected to see drier-than-usual soils.

“There are places where we are seeing some concern growing and that is Belize, Cuba and Puerto Rico,” he said, referring to stress on water re-

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sources.

Van Meerbeeck said flooding has a high potential to occur, particularly in the Guianas -Suriname and French Guiana – because, as opposed to the Caribbean islands and Belize, the Guianas are entering their secondary wet season.

He said that while the Caribbean knows that the dry season is usually like, this year, the Atlantic Ocean was particularly hot “and we felt the impacts of that because heat stress being a factor of both higher temperatures, but also more moisture, which comes from the ocean”.

Van Meerbeeck likened the situation to sweating as a cooling mechanism in humans, noting that while the Atlantic Ocean is cooling, it is still going to remain warmer than usual.

“I repeat is gonna remain warmer than usual,” Van Meerbeeck said, add-

ing that a warm Atlantic Ocean means hotter temperatures in the air and more humidity.

“So towards the end of the dry season, the heat season is gonna say, ‘Hello I’m back.’”

He said that on the other hand, the Pacific Ocean is suggesting the first strong El Nino since 2014 to 2016.

“Now I know my friend from Antigua can tell you that water availability in Antigua and Barbuda was a pretty big problem in those years,” he said, returning to the “boxing match” analogy he used in the May CariCof.

“There are some ways in which the Atlantic Ocean temperatures and the Pacific Ocean are having kind of a boxing game. And yes, both are the top fighters on earth.

“But you don’t know prior who wins. So what we’ve experienced in the past few months is that the Atlantic dominated. Both of them bring more

heat to the Caribbean. But it was not particularly dry and why because we have a lot of moisture in our atmosphere thanks to the evaporation from a warm Atlantic Ocean.

“What it looks like for the next few months is the boxing game was almost one was almost knocked out for El Niño with El Niño is fighting back.”

The climatologist said the hazard that the region needs to look out for during the dry season is drought, adding that the forecast is for more rain than usual during the second three months of the dry season.

Van Meerbeeck said this could lead to flooding in some places, depending on the intensity of the rainfall.

“Now unfortunately here we only have a forecast map for the next three months, not for the three months after that,” he said, urging the region to pay attention to the information from their local meteorological services.



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Venezuela's planned referendum leaves Guyana residents on edge

Congregants of an Anglican church in a sparsely populated rainforest village in Guyana gathered recently to bid on a bounty of bananas, squash and other produce during a community event. They sang hymns and rang a bell after each successful bid.

They offered grateful devotions typical of a harvest festival but also asked for peace for their community amid what they see as an existential threat. Their village, Surama, is part of Guyana's Essequibo region — a territory larger than Greece and rich in oil and minerals that Venezuela claims as its own and whose future it intends to decide Sunday with a referendum.

The practical and legal implications of the vote, which among other things calls for turning Essequibo into a Venezuelan state, remain unclear, but the referendum has left area residents on edge.

"We are praying, we are hoping and we are having faith that nothing negative will come," said Loreen Allcock, who led the congregation during the harvest festival. "We want to continue living a peaceful life in this beautiful land of ours."

Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro has thrown the full weight of his government into the effort, using patriotic rhetoric to try to summon voters to the polls to answer five questions over the territory, including whether current and future area residents should be granted Venezuelan citizenship.

Guyana sees the referendum as a case of annexation and asked the International Court of Justice last month to halt parts of the vote. The court has not issued a decision, but even if it rules against Venezuela, Maduro's government intends to hold the election Sunday.

The 61,600-square-mile



The Essequibo River flows through Kurupukari crossing in Guyana, Saturday, November 19, 2023. Venezuela has long claimed Guyana's Essequibo region, a territory larger than Greece and rich in oil and minerals. (AP Photo/Juan Pablo Arraez)

(159,500-square-kilometre) area accounts for two-thirds of Guyana. Yet, Venezuela has always considered Essequibo as its own because the region was within its boundaries during the Spanish colonial period, and it has long disputed the border decided by international arbitrators in 1899, when Guyana was still a British colony.

Venezuela's commitment to pursue the territorial claim has fluctuated over the years. Its interest piqued again in 2015 when ExxonMobil announced it had found oil in commercial quantities off the Essequibo coast.

