

PM BROWNE: ABST INCREASE FAR FROM BURDENSOME

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Government officials, members of the Diplomatic Corps, family members of Sir Vere Cornwall Bird Sr. and supporters of the ABLP gathered at the V.C. Bird Bust on Monday for a wreath-laying ceremony, in observance of the 113th birthday of the Father of the Nation. The bust, located in the heart of Saint John's, was commissioned by the Government of Antigua and Barbuda and sculpted by Cuban Sculptor, Andres Gonzalez. The bust was commissioned in 2002. [Photo Credit: Wayne Mariette]

PM Browne defends increase in ABST

Prime Minister Gaston Browne used his remarks at the V.C. Bird Day wreath-laying ceremony yesterday to call upon Antiguan and Barbudans to play their part in nation building, even if it means paying slightly more in taxes.

The Ministry of Finance has proposed a hike in the Antigua and Barbuda Sales Tax (ABST) from 15 to 17 per cent, which was adopted by the government and will come into effect in 2024. It is part of a long list of measures placed before the government for consideration, as it seeks to boost its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to 25 per cent.

With the decision drawing criticism mainly from the opposition United Progressive Party, the Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party leader

justified the two per cent increase in the ABST, stating it was necessary in order to fund increases in wages and salaries for public sector employees, to improve the country's road infrastructure and the public health system among other areas of national development.

"I say to you that the increase is far from being burdensome and if, as a consequence that you have to pay an additional 80 cents whenever you go to the supermarket on a weekly basis, I say to you, pay that 80 cents with pride, knowing that at the end of the day, you're making a further contribution to nation building, so that we can provide advanced and certainly improved services to you the people of Antigua and Barbuda," Mr. Browne asserted.



Prime Minister Gaston Browne

A public consultation is to be held on the planned increase of the ABST. Chief of Staff in the Office of the Prime Minister, Ambassador Lionel 'Max' Hurst said it will be held before the budget debate commences in January, 2024.

The Ministry of Finance estimates \$50 million will be added to the government's coffers annually as a result of the two per cent increase in the ABST.

The prime minister appealed to right-thinking citizens and residents not to be consumed by divisiveness, but rather, focus on playing an active role in the country's development.

"Let us continue to fight for the advancement of our country. Let us not sit on our laurels in idleness, let us not continue to sit back and to allow those who are not interested in nation building to divide and to destroy our country.

"Our politics cannot be about destruction, it must be about the advancement of our country and those who cannot contribute towards the advancement of our country and seek to divide and destroy, our people should stand against them, Prime Minister Browne said.



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Senatorial appointment for Michael Joseph next year

Prime Minister Gaston Browne has stated his intention to appoint Michael Joseph, the new ABLP caretaker for Saint John's Rural West to the Senate of Antigua and Barbuda.

The revelation was made on the prime minister's radio programme last Saturday while congratulating Joseph for winning the primary election by an overwhelming majority at the Multi-Purpose Centre on Friday evening.

The ABLP leader is of the opinion that Michael Joseph has a bright future ahead of him and is convinced that the political newcomer will regain the rural west seat for the party. Impressed by his ambition and desire to serve, Mr. Browne said Joseph will be added to the government's side in the Upper House

of Parliament in 2024.

"I have said to my political opponents and even those within the labour party, my replacement will not come from my generation, look out for people like Michael Joseph in the leadership of this country. You can hear the competence already. He hasn't served in any ministry as yet, but you can see he is ready.

"And by the way, I'm going to say this publicly, I'm putting you in the senate next year, because I believe that that will help you to make an even greater contribution and I have to make sure I put you toe-to-toe with your opponent there."

Prime Minister Browne explained *cont'd on pg 4*



Michael Joseph



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such decisions are part of the overall plan to introduce young, new talent as part of the party's renewal process and said Michael Joseph possesses the common touch, which will aid in propelling him to be the next member of parliament for Saint John's Rural West.

"There is a strong need for renewal within the party and that's what is going to enliven the labour party, that is what is going to send the signal of change.

"So, show the people of Antigua and Barbuda that the change you want in our politics is taking place now and that we're making space for



Prime Minister Gaston Browne the generation below us," Mr. Browne added.

Michael Joseph, Kevin Morgan, Aziza Lake, Shawn Benjamin and Rushelle Ellis contested the primary election last Friday, with 623 votes cast. Joseph secured 385 votes, Ellis (94), Morgan

(89), Benjamin (47) and Lake (7). There was one spoilt vote.

The new caretaker described the last few weeks drumming up support as arduous, but declared that the final result was rewarding. Joseph stated that while it

was easy to connect with people, the common refrain of little to no representation was evident and people being wary of politicians.

But he expressed determination in representing Saint John's Rural West to the best of his ability and in the process, change the minds of constituents.

"I have no intentions of losing Saint John's Rural West and I have no intentions of winning by a small margin. The intention is to overwhelmingly send a message that the people of Saint John's Rural West want proper representation and this is what I'm delivering," Michael Joseph affirmed.

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Luxury resort earmarked for Half Moon Bay

International Developer Kerzner International Holdings Limited will construct a One&Only Resort and community of private homes at Half Moon Bay.

Scheduled to open in 2027, the principals of the One&Only brand intend to pair Antigua and Barbuda's "beautiful landscapes with One&Only's rich hospitality to create an unrivaled resort experience".

The 132-acre site overlooks a secluded semi-circular beach, adjacent to a protected national park, with cliffs rising into panoramic views over the Caribbean. A glamorous tropical playground, attracting the world's luminaries, Antigua retains its natural wonders, island charm and unspoiled nature.

The architectural design



of the resort respects the terrain and minimal impact will be made to the location's ecosystem during development. Blending seamlessly with nature, the resort will reinterpret the island's vernacular design with an elegant contemporary lens, providing

flowing indoor and outdoor spaces, breathtaking views and chic living areas. Inspiration will be taken from Antigua's storied past and rich history to curate spaces of timeless luxury and laidback comfort.

As with every One&Only, unique experiences will be created to allow guests to experience the very best of what the island has to offer, encompassing nature, wildlife, cuisine and culture.

"This is a significant moment for the considered growth of the One&Only portfolio, we have been searching for a location in this region for a long time, and we have now found a destination that not only meets, but exceeds our vision for creating one-off resorts and experiences," commented Philippe Zuber, Chief Executive Officer for Kerzner International.

"I am delighted to introduce the One&Only brand to Antigua and to offer our loyal guests and homeowners an opportunity to uncover this extraordinary island, curated by One&Only."

Prime Minister Gaston Browne said: "We welcome and eagerly anticipate the One&Only Resort at Half Moon Bay, which promises to be a marquee hospitality project in the Caribbean and the flagship of Antiguan and Barbudan tourism product"

The upcoming opening in Antigua joins a number of highly anticipated new resorts for One&Only, including One&Only One Za'abeel in Dubai U.A.E. (opening January 2024), One&Only Kéa Island in Greece (opening Spring 2024), and One&Only Moonlight Basin in Big Sky Montana, United States.



