

A MESSAGE OF HOPE AND OPTIMISM

PM New Year's Day Address

Story on Page 2



HON. GASTON A. BROWNE
Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda

PM speaks to: Economic growth, the water situation and youth violence

Prime Minister Gaston Browne has delivered a very optimistic and upbeat New Year's Day message to the people of Antigua and Barbuda highlighting the nation's successes of the past twelve months and the expectations of continued economic buoyancy in the year ahead.

The prime minister said that was filled with 'great optimism' as together the nation has embarked 'up the pathway that is illuminated so brightly before us'.

"In the face of adversity, our nation has not only weathered the storm, but has emerged with resilience and strength, demonstrating the true spirit of our indomitable people," he remarked.

PM Browne recalled that several external financial institutions and agencies have concluded that Antigua and Barbuda experienced much growth in economic activity over the past twelve months.

The United Nations Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean reports that the economy achieved remarkable growth in 2023, soaring by 8.5%. This is keeping with the 8.6 percent average rate of growth for the past three years, as reported by the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank.

"Looking ahead, the projection for 2024 is equally favourable, with an expected growth rate of 8.2%," he highlighted.

The prime minister pointed to the several tourism projects that are in the pipeline ready to start this year and which are expected to provide the impetus for continued growth especially in the critical construction



Prime Minister Gaston Browne

sector. He even hinted that the country may have to resort to allowing in temporary labour to meet the demands of the expanding construction sector.

However, amidst his satisfaction with the economy of the past year and his expectations for the future, the prime minister said he is still not happy with the situation regarding the inconsistent supply of water.

"Do not believe for one second that I am not concerned about the inconsistency in the production and distribution of water. I am.

"We intend to make additional investments to increase the reliability of water production and distribution in 2024. We have indicated to the staff at APUA that we want consistent results and we will be holding them accountable to high standards of performance," he declared.

Turning to the issue of youth vio-

lence, PM Browne said he is obliged on this occasion, as the nation looks forward to a year of continuing progress, to sound a word of caution about increasing incidents of violence involving the youth.

"This matter saddens me, as I am sure it distresses all responsible adults in our beloved homeland. We have seen or heard of how youth violence has spiraled in other parts of the Caribbean, with homicides rising and parents terrified for their children. This phenomenon must find no welcome here," he stated.

He warned that all the nation's social and economic advancement could be blighted by the rise in youth violence.

"That's why all of us must come together to convert the energy and aspirations of our youth into focused and disciplined pursuit of better lives," he added.

Customs revenues top \$400 million mark

The Customs and Excise Division is reporting that revenue collections for 2023 have topped the 400-million-dollar mark for the first time in the nation's history.

Comptroller of Customs, Raju Boddu, said the figures at the end of last Friday December 29, the last working day of 2023, the collections totaled \$403 million.

“Customs revenues breached 400-million-dollar mark. We closed the year at \$403 million for the year 2023 in comparison to \$382.1 million in 2022. This represents a 5.5% growth over the previous year. The pre-COVID year 2019 was our previous high at \$389.8 million,” he told Point Express newspaper.

Put in dollar terms, the 5.5 percent increase is nearly \$21 million more than the collections total for all of 2022.

Boddu credits increased collections to several factors; notably the improved performance of the economy as well as better monitoring of implementing of the various processes of the division.

He said reaching an all-time high in terms of revenue collections for the Customs Division is quite



Comptroller of Customs, Raju Boddu

a remarkable milestone noting that there has been more enforcement of the rules as well as training of the staff to be more efficient in the collection exercise.

The training allows the customs officers to be better equipped to handle cross-border trade and trade facilitation. Additionally, he said the figures reflect the state of the economy.

According to Boddu there is much buoyancy in the economy with more and more people importing items, which is a reflection that many persons in the society are benefiting from the increased economic activity.

He describes the Customs Division as a ‘facilitator’ of the econom-

ic growth. “We facilitate trade and economic activity; we are not the policeman,” he explained.

AUCTION NOTICE

<u>REGISTRATION SECTION</u>	<u>BLOCK</u>	<u>PARCEL</u>
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Instructed by **ACB MORTGAGE AND TRUST COMPANY LIMITED**, I shall sell by **PUBLIC AUCTION** on Tuesday the 16th day of January 2024 at 11:00am the above residential property at Buckley's Heights.

The property is under the ownership of **LOREAN DENISE ROBERTS (aka DENISE LOREAN ROBERTS)**. The land is a 10,890 sq. ft. (0.25 acre) plot with an approximate 3,841 sq. ft., 2-storey with a partial basement reinforced concrete building with 4 bedrooms and 3 bathrooms.

The property is in a quiet residential area with a commanding view of the surrounding area.

The Auction shall be held on site.

Details of the Auction may be obtained from **Mr. Trevor Santos, Public Auctioneer** at telephone numbers: **464-7653** and **562-7653**.