The latest chapter on the dispute has sowed anger among area residents, the majority of whom are Indigenous people, against Guyana's government. Information on the referendum has reached them mostly through inaccurate social media posts that have only created confusion among the Guyanese.

"We feel neglected as the people of this land. Nothing is being done for us at the moment," said Michael Williams, an Indigenous leader for the Essequibo village of Annai. "The

government (...) only comes when they want our votes. Now, there's this dispute. Nobody is here to tell us, 'These are the issues. This may come. Let us prepare for it. We are negotiating. We hope for the best.' Nobody is coming to tell us that."

The disputed boundary was decided by arbitrators from Britain, Russia and the United States. The US represented Venezuela on the panel in part because the Venezuelan government had broken off diplomatic relations with Britain.

Venezuelan officials contend the Americans and Europeans conspired to cheat their country out of the land and argue that a 1966 agreement to resolve the dispute effectively nullified the original arbitration. Guyana, the only English-speaking country in South America, maintains the initial accord is legal and binding and asked the world court in 2018 to rule it as such.

Venezuelan voters on Sunday will have to answer whether they "agree to reject by all means, in accordance with the law," the 1899 boundary and

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SVG: Charges withdrawn against woman accused of throwing missiles

CMC - The prosecution Wednesday withdrew the charge against a 58-year-old vendor who had been accused of throwing missiles on August 5, 2021, in St Vincent and the Grenadines, during a protest against the government's then coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine mandate.

Prime Minister Dr Ralph Gonsalves was struck in the head and injured during the protests.

The vendor, Annamay Lewis, was charged in September 2021 with wounding Prime Minister Gonsalves. However, that charge was withdrawn on September 15, 2021.

On Wednesday, the prosecutor, Corlene Samuel withdrew the charge when Lewis appeared at the Kingstown Magistrate's Court. In August Magistrate John Ballah had indi-



Annamay Lewis (File photo)

cated that he would no longer adjourn the matter.

But the withdrawal of the matter means that the prosecution can reinstate the charge against the accused even as her lawyer, Kay Bacchus-Baptiste, told the Caribbean Media Corporation (CMC) that her client had "no fear" that the charge could be reinstated.

"Too much time has passed," the lawyer said, adding that when the matter was called on Wednesday,

the prosecution indicated that a witness who was critical to the Crown's case was still not available.

Bacchus-Baptiste said that based on the magistrate's comment, it was clear that he was going to dismiss the charge. On August 28, the magistrate had set November 29 as the final date for the trial telling the parties that he is "an equal opportunity hitter" and would dismiss the case if the prosecution were not

ready or would proceed if the defence were absent.

The matter had been adjourned a number of times over the last two years,

During one of the sittings, the prosecution had said it was prepared to start the trial but one of its witnesses, a police officer, was out of state at the Barbados-based Regional Security System (RSS) and the court would take his evidence by video link.

"Why wasn't the application made long before? This is a 2021 matter," Ballah had responded.

Bacchus-Baptiste had told the court that she did not believe that the defence was in a position to start the matter, as she had not received the "so-called warrant" for Lewis' arrest. The lawyer had said that she had applied for disclosure of the document a year earlier.

cont'd from pg 14

whether they support the 1966 agreement "as the only valid legal instrument" to reach a solution.

Maduro's government held a mock referendum on November 19 to get voters acquainted with the issue, but it has not said how many voters participated or what the results were. Officials also have not offered a timetable or specific steps on how they would turn the Essequibo region into a Venezuelan state and grant area residents citizenship should voters approve the proposed measures.

Ruling party lawmaker Juan

Romero told state media that one of the actions the government would have to pursue if people vote in favor of the measures is a constitutional reform to incorporate English as one of Venezuela's official languages. Meanwhile, another ruling party lawmaker, William Fariñas, has claimed "Essequibans" already "feel Venezuelan."

That, however, could not be further from the truth. People in Essequibo are proud of their Indigenous heritage. They point to the names of landmarks, given in their native language, as an example of why they believe the region never belonged to Venezuela. And

they insist they do not want their lives disrupted by the referendum.

