

MANY BASIC ITEMS NOT AFFECTED BY ABST INCREASE



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Many basic items not affected by ABST increase

In light of the coming into effect of the 2024 National Budget and the two percent increase in the rate of the Antigua and Barbuda Sales Tax (ABST) which took effect on January 1, the government has instituted steps to soften the impact on citizens and residents in the country.

Recognising the likely impact of an increase in prices, the government has broadened the list of items that are zero-rated for the tax; a move designed to cushion the impact on the spending power of consumers, especially for those at the lower rung of the economic ladder.

“Although there may be nominal impact on prices because of the rate adjustment; let me emphasize that the change in the ABST rate will not affect a wide selection of food and other essential items.

“Already, many basic food items

we presently consume are zero-rated; so consumers do not pay ABST on them,” Prime Minister and Finance Minister Gaston Browne told parliament in December.

The government’s social relief programme currently covers the following items that are zero-rated, meaning they do not attract ABST. These include;

most fruits and vegetables to include but not limited to bananas, oranges, grapes, potatoes, broccoli, cauliflower and lettuce

- baby products
- dry goods and oils to include pasta, sugar, corn meal, flour, rice, and cooking oils
- chicken, fish, locally produced meats, eggs, canned sardines and tuna
- bread
- cereals, cheese and milk
- water

- medicine, pharmaceutical supplies, and adult diapers

Additionally, the exemptions extend to supplies for use in the agricultural and fisheries sectors.

The government is also promising that it will engage several agencies including the Ministry of Finance, the Customs Division, the Consumers Affairs Division and other stakeholders to monitor prices as revenue reforms are implemented.

Further, the basket of essential goods and the list of price-controlled items are being reviewed and recommendations will be made to the Cabinet for appropriate adjustments.

“The intention is to minimize the price effect on basic and essential goods and ensure timely interventions are made to cushion any impact on vulnerable groups in society,” the prime minister emphasized.





Local News

Half a percent increase in SS contributions goes into effect

There has been a small increase in social security contributions across the board as measures have been put in place to ensure the long-term viability of the scheme.

The Social Security Scheme has announced that effective January 1, 2024, a half of a percentage point increase has been added to contributions both from the point of view of employers and from employees as well.

“To ensure our financial commitment to our beneficiaries and the continuous improvement of contributors’ funds, the Antigua and Barbuda Social Security Board (ABSSB) is reminding the public of the Social Security (Collections of Contributions) (Amendment) (Regulations) Statutory Instrument No. 60 of 2016, that effective



January 1st, 2024, the contribution rates will increase by ½% or 0.5%,” the SSS said in a media release.

He explained that the contribution rates for 2024, will therefore be 14½% for the public sector; and 15½% for the private sector, while the Self-Employed rate remains at 10%.

According to the release the decision to increase the contribution rates was based on recommendations by the

10th and 11th Actuarial Reviews.

The current retirement age is now pegged at 64 years. Next January the retirement age will be moved up one last time to 65 years. Any further rise in the retirement age must first get the approval of the parliament.

The following Table shows the breakdown of the contribution rates:

PUBLIC SECTOR	PRIVATE SECTOR
Employee – 5¾%	Employee – 6¾%
Employer – 8¾%	Employer – 8¾%

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Dated the 27th December,2023

.....
Hyacinth Agnes Benjamin
773-5604 780-1100

PM urges: Rise to the occasion

The spotlight of the world will focus on Antigua and Barbuda several times during this year, 2024, as the nation hosts a major United Nations conference as well as several Cricket World Cup matches.

And in his New Year's Day message to the nation, Prime Minister Gaston Browne is making a fervent call to citizens and residents alike to 'rise to the occasion'.

"My fellow citizens and residents, 2024 must be a year with a difference.

It must be marked by exciting achievements as we host both the United Nations 4th SIDS conference and several Cricket World Cup matches.

"Our country will be buzzing with the preparation and delivery of these important events. Thousands



Prime Minister Gaston Browne of people, representing governments, private sector organisations, non-governmental organisations, international financial institutions and many others, will gather here on our shores," he remarked.

PM Browne sees the hosting of these events as

an opportunity for residents and citizens to demonstrate the hospitality of our people, the attractions of the country, and their capacity as a society; to show that Antigua and Barbuda can match major venues in the world.