Dated this the 15th day of December 2023

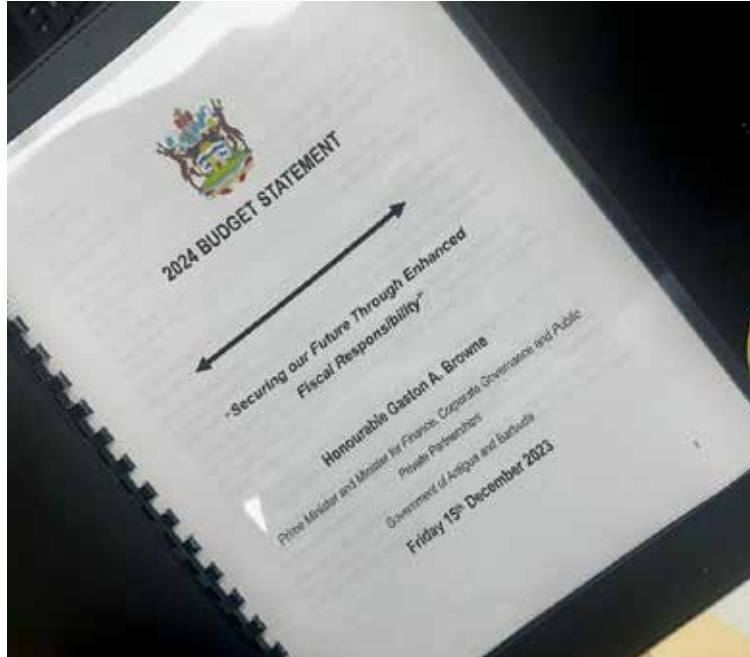
Trevor Santos
Licensed Auctioneer

Budget 2024 takes effect

The 1.9-billion-dollar National Budget for Antigua and Barbuda for the financial year, 2024, is now in effect as parliament mandated that it takes effect from January 1, 2024.

The 2024 Appropriation Bill was signed into law by the Governor General, Sir Rodney Williams, after the bill was approved by both houses of parliament in late December.

With the installation of the new National Budget, there are a number of things that also take effect. The two percent increase on the ABST, a ten percent increase on the taxes on alcohol and tobacco as well



as a higher rate of taxes for properties valuing more than \$3 million all begin immediately.

The government is

forecasting continued economic growth for Antigua and Barbuda in 2024. This is based on projected growth in the hotels sector

from the point of view of increased occupancy as well as the start-up of several hotel projects.

This is expected to give a boost to the construction sector, the second leading contributor to economic growth after tourism.

The government is also promising increased spend on infrastructural development as it makes a concerted effort to repair and upgrade the country's primary, secondary and tertiary road networks.

Education will receive the biggest slice of the budget followed by the Ministry of Health and the Environment.

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January salaries to reflect full increase

Public sector workers who have been yearning for salary and wage increases for some time, will be happy to learn that the remaining nine percent of the 14 percent increase agreed to by the government and their bargaining agents, will go into effect from January 1, 2024.

Government sources say the new increases in salaries and wages

for public servants will be reflected when they receive their January salaries at the end of the month.

Weekly paid workers will see the new wages reflected on their first payment following January 1, 2024.

There have been speculations that the remaining nine percent increase would have been phased in by the government over a period of

time. But government sources have dispelled those suggestions indicating that the full nine percent will be added to wages and salaries from January 1.

The government had paid a five percent increase to all public servants at the end of 2021 ahead of the conclusion of the negotiations process.

Cabinet approved re-purposing of lands at agricultural station

The Cabinet has agreed to the re-purposing of several acres of land that were formally part of the Dunbar's Agricultural Station into lands for housing and commercial development.

Agriculture Minister E.P Chet Greene said the decision by the Cabinet was made several months ago in recognition of the fact that the area of Friar's Hill Road stretching all the way to the round-about on the North Shore Road is being transformed into a combined residential and commercial area.

In keeping with this development, the Cabinet agreed that the lands that formerly formed part of the agricultural station should be turned over to the National Housing and Urban Renewal and Development Company (NHURDC) to undertake housing devel-

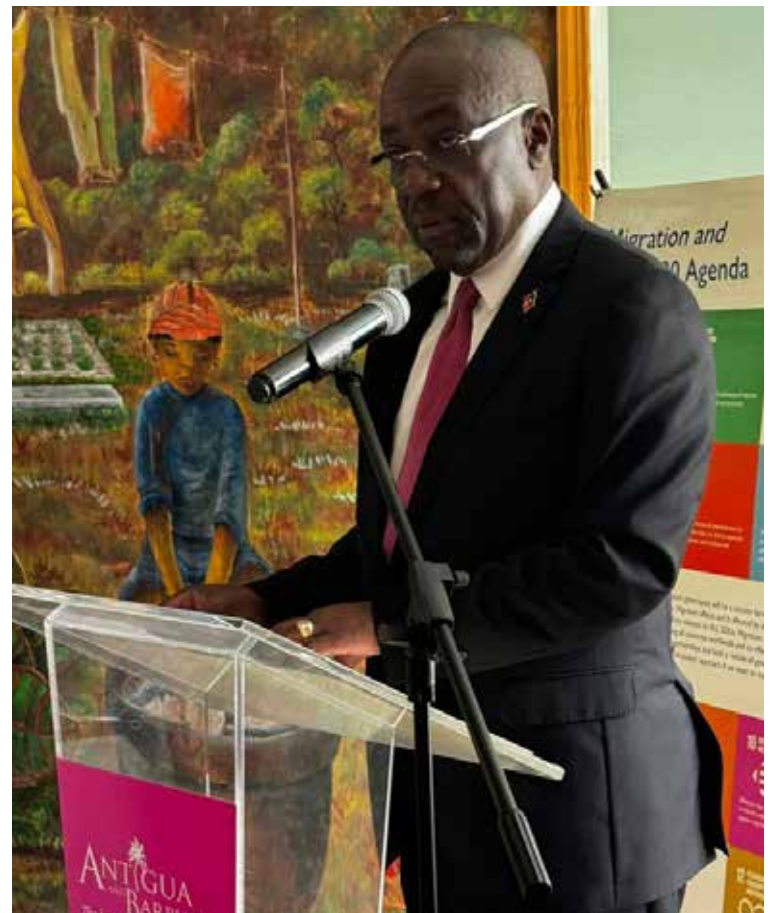
opment. Some of the lands will also be made available to private sector developers for commercial use.