The International Court of Justice is expected to issue a decision this week on Guyana's request to halt parts of the referendum. But the court is still years away from ruling on Guyana's broader request to deem the 1899 border decision as valid and binding. Judges accepted the case last April despite Venezuela's opposition.

In the meantime, Essequibo resident Jacqueline Allcock has one question for Venezuelan voters: "Why would you want to take away something that doesn't belong to you?"

Two Palestinian boys killed during Israeli raid in West Bank

Four Palestinians, including two children, have been killed by Israeli forces during a raid in the occupied West Bank, Palestinian officials say.

CCTV videos appeared to show eight-year-old Adam al-Ghoul and Basel Abu al-Wafa, 14, being shot during the same incident in the city of Jenin.

The Israeli military said suspects threw explosive devices at its soldiers and that they responded with live fire.

It also said troops killed “two high-ranking terrorists” during the raid.

There has been a surge in violence in the West Bank since the start of the war in the Gaza Strip, triggered by Hamas’s attack on southern Israel on 7 October.

Footage shows a small figure on a security camera video turning and starting to run, before falling sharply to the ground. His eight-year-old body is easily dragged from the road by a friend.

The life of Adam al-Ghoul ended in Jenin on Wednesday with a shot to the head, as Israeli forces withdrew from a military operation in the refugee camp there.

Nearby, his 14-year-old friend, Basel Abu al-Wafa was fighting for his life after being shot in the chest, with gunfire hitting the ground around him.

At Jenin Hospital, both



Basel Abu al-Wafa’s body was wrapped in a Hamas flag - something a relative said he would not have wanted.

boys were declared dead.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said in a statement that during “activity in the Jenin camp, a number of suspects hurled explosive devices toward IDF soldiers”.

“The soldiers responded with live fire toward the suspects and hits were identified.”

As Basel’s body was prepared for burial in the crowded hospital morgue, a relative watched as the teenager was wrapped in the green flag of Hamas. It wasn’t what Basel would have wanted, he told the BBC.

“He’s innocent, not from the militias,” he said, teetering between anger and grief. “He’s perfect in school, a good boy, kind.”

The hospital director, Dr Wissam Bakr, said the boys’ wounds - from shots to the

head and chest - showed that they were intentionally killed.

“There’s no safe place in Jenin now,” he said.

The war in Gaza has increased tensions here in the West Bank, where there are near-nightly raids by Israel’s forces.

In its operations in Jenin overnight, the IDF said it had killed a senior commander for Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Mohammed Zubeidi, and another called Wissam Hanoun who had been inside a building with him.

It accused Zubeidi of involvement in two shootings in May in which an Israeli civilian was killed and several soldiers were wounded.

Palestinian Islamic Jihad - which like Hamas is classed as a terrorist group by Israel, the UK and other Western powers - confirmed

that two of its local commanders were killed.

The IDF also said it had arrested 17 wanted individuals during the raid.

Israeli missiles, grenades and explosives have left a broad scar of destruction in Jenin’s camp - several houses gutted or collapsed, and large chunks of masonry hanging over mounds of rubble.

Diggers were helping search for a body still believed to be buried there.

Militant leaders were the target here, killed along with boys of eight and 14.

Before the Jenin raid, the UN said that at least 225 Palestinians, including more than 50 children, had been killed by Israeli forces in the West Bank since 7 October.

Adam and Basel are the latest casualties of a conflict that keeps getting older, even as children die.

Russia warns of tension as Finland shuts last border crossing

Finland has closed the last crossing on its long Russian border, prompting the Kremlin to condemn an “absolutely redundant measure”.

The northern crossing at Raja-Jooseppi closed for two weeks at 14:00 (12:00 GMT) on Wednesday, after Helsinki accused Russia of channelling asylum seekers towards Finland.

Finland says it has become the target of a Russian “hybrid operation”.

Some 900 asylum seekers have crossed the border this month.

The influx is dramatically higher than the previous number of barely one a day and Finland’s border guard says before August 2023 Russian authorities barred foreign citizens from travelling to the area without the necessary visas.

Finland shares a 1,340km (830 mile) frontier with Russia and closed its seven south-eastern border crossings last week, before announcing that its far-northern crossing would also be shut temporarily.