"No one should leave

here without enjoying and acknowledging the appeal of our country and the charm of its people. They must all want to come back to Antigua and Barbuda – these brilliant islands in the sun.

"That responsibility falls to all of us. We must rise to the occasion, as I know we can," the prime minister urged.

The 4th UN Conference for Small Islands Developing States (SIDS) will take place in May this year and will be hosted at a brand-new state-of-the-art facility that is currently under construction at the American University of Antigua (AUA) campus at Jabberwock.

Antigua and Barbuda will also host several international cricket matches during the year.

Seventy-five cruise calls slated for January

The cruise sector of the tourism industry is in for a busy month this January with a total of seventy-five cruise calls scheduled.

According to the Antigua Cruise Port, the entity responsible for managing the cruise sector, January will be the busiest month for cruise tourism during this current season.

During the month, there are two days when five cruise ships will be in port simultaneously. These are January 9 when the Britannia, Costa Serena, Royal Clipper, Norwegian Viva and Le Bellot will be in port, and on Tuesday



January 30, when the Explorer of the Seas, AIDA Perla, Costa Serena, Spirit of Discovery and Norwegian Viva will make calls.

Cruise tourism is anticipated to continue its growth during this year with an overall total of 415 cruise calls that have been confirmed so far. This

surpasses the figure for 2023 by some 39 calls.

The industry is expected to welcome approximately 900-thousand cruise passengers this year.

Two vessels are due in port today, Wednesday, with three scheduled for tomorrow.

Cabinet resumes weekly meeting today

The country's senior executive authority, the Cabinet, is meeting today; the first for the new year following the two-week break to mark the Christmas/end of year festivities.

No details have been made public regarding what are some of the key items that will go before the Cabinet for consideration and decision-making, but it is expected that there will

be a packed agenda down for today's meeting.

However, the public would not have to ponder too long as the post-Cabinet press briefing where journalists are free to ask questions regarding decisions taken at the Cabinet meeting is expected to follow on Thursday morning.

These post-Cabinet briefings have

become an institution in Antigua and Barbuda and they have attracted the interest of not only nationals at home, but for those in the diaspora around the globe.

Many Caribbean territories have also been implementing similar engagements with their publics as they too adopt the policy of openness and transparency.

'My goal was to serve the people, not to seek awards'

Assistant Superintendent of Police Dale Mercury says he is very happy to have been the first person to receive the King's Police Medal Award, as presented by the new UK Monarch, King Charles III.

Three Antigua and Barbuda nationals were named on the King's New Year's Honour's List with ASP Mercury the lone police officer. The others are Communication's Director in the Office of the Prime Minister, Maurice Merchant and Educator and Cultural icon, Rudolph Davis.

"Assistant Superintendent of Police Dale Michael Mercury is an exemplary law enforcement officer whose unwavering dedication and integrity have left an indelible mark on the Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda. His journey in law enforcement is a testament to his steadfast commitment to the service of his chosen homeland,

Antigua and Barbuda," the citation issued from Government House reads.

Speaking with Point Express newspaper, ASP Mercury, who was born in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, said when he joined the Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda 37 years ago, his intention was always to serve the people of Antigua and Barbuda to the best of his abilities.

"When I started in the force those many years ago, receiving an award from the British Monarch was the furthest thing from my mind. I wasn't serving for rewards or special recognition. My focus was the job and to do my best as an officer in the police force.

"I am happy to have received the award, especially to know that it is a historic moment as I am the first police officer from Antigua and Barbuda to receive the medal from King Charles," he declared.



Dale Mercury

ASP Mercury now serves as Aide De Camp to the Governor General, but he spent most of his time in the force serving in the

Criminal Investigations Department helping the force to solve major crimes and keeping criminal activities at a minimum.

Kirsy Rijo-Kullman, named a judge in Shark Tank - Malta

The company that produces Shark Tank Malta - greatt Company Limited – has announced that the programme will return for its third season and will air every Thursday on TVM, Malta's National Station, starting as of the 4th of January.

Shark Tank is the programme that brings awareness towards the business world and also exposes the multi-faceted approach Malta Enterprise, TVM's partner in this enterprise, has towards start-ups.