The total acreage of lands involved in the transfer is 40 acres.

This comes as the NHURDC is currently spearheading a 'housing revolution' in the country with developments taking part in several areas including Oliver's, Bolans/Jennings, Lightfoot and Paynters.

This is in response to a huge demand for quality homes in the country which NHURDC has been mandated to meet in an expeditious and cost-effective manner.

Greene added that the Cabinet also mandated that the agricultural sector should receive a similar amount of acreage in another location to allow it to



Agriculture Minister E.P Chet Greene

continue the work that was being done at the Dunbar's Station.

Clearing of the lands at

Dunbar's has started with the full knowledge of the staff at the agricultural station.

Maurice Merchant heads list of King's New Year's Honours awardees

Three outstanding individuals have been included among the King's New Year's Honours for 2024.

Among them is Maurice Merchant, the Director General of Communications in the Office of the Prime Minister. He was awarded the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in the Civil Division for service to Antigua and Barbuda.

Merchant has the distinction of serving as head of communications for three prime ministers.

Additionally, Merchant concurrently serves as Chairman of the Prime Minister's Scholarship Programme, through

which thousands of nationals have been awarded scholarships to pursue higher learning in educational institutions both at home and across the globe.

He has also served as Chairman of Christian Children's Fund programme in the Gray's Green community that implemented the first school uniform and school meals programme at the Greenbay Primary School in the 1990's serving over 300 students on a daily basis.

Merchant also has the honour of being the longest serving chairman of the Carnival Development Committee, now the National Festivals Commis-



Maurice Merchant

sion. He performed that role for seven years. He has also served as chairman of the major Carnival sub-committees.

He has served in various capacities in both public and private sector entities as well as with church-based groups and institutions.

Educator and Cultural icon, Rudolph Davis was named a Member of the British Empire (MBE) for service to youth and community development in Antigua and Barbuda. Davis has been a member of one of Antigua and Barbuda's oldest cultural groups,

the Community Players and his rich baritone voice has been a feature at many public and private events.

He has been principal of the St. Joseph's Academy, one of the country's top educational institutions and he has trained many of its students to participate in the annual teenage pageant of Carnival where invariably they have emerged as winners.

The third person honoured is Aide De Camp to the Governor General, Assistant Superintendent, Dale Mercury, who received the King's Police Medal.

NOTICE

As part of the overall improvement in the visiting experience to the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, effective Monday 1st January 2024, the opening hours are Mondays to Fridays 9 am to 4 pm and Saturdays 9 am to 1 pm.

An entrance fee of US\$5.00 or EC\$13.00 is being levied to support the maintenance and ongoing restoration of the Cathedral and its environs.

Visitors are asked to please pay attention to, and comply with, the relevant signs placed in various places on the property for their safety.

Schools desirous of visiting the Cathedral are asked to contact the Deanery office (462-0820 or via email – cathedral@apuainet.ag) at least 48 hours before the visit. We express thanks and appreciation as we work towards making visits to the Cathedral a very satisfying experience.

APUA sets timeline for completion of underground conversion

The Antigua Public Utilities Authority has set the end of the first quarter of 2024 for the completion of the conversion from overhead to underground distribution of a portion of

its system along the Friar's Hill Road.

In a statement, APUA said the affected area includes the distribution network from Government House to the junction at

the WIOC Pond.

“The Ministry of Housing, Works, Lands, & Urban Development has commenced the National Highway & Community Beautification Project on

Friars Hill Road, in which the Antigua Public Utilities Authority was consulted on the feasibility of the project along with the timeline for the removal of the overhead lines.

“During the previously concluded road rehabilitation project, the APUA Electricity, Telecommunications, and Water Business Units would have made provisions for and altered infrastructural upgrades to allow for more efficient maintenance operations,” a statement from the authority noted.

According to the statement, as part of these changes, preparations were made by the Electricity and Telecommunications Business Units for an overhead to underground conversion. The process involves installing new underground cables, transformers, and other necessary equipment.

“The project is a significant undertaking that aims to minimize power outages caused by inclement weather conditions and improve the overall resilience of the electricity network.

The APUA Electricity Business Unit anticipates that the energizing of the underground distribution system is anticipated to take place by the end of the first quarter of 2024,” the statement concluded.



Central Board of Health Community Update



Fogging Schedule On Antigua January 1st to 5th 2024

The Central Board of Health wishes to advise the general public that as part of the Mosquito Control Program for the adult *Aedes aegypti* Mosquito, the Vector Control Unit will be conducting fogging operations in the following areas commencing **4:30am**

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri
4:30am	Five Islands	Five Islands	Cooks Estate Denfields Community	Cooks Estate Union Rd Hatton	Hatton

Please take note of the following:

- Persons with respiratory illnesses are kindly asked to take the necessary precautionary measures
 - Motorists are kindly asked to take caution
- In the event of inclement weather, such as rain or high winds, fogging will not be performed. Fogging will then resume on the next available day until the areas are completed.
- Residents are also encouraged to prevent the breeding of mosquitoes on their premises and to protect themselves from mosquito bites.