A rail-freight line will remain open and the border guard says that in theory it is not a complete shutdown. Asylum seekers will still be able to reach Helsinki by plane.

Interior Minister Mari Rantanen said it was “a matter of national security” and on Wednesday the head of Poland’s National Security Bureau announced that its military advisers would travel to Finland to provide “on-site knowledge of border security”.

Jacek Siewiera said Poland was responding to a request from the Finnish president who was in Warsaw this week. His announcement on X, formerly Twitter, was illustrated with coils of barbed wire at a border fence running through a forest.



Raja-Jooseppi is the northernmost border crossing between Finland and Russia.

Finland’s northernmost crossing was described as quiet on Wednesday. Known as Lotta on the Russian side, it is extremely remote - more than 200km from Murmansk.

The only facilities there were shut down months ago. A sign on the local petrol station and cafe announced they had been “closed indefinitely”.

Russia vowed to take “counter-measures” last April when Finland completed its accession to the West’s Nato defensive alliance.

Helsinki decided to join Nato after Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Moscow said it had made a “dangerous, historic mistake”, bringing to an end a tradition of military non-alignment.

Col Matti Pitkaniitty of the Finnish border guard said they were not happy that “legal travellers” now had no guarantee that the border would be open.

They now had to choose between the Norwegian border near Kirkenes in the north, or the Estonian city of Narva to the south, he said. Finland had exchanged information with both countries to prepare for an influx, he told the BBC.

Col Pitkaniitty said the EU’s bor-

der agency Frontex was sending about 50 additional officers, but when asked if they were coming from Poland, he said he was not sure and it was “not relevant for us”. Their main role would be in helping with border surveillance in the heavily forested areas between crossing points, as Finnish guards had endured a “heavy load” in the past few weeks.

“There’s not permanent fencing but temporary fencing structures where we have roads going across the borderline,” he said. “We are entering winter conditions so it’s good they know the environment.”

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov warned that any increase in “the concentration of military units on our border” was unjustified: “The Finns should bear in mind that this will represent a threat to us.”

Temperatures in the past week have plummeted to -30C (-22F) and half the border area is under 20cm (8in) of snow, he said.

The Finnish Refugee Advice Centre fears closing the borders will push asylum seekers towards the many hundreds of kilometres of forests and rivers along the long border, which could be even more dangerous.

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Dravid gets extension as India coach

NEW DELHI (Reuters) - Rahul Dravid will stay on as India head coach following an extension of his contract, which had expired with the 50-overs home World Cup earlier this month, the country's cricket board said on Wednesday.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) did not reveal the duration of the extension but it is likely to cover the T20 World Cup in West Indies and the United States in June.

"The BCCI engaged in productive discussions with Rahul Dravid after the term of his contract ended ... and unanimously agreed to further the tenure," the board said in a statement.

The BCCI acknowledged Dravid's "exceptional professionalism" as coach of the side which reached the finals of the World Test Championship and the ODI World Cup this year los-



India's head coach Rahul Dravid. (Getty Images)

ing to Australia on both occasions.

The board also praised former test batter VVS Laxman, who was expected to succeed Dravid in the role having occasionally filled in for his former In-

dia team mate, saying he had shown "exemplary" service.

BCCI secretary Jay Shah said Dravid had made India a "formidable" force.

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Several hundred kilometres south of Raja-Jooseppi, on the Russian side of the Finnish border crossing at Salla, many of those who wanted to cross now appeared to have dispersed.

At one point about 400 migrants had gathered there, many of them lightly dressed. An official said about 200 had now been taken by bus to St Petersburg.

Some interviewed by RBC newspaper said they were on student visas in Russia that would soon expire.

It is hard to confirm how co-ordinated the movement of migrants towards the Russian border has been, and whether there has been direct complicity from the

FSB security service - to which the Russian border guard service belongs.

The EU's home affairs commissioner said last week that Finland's border challenge gave her a sense of deja-vu, two years after Belarus had driven large numbers of asylum seekers across its borders into Poland, Latvia and Lithuania.