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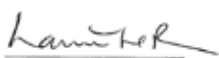
NOTICE TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC

Dated: December 4 2023

Please be advised that **the Antigua and Barbuda Civil Registry** will be closed to the public on December 12 2023. The Registry will be reopened on Wednesday December 13 2023 at 8.30 am.

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

We apologise for any inconvenience caused.



Registrar

Compassionate payment for former LIAT workers a simple process

Former employees of LIAT 1974 Ltd. have been advised that the process of benefitting from the government's compassionate payment is a simple one and every opportunity should be made to take up the offer.

Recently, Chief of Staff in the Office of the Prime Minister, Ambassador Lionel 'Max' Hurst said there remains approximately one million dollars of the monies set aside by the government to offer to the former workers. While some have become beneficiaries, many are yet to lay claim to the compassionate payment,



which represents 32 per cent of the shares Antigua and Barbuda owned in the airline.

During Friday's Post-Cabinet Press Briefing, Hurst explained that government's offer remains available and interested parties can go directly to LIAT's administrator, Cleve-

land Seaforth.

"This is what happened in the past," Mr. Hurst said. "That's how one million dollars have been used up thus far. So, you go straight to the administrator at LBDO and he will arrange for the LIAT worker to receive what is justly his," he added.

It was revealed that the airline's court-appointed administrator is aware of how much each claimant should be paid, since the relevant information was delivered to them by the union representing the former workers.

If there is insufficient cash, beneficiaries will be offered lands and scholarships for their children to pursue higher education at The University of the West Indies Five Island Campus.

Once the compassionate payment is accepted, the recipient cannot bring legal action against the government in this specific matter.

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Gala awards celebrate hospitality workers

Saturday evening's Tourism Gala Awards marked the conclusion of Tourism Week 2023.

Eleven hospitality workers drawn from a field of 55 nominees from various resorts across the country won awards in several categories.

They are:

ABHTA Employee of the Year - Hilma Joseph, Carlisle Bay Antigua

ABHTA Supervisor of the Year - Joslyn Williams, Carlisle Bay Antigua

Rising Star of the Year - Tammica Mendoza, Sandals Grande Antigua

Young Hotelier of the Year - Michelle Seaforth, Mill Reef Club

Young Chef of the Year- Jean-Pierre Tuitt, Jumby Bay Island

Chef of the Year - Ronald Wilson,



Andre Friday, left, accepts a Lifetime Achievement Award on behalf of his late father, Dennis Friday

Blue Waters Resort & Spa
 Transportation Service Provider of the Year - Andre Friday, Antigua & Bar-

buda St. John's Taxi Association
 Port Frontline Employee of the Year - Andre Norton, Antigua Cruise Port

Tour Guide of the Year - Sean Weathered, Antigua VIP Tours

Social Media Excellence Award - Cocobay Resort

Digital Marketing Excellence Award - Cocobay Resort

The evening's Lifetime Achievement Award was bestowed on Dennis Friday, Esq., whose son, Andre Friday accepted the honour on behalf of his late father.

A revered figure in Antigua and Barbuda's taxi industry, Mr. Friday's illustrious career spanned over fifty-five years. Notable milestones include being the first taxi driver from Antigua to be honored in Spain for exceptional service and pioneering the first limousine company and 45-seater bus on the island.

Mr. Friday's legacy embodies the essence of a remarkable taxi driver—responsible, locally savvy, punctual, and exceptionally hospitable. His profound knowledge of Antigua ensured safe and timely journeys for all passengers.

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Tribute to Rastaman Kentae Semper

In the early morning hours of December 2nd, 2023, a father, brother, uncle, and friend departed this life.

Born Albert Stetson Nathaniel Semper, to John Semper and Albertine Williams Semper, he was affectionately called Prince Albert by his mother, but was known to most as Rastaman Kentae.

He was father to his beloved daughters, Tangia and Cathyia Semper and Papa to his granddaughter, Royalty. Barry to his siblings, Daisy Herbert, Geraldine Semper, Estilyn King Peters, G. Veronica Peters, Novelle Nathann-Williams, Vaness Williams-Browne, Teacher Rosie, Bridget Williams, Robertine Smith, Laurel Martin, Pastor Fitzgerald Semper, Claristine Carr, Danette Semper-John, Sanjoy Semper-Edwards, the late Robert Semper, James Semper, James "Jackie" Semper, and Mary Semper Barrette.

Kentae was not shy to let the world know that his sister Sanjoy

Semper-Edwards was his favorite sibling, and Michella Benjamin his favourite niece.

He was affectionately referred to as Uncle Barry and Uncle Kentae by his numerous nieces and nephews to whom he reciprocated the affection.

Kentae was a people person. He was opinionated, fun-loving, community-minded, especially to his beloved Bendals community, and would go without so others could have.

He was an avid sportsman. He considered himself a football tactician and superb domino player.

During his radio programs Kentae would "shout out" a long list names as his way of showing his listeners he was thinking of them.

He was an Electrician who did favours, Director at the Central Board of Health, Political Advocate, Radio Talk Show Host, Mentor to many and friend to most.

Kentae believed education is the



gateway to success and was enrolled at YEEP to further his education.

His sudden passing shook the earth literally, and has left family and friends alike struggling with the fact that he no longer walks among us.

Cathyia Semper (Daughter) & Danette John (Sister)



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Opinion



One Caribbean – yes, no or neither?

By Tony Deyal

Taking a side, or even taking aside, is sometimes reasonable even in fights and furores. However, when you're trying to take both sides at the same time, the combatants are very likely to throw you aside or worse, beat you left, right, front, and most of all, centre and behind. While CARICOM at its usual break-neck pace is seemingly trying to get Venezuela to cool down and back off, the Venezuelan President, Maduro, who supposedly is a friend of the countries of the Caribbean, was first angry with all of them and now assures regional leaders that he will not invade Essequibo. Most likely what he means is that instead of grabbing one huge oil-rich part of the country, he will invade the whole of Guyana.

This is the only way to make any sense of what the Wall Street Journal posted about Venezuela "ratcheting up its claims to a swath of Guyana, its oil-rich neighbour, which has recently become one of the world's hottest energy frontiers".

Seeing a chance for a frontier and wealth enough to hang on to power, it is clear that Maduro is out for the kill. We know what "Mad" means but "Uro"? Google says it means "urine". The word comes from "aurochs", which is "an extinct large long-horned wild ox of Europe that is the ancestor of domestic cattle". The Merriam-Webster Dictionary says:

"It symbolised power, sexual potency and prowess in religions of the ancient Near East. Its horns were used in votive offerings as trophies and drinking horns." In the case of Guyana, it is more than a trophy. It will be a catastrophe.