Contact the Vector Control Unit at **764-4327** for more information.



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Opinion



Smallness and separateness will not do

By Sir Ronald Sanders

As we stand at the threshold of 2024, gazing upon the dawn of a new year with uncertainty, the time has come for a profound reflection on the trajectory of the 15 Caribbean nations constituting the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

This juncture prompts the nations of the region to take stock of the strides made, recognize the opportunities neglected in the pursuit of individual sovereignty, and confront the dual challenge of advancing domestic well-being while strengthening their global standing.

In this pivotal moment, it is evident that the more pressing threats to CARICOM's progress emanate not solely from climate change, but primarily from the lack of social cohesion and political consensus both within CARICOM nations and between them.

The choice before CARICOM countries now is the same one that has always confronted them: either pursue a closer union that would make them stronger together or a march alone, knowing they would assuredly be weaker, but hoping gambling on good fortune to muddle through.

So far, CARICOM countries, or at least, their political leadership, have

gambled on their ingenuity to maintain the trappings of sovereignty while conceding autonomy to external forces, which, for one reason or another, prop them up, but maintain their dependence.

Since the 1960s, when Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, and Barbados embarked on separate pathways of independence, they and the other CARICOM countries that followed them, have had fluctuating periods of economic and social development, but none of them has become independent. They have paid a steep price for cherishing individual sovereignty, manifested in their smallness and in their lack of capacity to exercise influence in the world.

The reality is stark: despite commendable strides on the domestic front, CARICOM nations remain on the fringes of global significance. Economic growth, for the majority, is stunted, shackled by burdensome levels of unsustainable debt. External shocks, such as the reverberations of the COVID-19 pandemic and the volatility of commodity prices, further strain their fiscal capacities.

The opportunity missed lies in the aftermath of the dissolution of the West Indian Federation, as each



Sir Ronald Sanders

nation opted for the allure of self-reliance. They made the mistake that the United States of America did not. As US historian Carol Berkin put it, the 13 former British colonies formed a union "on the firm conviction that a strong government representing all the peoples of a Federal State was the surest path to economic growth and prosperity, to civil law and order, and to winning the respect and recognition from foreign nations necessary to insure America's continued independence". And so, it turned out to be.

While over the years, in recognition of their weakness, CARICOM countries have established joint institutions and collective machinery, they have fallen short of creating a legally binding, political umbrella

that would be an effective instrument for dealing with critical domestic and foreign challenges.

Importantly, CARICOM leaders failed to do what the founding fathers of the US knew to be essential. They failed to do the hard work of governance which is to create a nationalism built on shared identity as citizens of a united Caribbean. Thus, the pursuit of separate sovereignties still hampers the strength of CARICOM countries in economic, financial, and diplomatic arenas.

None should believe that periods of economic good fortune that reflects itself in episodes of economic growth are sufficient when underlying structures of weakness remain. Even-

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tually, it is the fundamental weaknesses not the occasional successes that determine national viability.

CARICOM needs to reignite the flame of genuine independence. To do so CARICOM countries must reevaluate the concept of a Caribbean Single Market and Economy, fostering regional cooperation that transcends national borders.

In addition to external challenges, CARICOM countries face a significant hurdle in the form of internal political rivalries both within individual states and among the member nations. The relentless pursuit of political power and influence often takes precedence over the crucial need for social cohesion and national consensus—foundational elements for achieving fair and balanced regional development.

While diverse opinions on policy matters are essential in democratic societies, the detrimental practice of dismissing opposing views solely for narrow political gains undermines the very essence of progress. It becomes imperative to recognize that prioritizing regionalism over nationalism is the key to fostering growth, fortifying economies, and building the necessary capacity for true independence.

A looming concern threatening Caribbean stability is the alarming surge in gang-related violence, prominently evident in Haiti. The cultivation of gangs is not merely a local predicament but a symptom of organized crime seeking to destabilize the Caribbean as hubs for illicit activities. Addressing this menace necessitates a united front, built upon social cohesion and national consensus, lest it becomes an insurmountable impediment to economic and political integration.

The time is opportune for leaders across CARICOM, spanning government, opposition parties, the private sector, unions, and academia, to reignite the vision of deeper integration.

The emphasis should unequivocally be to pursue regional development and national interests on parallel tracks, recognising that each can contribute to the other. Pursuing national concerns to the exclusion of regional development is self-defeating.

Except for Haiti, the lessons ingrained in CARICOM's shared history since the 1930s, underscore the significance of interdependence, preserving a distinctive Caribbean identity, and collectively acquiring the capital and capacity requisite for the region to stand as a robust, respected, and influential area globally.

The road ahead demands a paradigm shift in our political culture — one that places social cohesion and national interest at the forefront. By transcending political rivalries and fostering a spirit of collaboration, CARICOM nations can harness their

collective strength to navigate the complexities of 2024 and beyond.

The vision of independence within interdependence remains an attainable beacon, promising a future of prosperity for the diverse and dynamic nations that constitute the Caribbean Community.

It is not beyond the creativity of the region to create a constitutional mechanism in which CARICOM countries can assign to a central agency, composed of representatives of their states, to sustain unity that benefits all. Separateness and smallness will not do.