The Polish advisory team being sent to Finland is expected to include those involved in a controversial operation to reinforce Poland's eastern border in 2021, when many of those trying to enter from Belarus were pushed back.

Poland's eastern border is now heavily protected with a giant metal fence and extra surveillance, including military patrols.



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ICONS claim back-to-back wins in business volleyball league

Last year's third-place finishers, ICONS, notched up two wins in the latest round of matches in the preliminary stage of the Antigua and Barbuda Amateur Volleyball Association's (ABA-VA) Business League competition.

The ICONS recorded their sixth and seventh wins in nine games by beating Royalton and the Media in their latest outings at the indoor volleyball facility at the YMCA Sports Complex.

The ICONS cruised past Royalton 25-8, 25-23, and prevailed 25-11, 25-18 against the Media.

It was the eighth loss in eight games for the Royalton, while the Media lost for the fourth time in eight outings.

The Antigua and Barbuda International Institute of Technology (ABIIT) had their first win in the competition by pulling off a 2-1 victory against MEDSO/UWI Fusion.



Players of the ICONS volleyball team. (File photo)

The ABIIT won for the first time in seven outings by prevailing 18-25, 25-19, and 15-8. MEDSO/UWI Fusion remain in the cellar of the 11-team round-robin competition after losing for the eighth time in as many

games. The business volleyball league will continue with two more matches at the YMCA Sports Complex this evening (Thursday).

77 Bus will take on ABIIT at 6:30 pm, and Tre-

sury will meet the ICONS at 7:30 pm.

In Saturday's double-header, MEDSO/UWI Fusion will clash with Royalton at 6:30 pm, and defending champion APUA INET will face ABIIT at 7:30 pm.

CHSS beat AGS in Under-16 school boys league

Clare Hall Secondary School (CHSS) beat defending champion Antigua Grammar School (AGS) in the Under-16 Boys Division of the Ministry of Sports Secondary Schools' Football League on Tuesday.

A T'Kai Williams' 15th-minute conversion was sufficient to give Clare Hall Secondary a 1-0 victory against

Antigua Grammar School in the first game of a double-header at the King George V Recreation Grounds.

Jennings Secondary School and Irene B. Williams Secondary played to a 1-1 draw in the second encounter at King George V Recreation Grounds.

Kimani Richards converted for

Jennings Secondary, and Niquan Tanner scored for Irene B. Williams Secondary.

Ottos Comprehensive School won by default against St. Anthony's Secondary School, which failed to show up for their Under-16 Boys Division encounter at the Radio Range playing

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Pakistan players told to put country before franchise leagues

LAHORE, Pakistan (Reuters) - Pakistan's contracted players must put national team duty ahead of franchise cricket, team director Mohammad Hafeez said after fast bowler Haris Rauf declined to be part of the team's Test tour of Australia.

White-ball specialist Rauf, who has played only one test and nine first-class matches in his career, turned down an offer to tour Australia where Pakistan will play three Tests.

The 30-year-old has instead been waiting for approval from the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) to join the Melbourne Stars in Australia's Big Bash League.

"All centrally contracted and domestic contracted players, for all of them, the priority is Pakistan," former captain Hafeez told reporters on Tuesday.

"The point of offering it (contract) to the 20-25 players ... is to make sure they are available to play," he said.

"Now there is a parallel option in the form of leagues and we experienced this in the Asia Cup and World Cup. There was talk of fatigue, or players were getting injured because



Pakistan's cricket team director Mohammad Hafeez. (Getty Images)

their workloads were too much, or not performing as they should."

Hafeez is part of a new team management that was put in place after Pakistan failed to make the semi-finals of this year's 50-overs World Cup in India.

Hafeez said the board would factor in a players' workload ahead of next year's T20 World Cup before giving him a 'No Objection Certificate' (NOC) to take part in one of the

growing number of lucrative franchise leagues around the world.

"Moving towards the T20 World Cup, the NOC policy will be based on what Pakistan needs," he explained.

"If Pakistan need fit players, we need to make sure of their workloads. The maximum energy and availability has to be to Pakistan.

"If there is an opportunity around that, that they can play (in leagues), that will be definitely considered."

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field in Ottos.