I have some advice to Guyana. Never get into fights with ugly people whose name starts with "Mad" followed by "uro".

They have nothing to lose. While you are tempted to fight fire with fire, especially with US and other support, you must remember that the fire department usually tries water first to cool down the situation. While CARICOM is not my favourite organisation for getting anything done quickly and properly, it is still the only option for the time being. However, my concern is really over what some Caribbean countries might be doing in either seeming to take, or have already taken, the Venezuelan side, or worse, playing both sides.

It is already bad enough to try to stop a fight anywhere, especially in the Caribbean. Recently, in Trinidad, an eight-member girl gang at one of the secondary schools turned their anger on a teacher after she attempted to part a fight.

They slapped her several times. A woman police officer tried to part a fight in San Fernando and suffered injuries to her hands. In the town of Arima, a 35-year-old man who helped to part a fight



Tony Deyal

between friends and encouraged them to calm down, was beaten to death with a sledgehammer. In April this year, a 28-year-old man who thought he could stop two men from fighting was stabbed to death, and in another incident, a youngster, just 22 years old, was shot dead. The Guyanese, who already know the difference between "curry chicken" and "chicken curry", also know what can happen with "fight-parting".

Just a few days ago, on September 29, iNews Guyana posted, "Women shot while parting fight between schoolgirls: Two women are nursing gunshot injuries about their bodies after they were shot at whilst parting a fight between a couple of schoolgirls." The Guyana Times wrote about a "Peacemaker hit to head while 'parting' wedding house fight."

These two Caribbean

countries are not alone in the perils of parting. In Jamaica, a 14-year-old teenager was killed for parting a fight. Another Jamaican, Rip Squad die, according to one post, "him a part a fight with his family and got wounded and pass away". Another newspaper report was, "Mom wounded while parting fighting sons dies." She died from a chop wound. THE STAR had a story about "Peacemakers killed after parting fight." Even Barbados has its limited but scary episodes.

A handyman ended up in court after parting a fight, and a man was shot dead while trying to "part two men engaged in an altercation". It is no huge problem if the people fighting are blind because, as one person claimed, he shouted, "I bet the one with the knife wins!" and both of the men ran away fast. Dealing

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with women might be easier. Two women were fighting for the last available seat on a bus.

The bus driver tried getting them to stop but they kept on pushing one another and shouting threats. Finally, in desperation, he grabbed his training manual and announced, "The policy is to allow the seat to go to the uglier one." If it was Maduro, it would have been different, but both women stood for the remainder of the trip.

It is not always so easy. A very badly beaten-up man came to hospital. The doctor asked what the hell had happened to him.

The man explained: "I was banging my neighbour over her kitchen table when we heard the front door open. She was frightened and told me, 'Oh lord! It's my husband! Quick, try the back door!'. Thinking back, I really should have run,

but you don't get offers like that every day." This is why some of the Caribbean politicians should understand that even with the best offers from Venezuela, if taking one side is bad and could seriously harm you and your country, think of what can happen if you take both sides. Undoubtedly, any country that goes that route will need more than help.

It will be very much like the man who, while walking with his wife, came across her stepmother being beaten up by six bad men. His wife asked him, "Aren't you going to help?" "No," he replied. "Six should be enough." In the case of CARICOM, one hopes that its twenty members will be more than enough, especially with the support of the US and other international organisations. However, playing both sides, Venezuela and Guyana, is not just a gamble, but when the spit hits the fan, you will not have any fans or friends left.

It seems that some Caribbean countries are trying to be bilateral and can end up die-lateral.

In this greed for gas, you can't run with the hares and hunt with the hounds. As one writer said: "I was taught to shoot the messenger too. Somebody playing both sides of the fence is more dangerous than your enemy." I believe that if a war between Venezuela and Guyana starts, the politicians who are playing, or have played both sides, and even CARICOM if it does not stand up for one of its members, or fight on its behalf if necessary, should be placed in the middle of the zone when the battle starts and both sides head straight at them from front and behind.

Tony Deyal was last seen explaining how easy it is to start a fight. His wife asked him, "What do you love most, my body or my face" and he replied, "Your sense of humour..."



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US FDA approves two gene therapies for sickle cell

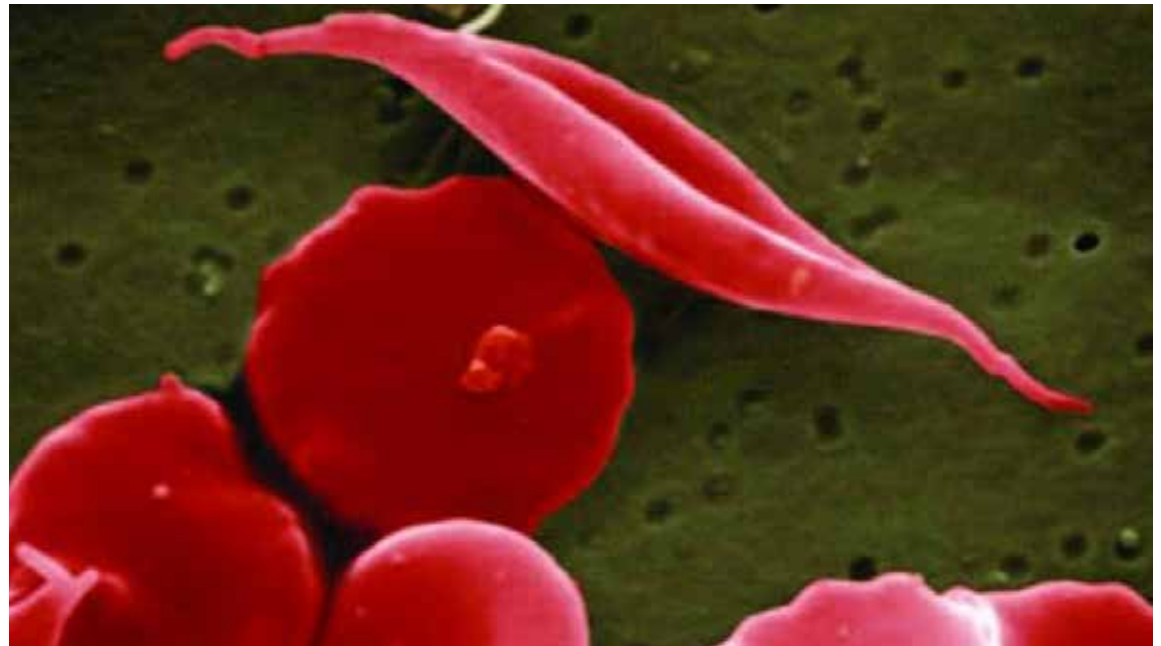
Regulators last Friday approved two gene therapies for sickle cell disease that doctors hope can cure the painful, inherited blood disorder that afflicts mostly Black people in the US.