(The writer is Antigua and Barbuda's Ambassador to the US and the OAS. He is also the current President of the OAS Permanent Council. The views expressed are entirely his own. For comments and previous commentaries, see: www.sirronaldsanders.com)

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Google settles \$5bn lawsuit for ‘private mode’ tracking

By Annabelle Liang

Google has agreed to settle a US lawsuit claiming it invaded the privacy of users by tracking them even when they were browsing in “private mode”.

The class action sought at least \$5bn (£3.9bn) from the world’s go-to search engine and parent company Alphabet.

Large technology firms have faced increased scrutiny of their practices in the US and beyond.

Lawyers representing Google and its users did not immediately respond to the BBC’s requests for comment.

US District Judge Yvonne Gonzalez Rogers put a scheduled trial for the case on hold in California on Thursday, after lawyers said they had reached a preliminary settlement.

Judge Rogers had rejected Google’s bid to have the case dismissed earlier this year, saying she could not agree that users consented to allowing Google to collect information on

their browsing activity.

The terms of the settlement were not disclosed. However, lawyers are expected to present a formal settlement for the court’s approval by February 2024.

The class action, which was filed by law firm Boies Schiller Flexner in 2020, claimed that Google had tracked users’ activity even when they set the Google Chrome browser to “Incognito” mode and other browsers to “private mode”.

It said this had turned Google into an “unaccountable trove of information” on user preferences and “potentially embarrassing things”.

It added that Google could not “continue to engage in the covert and unauthorized data collection from virtually every American with a computer or phone”.

Google said it had been upfront about the data it collected when users viewed in private mode, even if many users assumed otherwise.

The search engine said the col-

lection of search history, even in private viewing mode, helped site owners “better evaluate the performance of their content, products, marketing and more”.

Incognito mode within Google’s Chrome browser gives users the choice to search the internet without their activity being saved to the browser or device. But the websites visited can use tools such as Google Analytics to track usage.

Google faces other lawsuits challenging its search and digital advertising practices.

Earlier this month, the technology giant said it would pay \$700m to settle a lawsuit brought by a group of US states that accused Google of quashing competition to its Play Store on Android devices.

This came days after it lost a US court battle to Fortnite maker Epic Games. The video game company sued Google in 2020 for unlawfully making its app store dominant over rivals.

**TUES - FRIDAY
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Regional News



Incoming CARICOM Chairman says regional security a critical matter

Guyana will Chair the Conference of Heads of Government for the period January 1 to June 30, 2024, as President Dr Irfaan Ali prepares to take the helm as CARICOM Chairman.

President Ali in a statement as incoming Chairman of CARICOM says the New Year brings renewed possibilities to continue targeted programmes to advance CARICOM's strategic priorities with the objective of pursuing the Region's development goals, and striving for peace and prosperity across the Caribbean Community.

He says: "Regional security is an increasingly critical matter. We live in a world where peace is challenged from one corner of the universe to the next. We ended 2023, however, with CARICOM's robust role in assuring the rule of international peace and security in our corner on the world and ensuring that Latin America and the Caribbean as a whole remained a Zone of Peace. We shall continue 2024 with this respect for international law. We all remain committed to peacefully and by legal means resolving border controversies."

CARICOM will continue to address crime and violence including combatting the illegal weapons trade through its "War on Guns" campaign. President

Ali says CARICOM will leave no stone unturned in efforts to return Member State, Haiti, to peace and stability as he maintains the Region must remain a Zone of Peace.

Turning to the issue of the Region's food and nutrition security, President Ali says despite adverse challenges, including climate change, CARICOM Member States have made steady progress towards achieving the '25% by 2025' target to reduce the Region's food import bill.

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President of Guyana, Dr Irfaan Ali.

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Ghost guns (Photo:CMC)

American jailed for trafficking 'ghost guns' to Dominican Republic

CMC – A 36-year-old United States national has been sentenced to more than five years in jail for trafficking over 100 “ghost guns” to the Dominican Republic,’ the US attorney for the Southern District of New York, Damian Williams, has said.

Williams, the son of a Jamaican-born physician, said that Robert Alcantara was sentenced by US District Judge Vernon S. Broderick after he pleaded guilty to conspiring to traffic firearms and conspiring to laun-

der money.

“Robert Alcantara alone trafficked over 100 untraceable ghost guns to the Dominican Republic. The proliferation of unlawful ghost guns is a threat to public safety, and our response is clear: we will not let up,” said Williams.

According to the charging documents and other filings and statements made in court, Alcantara from 2017 until January 2022, operated a “ghost gun” factory out of his home in Rhode Island.

The indictment states Alcantara purchased ghost gun kits at gun shows and other places, and then “machined the kits into working firearms.

“Once he had completed the untraceable firearms, he exported and sold them to the Dominican Republic. Most of those guns were handguns, but a number were rifles,” according to the indictment, noting that Alcantara and others then laundered the proceeds of his gun sales.

The indictment further

states that, on November 20, 2021, “Alcantara was stopped in his vehicle in possession of kits to build approximately 45 ghost guns.

“Alcantara was interviewed by law enforcement agents and stated that he was planning to turn the 45 kits into working firearms, and he had 50 additional similar ghost guns at his home.”

In addition to the prison term, Williams said Alcantara was sentenced to three years of supervised release.

Williams praised the “outstanding investigative work” of the US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives and the US Department of Commerce’s Office of Export Enforcement, New York Field Office as well as other US law enforcement agencies for their assistance in the case.