Meanwhile, Joshua James of St. Joseph's Academy finished as the top goal-.The SJA had amassed scorer in the Under-14 Boys Division, which concluded on Monday with Princess Margaret School retaining the title.

James scored 10 goals to help St. Joseph's Academy finish in fifth place in the 10-team round-robin competition with a total of

15 points.

Tafari Parker of Antigua Grammar School was the second-leading goal scorer with eight conversions. His efforts helped the Antigua Grammar School finish in third place with 20 points.

Three players finished tied as the third-leading goal scorers with seven conversions apiece.

They are Kimani Francis of second-place finisher All Saints Secondary School, Iczjair Sebastian

of St. Joseph's Academy, and Robert Jeffery of sixth-place finisher Clare Hall Secondary School.

Antigua Grammar School's Kevonte Lewis, who scored six goals, was the only other player to convert more than five goals during the under-14 boys' competition.

The Secondary Schools' Football League will continue with three matches in the East Zone of the Under-20 Boys Division today

at 3:30 pm.

Clare Hall Secondary will meet defending champion Antigua and Barbuda Institute of Continuing Education (ABICE) at the Potters playing field.

All Saints Secondary and Irene B. Williams Secondary will clash at the Mack Pond playing field in AllSaints, and Pares Secondary School will tackle St. Joseph's Academy at the Princess Margaret School playing field.



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Ministry of Agriculture and SJDC advance in business football league

The Ministry of Agriculture and St. John’s Development Corporation (SJDC) have advanced to the next round of the knockout phase in the Cool and Smooth, JOMA Caribbean Ministry of Sports Business Football League.

Both teams won their respective opening round knockout matches during a double-header at the Golden Grove playing field on Tuesday night.

Group 1 winners the Ministry of

Agriculture prevailed 8-7 in a penalty shootout against fourth-place finishers in Group 4 Villa Tech Enterprises.

The match-winner was decided in the penalty shootout after both teams fought to a 1-1 draw at the end of regulation.

Kareem Wilson scored twice to lead Group 3 winners St. John’s Development Corporation to a 3-0 victory against fourth-place finishers in Group 2 CHAPA Warriors.

Wilson had conversions in the

17th and 51st minutes, and Romaine Ault scored in the 22nd minute for St. John’s Development Corporation.

The knockout stage of the business football league will continue with a triple-header at the Antigua Recreation Ground today (Thursday).

Keyonna/Cocos will face the University of the West Indies (UWI) at 6 pm, Curtain Bluff will challenge PBC HC VER at 7 pm, and Sandals Hotel will tackle Antigua Port Authority at 8 pm.

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Two players of the Celtics team (blue and white uniform) attempt to take possession of the ball against Earthquake during their ABFA's First Division match at the Fort Road playing field on Tuesday, November 28, 2023. (Photo by Elwin Francis)

Three teams off to winning starts in Second Division

Fort Road's Earthquakes, ABAYA, and FC Master Ballerz made winning starts to their campaigns in the Antigua and Barbuda Football Association's (ABFA) Second Division League on Tuesday.

The Earthquakes romped to an emphatic 5-0 victory against the Celtics of Ottos at the Fort Road playing field.

ABAYA prevailed 3-1 against West Ham at the Parham playing field.

Jahvante Harriet scored twice, and Jahquante Joseph converted once for ABAYA.

FC Master Ballerz snatched a 3-2 victory against Real Blizzard at the Radio Range playing field in Ottos.

Kestone Daley's conversion and an own goal accounted for Real Blizzard scoring twice in the match.

But Tuesday's other opening day second division match between CPT-SA Wings and Soccer Academy was not played at the ABFA Technical Center.

The game was postponed to facilitate the preparation of the senior national female team for their Concacaf's Women Gold Cup qualifying match, which was slated to be played

at the same venue yesterday (Wednesday).

Eight more teams will launch their campaigns in four second division matches that are slated to take place today (Thursday) at 4:30 pm.

Bethesda Christian Hill will host English Harbour at the Bethesda playing field. Glanvilles will entertain Freeman's Village at the Glanvilles playing field.

Golden Grove will clash with TAMO FC at the Golden Grove playing field, and Urlings Golden Stars will face Young Warriors at the Urlings playing field.