The Food and Drug Administration said the one-time treatments can be used for patients 12 and older with severe forms of the disease. One, made by Vertex Pharmaceuticals and CRISPR Therapeutics, is the first approved therapy based on CRISPR, the gene editing tool that won its inventors the Nobel Prize in 2020. The other is made by Bluebird Bio and works differently.

“Sickle cell disease is a rare, debilitating and life-threatening blood disorder with significant unmet need,” the FDA’s Dr Nicole Verdun said in a statement announcing the approvals. “We are excited to advance the field especially for individuals whose lives have been severely disrupted by the disease.”

The two gene therapies are the first approved in the US for sickle cell. The FDA has previously OK’d 15 gene therapies for other conditions. Some have list prices in the millions of dollars, and the sickle cell therapies will too.

In the U.S., an estimated 100,000 people have sickle cell and about a fifth of them have the severe form. Sickle



This electron microscope image provided by the National Institutes of Health in 2016 shows a blood cell altered by sickle cell disease, top. (National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS), National Institutes of Health via AP)

cell is most common among Black people and 1 in 365 Black babies are born with the disease nationally. Scientists believe being a carrier of the sickle cell trait helps protect against severe malaria, so the disease occurs more often in mosquito-prone regions such as Africa or in people whose ancestors lived in those places.

The disease affects hemoglobin, the protein in red blood cells that carries oxygen. A genetic mutation causes the cells to become sickle or crescent-shaped, which can block blood flow, causing excruciating pain, organ damage, stroke and other problems.

Current treatments include medications and blood transfusions. The only permanent solution is a bone

marrow transplant, which must come from a closely matched donor and brings a risk of rejection.

No donor is required for the gene therapies, which permanently change DNA in the patient’s blood cells. The goal of the Vertex therapy, called Casgevy, is to help the body go back to producing a fetal form of hemoglobin that’s present at birth — it’s the adult form that’s defective in people with sickle cell disease. CRISPR is used to knock out a gene in stem cells collected from the patient.

Bluebird’s treatment, called Lyfgenia, aims to add copies of a modified gene, which helps red blood cells produce “anti-sickling” haemoglobin that prevents or reverses misshapen cells.

When patients get the

treatments, stem cells are removed from their blood and sent to a lab. Before getting the altered cells back, they must undergo chemotherapy. The process requires at least two hospitalizations, one lasting four to six weeks.

Still, many patients say they’d consider gene therapy given the seriousness of the disease.

Jalen Matthews of Louisville, Kentucky, was diagnosed with sickle cell at birth and had her first pain episode at age 9. Three years later, the disease led to a spinal cord stroke that left her with some paralysis in her left arm and leg.

“I had to learn how to walk again, feed myself, clothe myself, basically learn how to do everything all over

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again,” said Matthews, now 26.

Today, she keeps her sickle cell at bay with transfusions every two months or so, with five units of her blood replaced with healthy cells. She said gene therapy could be a better option and she plans to ask her doctor about it.

“This one-time kind of cure is very much needed,” said Matthews.

The FDA’s approval is the first for Bluebird’s treatment; Vertex has been previously authorized in Britain and Bahrain.

Studies testing the therapies suggest they work well. Of 31 people treated in the pivotal Vertex study with sufficient follow-up, 29 were free of pain crises for at least a year. In the Bluebird study, 28 of 32 patients had no severe pain or organ damage between six and 18 months after the therapy.

But doctors point out there are possible side effects and the long-term outcomes are unknown. For both, the nec-

essary chemotherapy comes with risks such as infertility, hair loss and vulnerability to serious infection.

With the Bluebird therapy, blood cancer has occurred, so the FDA said the label will include a “black box warning” about that risk.

With the Vertex therapy, some scientists worry that CRISPR brings the possibility of “off-target effects,” which are unexpected changes to a person’s genome.

“It’s important to be cautious and to be optimistic about this therapy, but also know that there’s still not a ton of experience with it,” said Dr. Benjamin Watkins, director of the paediatric stem cell and cell therapy program at Children’s Hospital New Orleans.

Doctors said they don’t expect every medical centre to offer gene therapies because they require so much equipment and coordination between medical specialists. They also don’t expect lots of people to seek them right away. Wat-

kins said some may want to wait until more people get the treatments.

Experts also warned that cost could be a hurdle. The list price for Bluebird Bio is \$3.1 million and for Vertex, \$2.2 million.

What patients might pay will depend on insurance coverage and other factors. To help cover the cost, the US Centres for Medicare and Medicaid Services announced a plan that aims to establish partnerships with state Medicaid agencies and drug companies.

But eventually, gene therapy “could be transformative and really change the landscape of sickle cell disease,” said Dr Monica Bhatia, who treats children with the disease at New York-Presbyterian.

Matthews, who volunteers with The Sickle Cell Association of Kentuckiana, said she’s hopeful the treatments will have a big impact.

“It’s a blessing,” she said. “It will really benefit all of us in the sickle cell community.”



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SVG: Concerns raised over former Top Cop's senior magistrate position

CMC - The St Lucia-based Judicial & Legal Service Commission (JLSC) says it will "investigate further" concerns raised by the St Vincent and the Grenadines Bar Association (SVGBA) regarding the appointment of former police commissioner, Colin John as a senior magistrate.

John, 55, who went on early retirement in August, was appointed senior magistrate effective December 1 this year.

On November 30, one day before John, a former assistant director of public prosecution, was sworn in, the Bar Association wrote to the JLSC placing on the record its concerns regarding the appointment.

In a December 6 response JSLC secretary Jodi-Ann Masters-Singh, who wrote on behalf of Chief Justice and chair of the Commission, Dame Janice M. Pereira, said the Commission noted the concerns "and intends to investigate the matter further for a suitable resolution.

"To that end, the Commission will be liaising with the Public Service Commission in St Vincent and the Grenadines, from which the Commission received the recommendation for Mr Colin John's appointment to the post of Senior Magistrate," Masters-Singh wrote.

She said the JLSC appreciates "the sensitive na-



Colin John, former Police Commissioner of St Vincent and the Grenadines.

ture of the Bar Association's concerns and, accordingly, would require time to conduct its own investigations.

"Once those investigations are complete, the Bar Association will receive a more detailed response from the Commission as timeously as possible," the letter said.

The JLSC in its November 30 letter said John's then-impending appointment was "of deep and urgent concern to the Bar".

SVGBA president, Shirlan M. Barnwell, said her organisation was only reliably informed one day before John's swearing-in.

Among the concerns that the Bar Association raised was that John is the immediate past commis-

sioner of police who served in that position from December 31, 2018, to August 31, 2023.