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He says the agricultural sector will continue to be supported with expected innovations and crucial to this initiative is the need to improve regional transportation which will remain one of CARICOM’s top priorities.

Outgoing Chairman, Dominica’s Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit was

thanked for his leadership over the last six months.

President Ali says Guyana looks forward to welcoming all CARICOM Heads of State and Government to Georgetown in February 2024, where it will host the 46th Regular Meeting of the Conference and continue the Community’s activities to mark CARICOM’s 50th Anniversary.

Mexican villagers who killed extortionists 'acted in self-defence'

By Vanessa Buschschlüter

Mexican villagers who killed 10 members of the notorious Familia Michoacana criminal gang will not be facing any charges after prosecutors ruled they had acted in self-defence.

Prosecutors said that the residents of Texcapilla had come "under constant threat" from the gang, which had tried to extort money from farmers.

They were summoned to a football pitch where gang members opened fire on them.

But they fought back with weapons including shotguns and machetes.

Ten members of the Familia Michoacana and four of the locals were killed in the deadly fight which followed. Seven more people were injured.

In the weeks since what locals have dubbed "the massacre on the football field", the residents of Texcapilla have been telling the authorities how the Familia Michoacana had wielded its power in the village.

While local business people have long had to pay "protection money" to the gang, the Familia Michoacana has extended its extortion racket to those who work the land.

Gang members demanded that farmers pay a fee to the group for every square metre of the fields



Hundreds of police have been deployed to Texcapilla after the deadly incident.

they planted, a sort of criminal ground rent.

But after a particularly poor harvest this year, local farmers tried to negotiate a reduced fee in a meeting held on 7 December, to no avail.

It was after this failed meeting that the gang ordered the farmers to gather at the football pitch for what sounded like a noon showdown the next day.

Shortly before that meeting, the farmers agreed to stand up to the gang and refuse to pay altogether.

Prosecutors from the state of Mexico, where Texcapilla is located, have determined that the gang opened fire first and that the farmers defended themselves with "the tools

of their trade", which included sickles, machetes and shotguns.

Among those killed was reportedly the leader of the Familia Michoacana in Mexico state, a man known as "El Payaso", Spanish for "the clown".

While the farmers appear to have scored a victory on the day, locals have been living in fear of reprisals since the deadly confrontation.

They are particularly concerned about the fate of 14 villagers, among them four children, who disappeared in the days after the confrontation.

One of them was abducted from the hospital where he was being treated for an injury sustained during the fight with the

Familia Michoacana.

Nine others, including the four missing children, were seized as they were travelling by car in the area some days later.

It is feared they have been taken by the Familia Michoacana.

Hundreds of members of the National Guard have been deployed to the area to protect the villagers.

The governor of Mexico state, Delfina Gómez, has promised residents that officials will not abandon them: "I tell you, you are not alone, we are with you."

Security officials say they want to prevent the emergence of a vigilante force, as has happened in the past in other rural regions of Mexico.

Israel says war in Gaza expected to continue throughout 2024

By George Wright

The Israeli military has said it expects the conflict in Gaza to continue throughout 2024.

In a new year's message, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) spokesman said troop deployments were being adjusted to prepare for "prolonged fighting".

Daniel Hagari said some troops - especially reservists - would be withdrawn to allow them to regroup.

"These adaptations are intended to ensure the planning and preparation for continuing the war in 2024," he said.

"The IDF must plan ahead out of an understanding that there will be additional missions and the fighting will continue the rest of the year."

He said that some reservists would leave Gaza "as soon as this week" to allow them to "re-energise ahead of the coming operations".

Some 21,978 people - mostly women and children - have been killed in Gaza since 7 October, according to the Hamas-run health ministry. Its latest update said 56,697 people in Gaza had been wounded over the same period.

The figures included 156 people killed and 246 injured in the last 24 hours, the ministry added.

The latest war was trig-



More than 21,800 people have been killed in Gaza - mostly children and women.

gered by an unprecedented cross-border attack by Hamas gunmen on southern Israel on 7 October, in which 1,200 people were killed - most of them civilians - and about 240 others taken hostage.

Israel continued its bombardment of Gaza up until the end of what has been a dark year in the region.

The IDF said it killed a senior Hamas commander involved in the 7 October attack, Adil Mismah, in an overnight strike on the town of Deir al-Balah.

The Gaza health ministry reported at least 48 deaths in overnight bombing in Gaza City. Witnesses told the AFP news agency that another strike killed 20 people sheltering at Al-Aqsa University in the city's west.

Another strike on Monday morning was said to have killed at least 10 people in the al-Maghazi refugee camp.

The BBC has not been able to verify the latest battlefield reports.

A resident of northern Gaza displaced to the south of the enclave highlighted the contrast between New Year celebrations around the world and the situation in Gaza.

"Tonight the sky in world countries will be lit by firecrackers, and joyful laughs will fill the air," Zainab Khalil, 57, told Reuters on Sunday.

"In Gaza our skies are now filled with Israeli missiles and tank shells that land on innocent, homeless civilians."

The UN says 85% of Gaza's 2.4 million people

- almost two million - have now been displaced.

Thousands of doses of vaccines against childhood diseases, including polio and measles, have been delivered to Gaza, to help tackle a growing health emergency, Reuters reports.

The news agency quoted the Palestinian health ministry as saying that supplies estimated to cover vaccinations for up to 14 months had entered through the Rafah border crossing with Egypt.

Speaking from Rafah, Ayadil Saparbekov from the World Health Organization told the BBC that vaccines were crucial because of the conditions in which Gazans were living.

"Thousands of people live together in overcrowded camps with very poor
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Sports News



Success for Garden Stars, Willikies and Hoppers in Premier League

Garden Stars, Willikies, and Greenbay Hoppers all recorded wins in the Antigua and Barbuda Football Association's (ABFA) Premier Division League on Saturday.

Gardens Stars claimed their second win in four games by snatching a one-nil victory against Swetes in the first game of a triple header at the ABFA Technical Center.

Following a goalless first half,

Karique Knight scored the only goal of the match in the 80th minute for the Garden Stars to advance to six points after losing their first two matches.

Swetes remain in the lower half of the standings with just one point after losing for the fourth time in five matches.

Willikies recorded their first win in four matches by snatching a

2-1 victory against former Premier League champions Empire in the second game on Saturday.

Greenbay Hoppers claimed their fourth win in five games by grabbing a 4-2 victory against SAP in Saturday's feature match.

The result lifted Hoppers to 12 points, while SAP remain on seven points after losing for the second time in five matches.

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water conditions, poor hygiene and very poor sanitation - these are all breeding grounds for various diseases," he said.

Israeli Prime Minister

Benjamin Netanyahu said on Saturday that "the war is at its height".

"We are fighting on all of the fronts," he said. "We have huge success but we also have painful cases.

Achieving victory will require time.

"As the (army) chief of staff has said, the war will continue for many more months."

Israel's far-right Fi-

nance Minister Bezalel Smotrich called for Palestinians to leave Gaza and make way for Israelis who could "make the desert bloom".

The official line from the Israeli government is that Gazans will eventually be able to return to their homes, though it has yet to outline how or when this will be possible.

Air raid sirens sounded in Tel Aviv and southern Israel as it saw in the new year, with Israeli missile defence systems intercepting rockets fired from Gaza, AFP reported.

One man who was in Tel Aviv celebrating the new year with friends said: "I was terrified, like it was the first time I saw missiles. It's terrifying."

Hamas's military wing, the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, said in a video posted on social media that it carried out both attacks.

They said M90 rockets were used in "response to the massacres of civilians" perpetrated by Israel.

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LICB plans to switch Hurricanes' home base from St. Kitts to Antigua

The Leeward Islands Cricket Board (LICB) has announced it will be relocating the home base of its Cricket West Indies (CWI) regional franchise team, the LI Hurricanes, from St. Kitts to Antigua and Barbuda later this year.

According to a media release, "The LICB release stated that while the operational base of the Leeward Islands Hurricanes will relocate to Antigua and Barbuda, St. Kitts will now become the home of women's cricket in the sub-region.

"The expansion to Antigua will include the franchise men's team using Antigua as their main training venue, while St. Kitts will become the home of Leeward Islands women's cricket.

"From a cricketing perspective, we highly anticipate that this strategic expansion will create greater opportunities for our players across our eight (8) territories, facilitate the increase in cricket being played, and remove women's cricket from being in the shadows of men's cricket."

However, the LICB said "the plan will take place at the start of the second quarter of 2024. The Hurricanes will continue to train and play matches in St. Kitts, to include the start of the CWI 2024 4-Day Tournament."



The Leeward Islands Hurricanes squad which claimed the runners-up spot at the 2023 regional CWI Super50 Cup one-day tournament in Trinidad. (Photo courtesy LICB)

The LICB also stated that future international matches will continue to be hosted at Warner Park in St. Kitts.

The release stated that "The Leeward Islands Cricket Board Ltd. (LICB) is the body responsible for the administration, management, and development of cricket across eight (8) territories, namely: Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, the British Virgin Islands (BVI), Montserrat, St. Kitts, Nevis, St. Maarten, and the United States Virgin Islands (USVI).

"Since the inception of the Leeward Islands Hurricane Franchise in 2016, its operational base has been

in St. Kitts, the headquarters of the Leeward Islands Cricket Board, but a strategic expansion is on the horizon.

"The Leeward Islands Cricket Board has made a strategic decision to expand its operation to all eight territories, with Antigua and Barbuda being the immediate focus."

It adds that "in the recently concluded CWI Super 50 Tournament, the LI Hurricanes placed second, which showcased our rising potential. LICB's goals are to improve and develop the standard of cricket within the Leeward Islands, to increase the amount of cricket that

is being played within the region, and to bring youth and women's cricket to the forefront."

According to the release, "Mr. Enoch Lewis, President of the LICB, said that his board is focused on bringing about ongoing improvement to Leeward Islands cricket, and the action being taken is with this objective in mind.

"Administratively, the board will continue to pursue the registration of its operations in the remaining six (6) territories in the future and looks forward to the positive benefits that this proactive decision will bring to Leeward Islands cricket."

Australia's Warner retires from ODIs as well as Tests

SYDNEY (Reuters) - Australia opener David Warner said on Monday he had decided to call time on his One-Day International (ODI) and Test match careers to spend more time with his family.

The 37-year-old, a key member of the Australia team that won the 50-overs World Cup for the sixth time in India last year, will play his 112th and final test against Pakistan at his home Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG) starting on Wednesday.

"I said at the World Cup that I wanted to get through that ... but I've decided to also announce my retirement from that format," Warner told reporters at the SCG.