"We estimate that over 95 per cent of criminal matters brought in the Magistrate's court involve the Commissioner of Police as complainant. Given the delays in the system, most of the matters brought over the last four years will still be pending," Barnwell wrote.

She said the public, like many members of the Bar, carries the perception that the magistrate's court is a police court.

"This impending appointment will further cement that perception," Barnwell said in the letter, which stated that two out of the four sitting magistrates are former senior police

officers, both of whom are male.

"Mr John's impending appointment means that three out of the four sitting magistrates will be male, and former senior police officers."

Barnwell noted that magistrates Bertie Pompey is a retired deputy commissioner of police and John Ballah, who was appointed to the magistracy in June 2023, is a former assistant superintendent of police.

"As you may be aware, St Vincent and the Grenadines is currently experiencing an unprecedented surge in crime. Currently there are 50 recorded homicides and the public perception of police and policing is at an all-time low," Barnwell wrote.

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Heroes Highway named in memory of Guyana helicopter crash victims

The new Eccles to Great Diamond four-lane highway was commissioned on Sunday and renamed Heroes Highway in honour of the five Guyana Defence Force (GDF) servicemen who perished in a helicopter crash on December 6.

The fallen servicemen honoured are Brigadier Gary Beaton; Colonel Michael Shahoud; Lt Col Michael Charles; Lieutenant Colonel Sean Welcome and Staff Sergeant Jason Khan.

Speaking at the event, President Dr Irfaan Ali said: "This highway is dedicated to the life, work and memories of our five great servicemen. We honour them with this highway, we want their children to grow up knowing that their fathers were legends."

The President said that the fallen heroes were honourable men who died fulfilling their mandate and have left a legacy of



The new Eccles to Great Diamond Heroes Highway was commissioned in Guyana on Sunday, paying tribute to the five servicemen who died in a helicopter crash last Wednesday. (Photo credit: DPI)

strength, hope and courage.

A number of cabinet ministers, including Prime Minister Brigadier Mark Phillips, Government officials and members of the diplomatic community were at the event.

Commissioner of Police Clifton Hicken along with members of his ELT

team, and senior and junior officers and ranks of the Guyana Police Force were present to witness this significant yet sad occasion.

The Top Cop again extended condolences to the families and friends of these heroes, who made the ultimate sacrifice in service of their country and citi-

zens.

According to the Department of Public Information (DPI), the Heroes Highway was constructed at a cost of approximately \$13.3 billion.

It spans 9.4 kilometres and features over 30 reinforced concrete bridges and two roundabouts.

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"The add-on effect of this impending appointment is the lack of diversity in a 21st-century judicial system. The magistracy is heavily male-dominated and now police-dominated."

The letter said that a "new and deeply concerning precedent" was being set in that the holder of the office of commissioner of police can seamlessly move from active duty as police chief to a judicial officer.

"In that capacity, he will likely be presiding over criminal matters filed in his name over the last four years

and hearing evidence from his colleagues and subordinates, which can lead to criminal convictions," Barnwell wrote.

"Dame Janice, we take very seriously our duty to protect, preserve and promote the legitimacy and credibility of our justice system. We strongly believe that the impending appointment flies in the face of the well-entrenched dictum that 'justice must not only be done but must also be seen to be done.'"

Barnwell said the Bar Association believes that John's appointment as

senior magistrate would "further erode the public trust and confidence in the judiciary, and likely to bring the justice system into further disrepute.

"We must, therefore, guard against the appearance of bias and ensure that the fundamental principles of impartiality and independence of the judiciary prevail at all times. We trust, Dame Janice, that you understand our concerns and that the JLSC will accept and place on record the concerns of the St Vincent and the Grenadines Bar Association on this issue," Barnwell said in her letter.



The mayor said the area affected measured 60m in diameter.

Maceió: Salt mine ruptures in Brazil causing fear of collapse

By Vanessa Buschschlüter

A rupture at a rock salt mine in north-eastern Brazil has heightened fears of an impending total collapse.

Video recorded by the civil defence authority showed murky water bubbling up in the Mundaú lagoon near the city of Maceió, where the mine is located.

The closed mine was operated by Brazilian petrochemical giant, Braskem.

Over the past four decades, tens of thousands of residents have been displaced due to the destruction caused by the extraction of rock salt.

The rupture, which caused water from the lagoon to enter the mine, happened at 13:15 local time (16:15GMT) on Sunday.

Braskem confirmed that cameras monitoring the surroundings of the mine, known as Mine 18, had detected “an unusual water movement” in the lagoon’s soil.

The mayor of Maceió, João Henrique Caldas, flew over the lagoon in a helicopter to inspect the damage.

He said the rupture - which according to him affected an area measuring 60m (200ft) in diameter - did not currently pose a threat to any people because those living nearby had already been evacuated.

He added that the mine was expected to stabilise.

However, residents of the city have expressed their concern at the speed at which the ground above the mine has been sinking. Official measurements show that the ground subsided a total of 2.35m between 30 November and 10 December.

While Maceió’s office for civil defence warned on 29 November that Mine 18 was at imminent risk of collapse, the city’s problems with rock salt mining date back further.

In 2018, buildings and roads in five neighbourhoods began to crack. In the five years since then, more than 14,000 buildings have had to be evacuated, affecting around 60,000 people.

The abandoned neighbourhoods have turned into ghost towns.

The damage was originally blamed

on heavy rains and seismic tremors. But a 2020 federal study found the cracks and the soil subsidence were caused by rock salt mining carried out by Braskem.

For decades, the Brazilian petrochemical company had operated dozens of mines in the region.

Rock salt, which is used as a raw material in the production of PVC, is extracted from deep underground deposits and the holes left behind can cause the soil above to sink.

Braskem disputed the findings of the study carried out by experts from the Brazilian Geological Service, saying they were flawed.

Nevertheless, the company closed its mines in Maceió in 2019 and earlier this year it reached a settlement with the city worth 1.7bn reias (\$343m; £273m) for land subsidence and relocation damages.

Following warnings about Mine 18’s imminent collapse, the municipal authorities have asked to negotiate a new compensation agreement with the company to include “new damages”.

Kenya's nationwide power blackout sparks KPLC sabotage suspicions

By Gloria Aradi

A power blackout that plunged Kenya into darkness on Sunday was a possible act of sabotage, a minister says.

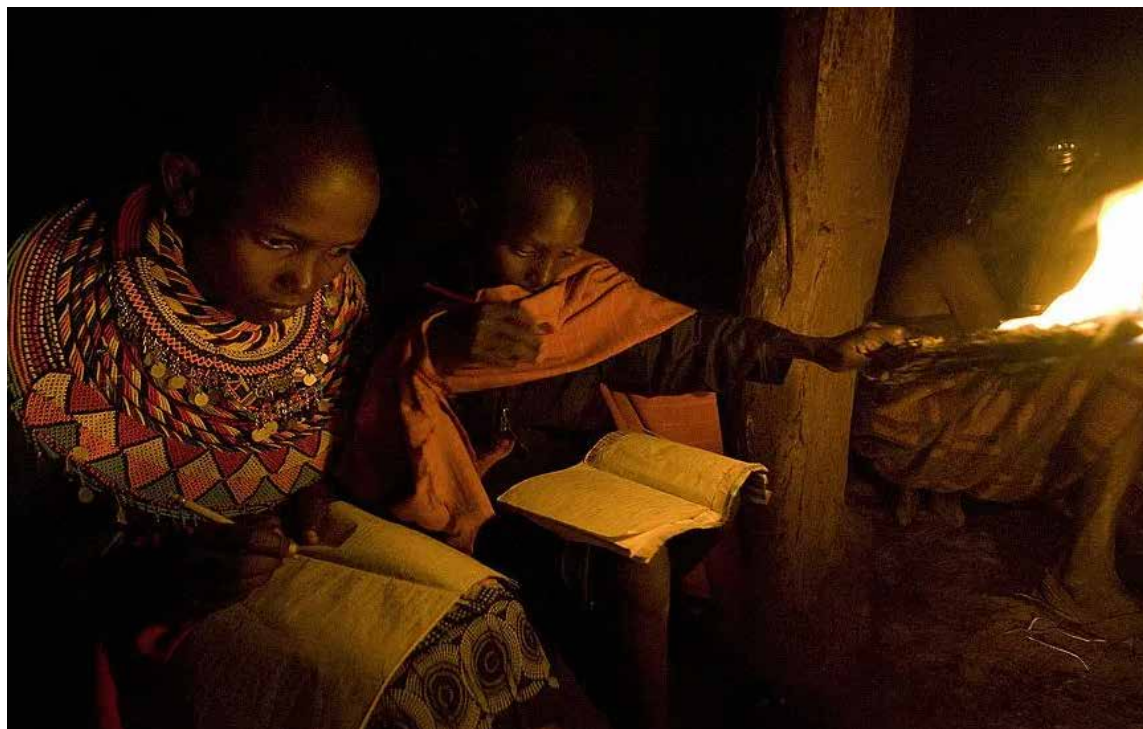
It hit at about 20:00 local time (17:00 GMT) - Kenya's third nationwide blackout in the past four months.

The outage disrupted several services, including the main airport in the capital, Nairobi, where two terminals were without power for several hours.

Many Kenyans have demanded answers, as anger and frustration mounts over the recurring power disruptions.

Transport Minister Kipchumba Murkomen - who has been criticised for the time it took to restore power at Nairobi's Jomo Kenyatta International Airport (JKIA) on Sunday - has asked police to investigate the possibility that the recurrent power outages were sabotage.

"Considering the frequency of the power disruption, and taking into account the fact that JKIA is a facility of strategic national importance, we are making a formal request to the National Police Service to investigate possible acts of sabotage and coverup," he



Power had been restored to most parts of the country by Monday morning, posted on X.

After Kenya suffered its longest countrywide power outage in recent years in August, Mr Murkomen pledged that a power outage at the airport would "not happen again".

Sunday's blackout affected two of the busiest JKIA terminals, with the airports authority explaining that the back-up generators serving those terminals had "failed to immediately activate".

Some Kenyans have suggested that the power cuts could be part of a plot to justify privatising the state-run electricity provider, Kenya Power and Lighting Company (KPLC).

Other Kenyans have disagreed, instead blaming KPLC's incompetence for the blackouts.

Power had been restored to most of the country by noon on Monday, except for some parts of Nairobi and the Coast region.

In its most recent update, Kenya Power said it was "working round the clock to restore normalcy to the remaining areas as soon as possible".

Energy Minister Davis Chirchir has attributed the outage to a powerline overload, which then caused a failure to the country's entire power network.

He said that "scheduled minimal load-shed-

ding" will be executed in areas with high electricity demand, a measure used in countries like South Africa to prevent system collapse during demand spikes.

It involves suspending power supply to different areas for a number of hours throughout the day.

The government will also build additional networks over the next 20 months to relieve the currently overloaded transmission lines and prevent future outages, Mr Chirchir added.

Kenya has suffered several national power outages in recent months, including on 11 November, 25 August, 4 March and in November and December last year.

PMS and AGHS to clash in U-16 Girls Division final

Princess Margaret School (PMS) and Antigua Girls High School (AGHS) will clash in the final of the Under-16 Girls Division of the Ministry of Sports Secondary Schools Football League in the New Year.

Both teams booked their place in the final by recording victories in the semi-finals at King George V Recreation Grounds.

Rolesha Humphreys scored in the 38th minute, and Kayla Melvin had a 48th-minute conversion to give the girls of Princess Margaret School a 2-0 victory against Clare Hall Secondary.

Na'jirah Wynaldum scored twice as Antigua Girls High School romped to a 4-0 victory against Jennings Secondary School.

Wynaldum had conversions in the 3rd and 53rd minutes; Nafisa Quashie opened the scoring with a 13th-minute conversion; and Kimoya Jacobs scored in the 35th minute for the AGHS.

Meanwhile, Princess Margaret School was presented with the trophy for winning the Under-16 Boys Division title on Friday.

Princess Margaret School won the title by finishing the competition unbeaten, playing to a 1-1 draw with All Saints Secondary in their final encounter



Coach Rolston 'Lexi' Phoenix (blue shirt) and forward Greg Williams holds the trophy after Princess Margaret won the Under-16 Boys Division title at the PMS playing field on Friday, December 8, 2023. (Photo by Elwin Francis)

at the Princess Margaret School playing field.

Greg Williams scored the equalizer for PMS in the 32nd minute after Jaden Joseph scored in the 25th minute to give All Saints Secondary a 1-0 lead.

Princess Margaret won the Under-16 Boys Division title by recording 31 points from their 11 matches. All Saints Secondary finished in fifth place with 22 points from its quota of 11 matches.

Clare Hall Secondary captured second place with 25 points, while Ottos Comprehensive claimed third place with 24 points.

Last year's champion, Antigua Grammar School, finished in fourth place with 23 points.

The defending champion, the Antigua and Barbuda Institute of Continuing Education (ABICE), secured a 3-3 draw with St. Joseph's Academy at the Potters playing field to claim the second qualifying spot in the East Zone and advance to the semi-finals of the Under-20 Boys Division.

Eroy Gonsalves scored twice, and Dejuan Francis had the other conversion for St. Joseph's Academy.

Denyah Looby had a

double conversion with goals in the 26th and 40th minutes, and Karique Knight scored in the 19th minute for ABCICE in their final encounter in the preliminary group stage of the competition.