"It'll help the one-day team move along a bit ... but if they need me, they know where I am," said an emo-



David Warner

tional Warner, with his wife and children also present.

Warner scored 22 centuries and 6,932 runs at an average of 45.30 over 161 one-day internationals after his debut in January 2009, winning two World Cups in the format.

Australia's victory against India in the Nov. 19 final of the World Cup last year remains Warner's last ODI outing. He was Australia's leading scorer in the tournament.

Among his compatriots, only Ricky Ponting (30) has

more ODI hundreds than Warner's 22.

A sought-after name in franchise cricket, the aggressive opener remains available for Australia in the game's shortest format and is hopeful of playing the T20 World Cup in June.

Five Islands stay atop of First Division League

Five Islands have remained unbeaten leaders of the Antigua and Barbuda Football Association's (ABFA) First Division League.

Five Islands won for the fourth time in five games by securing a 2-1 victory against the Liberta Black Hawks at the King George V Recreational Grounds during the latest round of matches.

Jamal Joseph scored in the 12th minute, and Jaheim Jeremy had an 88th-minute conversion for Five Islands, while Jaden Joseph scored in the 30th minute for the Liberta Black Hawks.

The result meant that Five Islands will remain at the top of the 11-team round-robin competition by advancing to 13 points, while the Liberta Black Hawks remain third from the cellar on three points after losing for the third time in four encounters.

Attacking Saints and Fort Road also recorded wins in the First Division League.

The Attacking Saints claimed their third win in four matches by hammering Bendals five-nil at the Bendals playing field to move into second place behind Five Islands with 10 points.

Fort Road ended a run of three consecutive defeats by romping to a 5-2 victory against the Young Lions of Old Road at the ABFA Technical Center.

Potters Tigers and Lion Hill fought to a 2-2 draw at the ABFA Technical Center. Joshua Daniel converted in the 77th minute, and Brian Davis scored in added time (90+1 minute) for the Potters Tigers.

Both teams scored in the first half as Bolans and Police battled to a 1-1 draw in their encounter at the Jen-

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Players of the Fort Road women's football team. (File photo)

Fort Road remain unbeaten in women's league

Fort Road have maintained their unbeaten run during the fourth round of matches in the Antigua and Barbuda Football Association's (ABFA) Women's League.

Fort Road secured their

seventh consecutive win by romping to a six-nil drubbing of All Saints United at the ABFA Technical Center.

The result meant that Fort Road continue to lead the competition with 21 points from seven matches,

while All Saints United remain in the cellar with three points after losing for the sixth time in seven outings.

Knockout champions Cutting Edge prevailed 2-0 against Wadadli United in a contentious women's di-

vision encounter, which resulted in three players being sent off after receiving red cards for fighting during the match.

Cutting Edge remain in second place by advancing to 10 points after securing their third win in six matches.

Wadadli United remain in third place on nine points after suffering their third loss in six encounters.

cont'd from pg 20

nings playing field. Jaric Richards put Bolans ahead with a 36th-minute strike, and the Police equalized via Floyd Prince's 40th-minute conversion.

The result allowed Bolans to pick up their first points after losing their previous three matches, while the Police moved on to five points after drawing for the second time in four encounters.

Grenades maintain perfect run in Premier League

Reigning champions Sandals Inet Jennings Grenades have continued their dominance of the nation's top domestic football league by extending their unbeaten run to five matches on Sunday.

Grenades continue to lead the Antigua and Barbuda Football Association's (ABFA) Premier Division after completing a 4-1 drubbing of Pigotts Bullets in the feature match of a triple header at the ABFA Technical Center.

Leaus Henville and Quinton Griffith each scored twice as the Grenades advanced to 15 points to remain at the top of the 15-team round-robin competition.

Henville struck in the 5th and 10th minutes, while Griffith's conversions came in the 42nd and 52nd minutes. Kimon Harrigan scored a late consolation goal for the Pigotts Bullets in the 77th minute.

The result meant that the Pigotts Bullets would remain on four points after suffering their third loss in five matches.

Nazir McBurnette scored twice as All Saints United claimed their third win in four games by romping to a



Players of the Sandals Inet Jennings Grenades football team. (File photo)

4-0 victory against winless Green City in the second match on Sunday.

McBurnette had conversions in the 6th minute. D'Andre Bishop scored in the 31st minute, and Malcolm Stewart converted a penalty kick in added time (90+6 minutes).

All Saints United played most of the second half with 10 men after losing the services of Roneba Cordice, who received a red card in the 48th minute for denying an obvious goal-scoring opportunity.

The result ensured that

All Saints United would advance to 10 points, while Green City would remain without a point after losing for the fifth time in as many games.

John Hughes and the Aston Villa Lions battled to a 2-2 draw in Sunday's opening Premier League encounter.

Deno Bryan converted a penalty kick in first-half added time (45+3 minutes) to give John Hughes a one-nil halftime lead. But Villa Lions equalized almost immediately after the break via Eroy Gonsalves' 46th-min-

ute conversion.

Joylan Sinclair scored in the 53rd minute to give the Villa Lions a 2-1 lead, but John Hughes drew level in the 71st minute when Hanel Burrell scored the equalizer.

Villa will move on to 11 points after drawing for the second time in five matches, while John Hughes will advance to seven points from the same number of encounters.

The Premier League will continue today when the Otos Rangers tackle Old Road at the ABFA Technical Center at 6 pm.