The result ensured that ABICE finished second on goal difference in the east zone by advancing to 19 points from its quota of 10 matches and qualifying to the semi-finals with group winners All Saints Secondary.

Antoniell Campbell scored a hat-trick as Irene B. Williams Secondary

cont'd on pg 19

APUA Inet retains business volleyball league title

In a repeat of last year's final, defending champions APUA Inet defeated the Eastern Caribbean Amalgamated Bank (ECAB) to retain the Antigua and Barbuda Amateur Volleyball Association's (ABAVA) Business League title.

APUA Inet came from behind to secure their back-to-back titles at the indoor volleyball facility at the YMCA Sports Complex on Saturday night.

ECAB, who played unbeaten in winning their 10 games in the preliminary stage, suffered their first loss in this year's tournament after winning the opening set in the final 25-14.

APUA Inet recovered by clinching the second set 27-25 to draw level 1-1, and then won the third and deciding set 15-11 to retain the title.

Both teams advanced to the final after recording straight-set 2-0 victories in



APUA Inet team celebrate after winning the 2023 ABAVA Business Volleyball League title at the indoor stadium at the YMCA Sports Complex on Saturday, December 9, 2023. (Photo courtesy ABAVA)

their respective semi-finals.

APUA Inet prevailed 25-16, 25-21 against ICONS in the first semi-final, while ECAB cruised to a 25-16, 25-22 victory against Nate's Photography in the second encounter.

Nate's Photography captured third place in the annual tournament, which was contested by 11 teams this year.

Nate's Photography beat the ICONS 2-1 in the playoff for third place on Saturday.

They took the opening set 25-20, and the ICONS tied the match 1-1 by taking the second set 25-21. However, Nate's Photography rebounded by clinching the deciding third set 16-14 to win the match.

cont'd from pg 18

hammered Clare Hall Secondary 4-0 at Swetes in their final outing in the east zone.

Campbell had conversions in the 5th, 6th, and 65th minutes, and Shamar Anthony scored in the 61st minute for Irene. B Williams Secondary, which narrowly missed out on qualifying for the semi-finals.

Irene B. Williams finished their quota of 10 matches with 19 points, the same as ABICE, which qualified for the semi-finals by virtue of a superior goal difference.

All Saints Secondary, which claimed the runner-up spot in last year's competition, won the east zone by recording 22 points from its 10 matches.

West Zone winner Ottos Comprehensive School and second-place finishers Antigua State College are the other two teams to qualify for the semi-finals, which will be played in the New Year.

Ottos Comprehensive School defaulted to the Antigua Grammar School in their final encounter in the West Zone of the Under-20 Boys Di-

vision at the PMS playing field on Friday.

The result meant that Ottos Comprehensive finished at the top of the West Zone with 22 points from their quota of 10 matches, while Antigua Grammar School ended their campaign in the West Zone in fourth place with 18 points from its 10 matches.

Antigua State College finished second in the west zone by virtue of a superior goal difference to Princess Margaret School after both teams finished their quota of matches tied on 20 points.

CWI announces West Indies player central contract offers for 2023 to 2024

Cricket West Indies (CWI) has confirmed the West Indies Men's and Women's centrally contracted players for the upcoming 2023 to 2024 season.

The contracts are offered based on player performances during the 2022 to 2023 evaluation period following recommendations from the Selection Panels and approval by the CWI Board of Directors.

Four West Indies men have been offered contracts for the first time. They are left-arm spinner Gudakesh Motie, right-handed batter Keacy Carty, and left-handed batters Tagenarine Chanderpaul and Alick Athanaze.

For the West Indies Women's, two players have been offered contracts for the first time, all-rounders Zaida James and Sheneta Grimmond.

West Indies Men's Lead Selector, Dr. Desmond Haynes said, "With a busy year of cricket ahead, in all three formats, we have held several detailed discussions with the two head coaches on the brand of cricket they want to play.

"We are very clear in the direction we want to go. The players who have been offered contracts are among those who we expect to feature, as we look to build towards challenging for the top spot



Keacy Carty (left) and Alick Athanaze at the crease during the third and final CG United ODI against England at the Kensington Oval in Barbados on Saturday, December 9, 2023. (CWI Media)

when we host and compete in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024 on home soil.

"We also have away Test series in Australia and England – these are two major assignments whilst in the 50-over format we look to build a nucleus of players aimed towards the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2027."

West Indies Women's Lead Selector, Ann Browne-John said, "The selectors have identified a cadre of players who we believe can drive West Indies cricket forward.

"We have placed emphasis on the development

of the younger players, which we view as pivotal in the pathway to the international level. We have a number of high-profile bilateral series and major global events on the horizon, and with this in mind, we want to have our players prepared and ready for every occasion."

Jason Holder, Kyle Mayers, and Nicholas Pooran declined the offer of central contracts, but confirmed their availability for all West Indies T20 Internationals during the contract year.

Contracted Players - West Indies Men: Alick Athanaze, Kraigg

Brathwaite, Keacy Carty, Tagenarine Chanderpaul, Joshua Da Silva, Shai Hope, Akeal Hosein, Alzarri Joseph, Brandon King, Gudakesh Motie, Rovman Powell, Kemar Roach, Jayden Seales, and Romario Shepherd.

West Indies Women: Aaliyah Alleyne, Shemaine Campbelle, Shamillia Connell, Afy Fletcher, Cherry-Ann Fraser, Shabika Gajnabi, Jannillea Glasgow, Sheneta Grimmond, Chinelle Henry, Zaida James, Mandy Mangru, Hayley Matthews, Karishma Ramharack, Stafanie Taylor, and Rashada Williams.

SVF draw with Blackburn in second division league

Sea View Farm (SVF) and Blackburn Palace fought to a 1-1 draw in the latest round of matches in the Antigua and Barbuda Football Association's (ABFA) Second Division.

Markland Wright put Sea View Farm ahead with an 18th-minute conversion, and Diondre Harrigan scored the equalizer for Blackburn Palace in the 26th minute of the encounter at the Princess Margaret School playing field.

Belmont FC and TAMO FC recorded their second win in as many matches. Jahvier Joseph scored six goals or a double hat-trick to lead Belmont FC to a crushing 9-0 victory against the Young Warriors in the first game of a double header at the ABFA Technical Center.

Joseph scored in the 13th, 16th, 36th, 60th, 79th, and 85th minutes; Zamaal Greene had a 10th-minute conversion; Iandre Hodge scored in the 24th minute; and Jamal Spencer scored in the 63rd minute for Belmont FC.

Jaheim Grant scored four times to lead TAMO FC to a 7-2 victory against JSC Progressors in the second encounter.

Grant had conversions in the 36th, 71st, 78th, and 87th minutes; Adonijah Dyett had a conversion in the 55th minute; Keanu Lawrence scored in the 70th minute; and Carlus Stephens scored in the 89th minute for TAMO FC.

Jahmaya Gilkes scored both goals for the JSC Progressors in the 30th and 64th minutes.

Freemans Village were leading Urlings 4-0 when the match was stopped in the 75th minute by the referee because of bad light at the Urlings

playing field.

Kahlique Kellman scored twice with conversions in the 35th and 50th minutes; Jahmiah Daniel of Urlings scored an own goal in the 38th minute; and Darius Hector had a 52nd-minute conversion for Freemans Village.

The other scheduled second division encounter between Real Blizzard and Golden Grove was not played at the Golden Grove playing field because both teams showed up for the match wearing uniforms with identical colours.

Five Islands secured their first win in the ABFA's First Division by coming from behind to pull off a 3-1 victory against Police at the Five Islands playing field.

Hamilton Joseph scored twice for

Five Islands, who came from behind after Jahquan Joseph converted a penalty kick in the 19th minute to give the Police a 1-0 halftime lead.

Hamilton Joseph had conversions in the 69th and 81st minutes after teammate Samuel Semper scored the equalizer for Five Islands in the 54th minute.

The First Division will continue with four matches today. Bendals will face Balans at Bendals. Liberta Blackhawks will meet the Potters Tigers in the first game of a double header at the ABFA Technical Center at 4:30 pm.

Police and Fort Road will clash in the second game at 6:30 pm. Lion Hill will tackle the Young Lions at the Golden Grove playing field at 4:30 pm.



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West Indies name squad for T20I Series against England

The Cricket West Indies (CWI) Senior Selection Panel has named the 15-man squad to play against England in the first three matches of the five-match T20 International (T20I) series from December 12 to 21.

It marks the first time that both nations will be going head-to-head in a T20I series during the festive season as West Indies come home for Christmas. The West Indies T20I squad return to action after their thrilling 3-2 series win against India in August.

All-rounder Matthew Forde is selected for the T20I squad for the first time, having impressed with the new ball throughout the past two CPL seasons and this follows his recent impressive debut for the West Indies ODI squad.

Sherfane Rutherford is also selected and returns to the squad after last representing the regional side in January of 2020. Gudakesh Motie returns to the T20I squad after recovering from injury, which caused him to miss selection for the India series.

The T20I squad also sees the return of all-rounder Andre Russell, who last played for the West Indies at the 2021 ICC Men's T20 World Cup in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Johnson Charles, Obed



All-rounder Matthew Forde celebrates after claiming one of his three wickets on debut for the senior West Indies men's team during the first One-Day International against England at the Kensington Oval in Bridgetown, Barbados, on Saturday, December 9, 2023. (CWI Media)

McCoy, Odean Smith, and Oshane Thomas miss out on selection after featuring in the previous T20I squad.

Shai Hope becomes the vice-captain of the T20I team to add to his role as captain of the West Indies ODI team. The selection panel has the opportunity for squad adjustments ahead of the final two matches of the series to be played at the Brian Lara Cricket Academy on from December 19 to 21.

Speaking about the composition of the squad, CWI lead selector, Dr. Desmond Haynes said, "This will be

the final home T20I series for the West Indies in 2023, as they prepare to be one of the two host teams for the ICC Men's T20 World Cup in the West Indies and USA in June, 2024.

"We have selected a squad that we think gives us the best chance of success in that tournament. We will continue to assess in the lead up to the competition."

The West Indies and England will clash in the first T20I at the Kensington Oval in Barbados today at 6 pm.

The second and third T20 internationals will be played at the National Sta-

dium in Grenada on December 14 and 16 at 1:30 pm on both days.

The last two matches will take place at the Brian Lara Cricket Academy in Trinidad on December 19 and 21 at 4 pm on both days.

Full Squad: Rovman Powell (captain), Shai Hope (vice-captain), Roston Chase, Matthew Forde, Shimron Hetmyer, Jason Holder, Akeal Hosein, Alzarri Joseph, Brandon King, Kyle Mayers, Gudakesh Motie, Nicholas Pooran, Andre Russell, Sherfane Rutherford, and Romario Shepherd.

West Indies claim series victory over England

Keacy Carty hit a half-century and Matthew Forde took three wickets as West Indies claimed a four-wicket win against England in the rain-affected third CG United One-Day International at the Kensington Ovals in Barbados on Saturday to win the three-match series 2-1.

Saturday's victory was the West Indies first home ODI series victory over England since 1998.

Chasing a Duckworth-Lewis (DLS) revised target of 188 in 34 overs due to a few rain interruptions, West Indies appeared to have gotten off to the perfect start as Carty (50) combined with Alick Athanaze (45) for a 76-run partnership, but spinner Will Jacks tore through their middle order.

Jacks, who finished with three for 22, picked up three key wickets as West Indies slumped from 78 for one to 135 for six.

With his side reeling, Romario Shepherd hit a crucial knock of 41 to push them over the finish line with 14 balls to spare, though the all-rounder benefited from a massive slice of luck when he was dropped on 18 by Liam Livingstone on the boundary rope.

West Indies won the series 2-1, claiming a four-wicket victory in the first match before being beaten by six wickets in the second game.

Earlier on Saturday, Forde captured three for 29, taking the wickets of top-order batters Phil Salt, Jacks and Zak Crawley to leave England on 45 for three in an excellent spell on his



The West Indies team celebrate after claiming their series victory after the third One-Day International against England at the Kensington Oval in Brirgetown, Barbados, on Saturday, December 9, 2023. (CWI Media)

ODI debut.

"There's a lot of work that goes in behind the scenes. Me and the guys have been training hard in a camp before the series. Obviously, getting a victory is a dream come true on my debut," Forde said.

"It was special for me. I am 21 and I am living my dream. I thank all the guys for making it possible. They have welcomed me with open arms and it has been an easy camp so far."

England's innings was rescued by Ben Duckett, whose knock of 71 came off 73 balls, while Liam Livingstone was able to shrug off his recent struggles with the bat to contribute 45 runs.

Shepherd removed both Duckett and Livingstone in back-to-back overs to stymie England's progress, with the visitors posting a total of 206 in 40 overs.

The series victory, West Indies' first over England since 2007, will give the hosts a massive boost after they failed to qualify for the 50-overs World Cup.

For England, however, it will raise even more questions about the future of their ODI team, coming off the back of a disappointing World Cup exit.

"This is the start of a long journey for this side," said England captain Jos Buttler.

"There are some young guys who have got their first taste of ODI cricket and have hopefully learned lot and can go on and we can build something for the future."

The two sides next face each other in a five-match Twenty20 series. The first game of that series will be played at the Kensington Oval in Barbados today (Tuesday).