The first two seasons of Shark Tank Malta were a success, with over two million Euros worth of investments. This year, the ultimate aim is to continue improving on what was done in the past and continue this entrepreneurial journey of a nation. To help with this, the Sharks' line-up is a mix of old and new faces, trustworthy businessmen and women that can elevate the programme and nurture those they will invest in.

This year's Shark line up will consist of:

Kirsy Rijo-Kullman, an Antiguan national but a longtime friend of the Maltese Islands. Since Dr. Kullman is a new face in the Shark Tank scene here are some important points to mention: At the age of 15 she embarked on her entrepreneurial journey by establishing an entertainment company, operating alongside her close friends. Through this venture, she not only honed her skills as a dancer but also accumulated sufficient funds to support her travels as a martial artist representing her country.

In the year 2000, after many years of practicing martial arts, Dr. Kullmann achieved great success, becoming the Caribbean champion in weapons. Despite her remarkable accomplishments

in sports, she recognized that her true calling lay within the realm of business. Consequently, during her first year at university, she delved into the startup scene, marking the beginning of her illustrious career as an international startup entrepreneur.

Over the years, Dr. Kullmann has founded and managed numerous businesses, establishing herself as a prominent figure in the entrepreneurial landscape. Additionally, she actively engages in global investments, particularly focusing on impactful sustainable projects.

Locally in Malta, Kirsy has found another passion - hospitality - opening one of Malta's heartthrob places, Taproom Valletta, and soon to open a boutique hotel also in the heart of Valletta.

For the past decade, Dr. Kullmann's passion has centered around philanthropic endeavors. Through her family foundation, the Kullmann Foundation, as well as her own LO-CYF Foundation, she has undertaken several charitable initiatives in her native Antigua and Barbuda, the Dominican Republic, Latin America, Africa, Asia, and beyond. Her dedication to making a positive impact on society is truly commendable.

Dr. Kullmann holds a Bachelor's degree in International Business Management and Finance, further complemented by a Ph.D. in International Relations. Her impressive educational background, combined with her extensive experience in both business and sports, positions her as a highly respected and influential individual in her field.

Mark Bajada, is a seasoned Shark returning for the third consecutive season. Bajada is an influential figure in the energy industry, committed to



Kirsy Rijo-Kullman

addressing climate change and caring for an aging population. Mark is very much known for his willingness to guide and assist pitchers in the tank.

Alexander Fenech, a long-standing member of the Shark Tank family, will also be back for the third season. Alexander manages a leading pharmacy chain in the country, Brown's Pharma and he was the biggest investor in Season 01 and the second biggest in Season 02.

Dino Fino, a guest Shark in Season 02, is now permanently joining the Shark Tank family. He is the owner of a well-known diversified brand called the Dino Fino Group.

Last but not least, Michael Bonello is the owner of one of Malta's largest property sales franchises, Alliance Real Estate. Michael will also be returning for another thrilling season from Season 01.

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end at the basketball court

Unveiling the Layers of South Africa Institution of Proceedings at the ICJ Against Israel

J'Moul Francis BA Law, LLM, (EU Law, Competition Law, and International Law); Antigua and Barbuda Commonwealth Scholar 2018/2019, 2023 US State Department International Visitor Leadership Programme (IVLP) Alumnus, Legal Commentary Blogger at www.francisobiter.org. The views expressed are entirely his own.

In the intricate tapestry of international law and relations, a momentous and historic juncture unfolds as South Africa takes a bold step, filing an application against Israel before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on 29 December 2023.

This move, initiating proceedings under the *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* (1948) (the “Genocide Convention”) against Israel in breach of obligations under Articles 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6, in view of Article 2, marks a significant milestone in the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine concerning the Gaza Strip.

To comprehend the gravity of the situation, a brief historical reflection is essential. The term “*genocide*” was coined in 1944 by Raphael Lemkin— a Polish-Jewish lawyer and scholar, in light of the atrocities committed during World War II. Lemkin’s approach was to establish mechanisms for the *protection of a group as a whole*, a concept that initially clashed with the focus on the *protection of the individual*— an approach championed by the eminent international law scholar Hersch Lauterpacht.

Though Lauterpacht’s approach garnered more acceptance at the time and formed the basis of the Nurem-

berg Trials, over time, the global community came to reconcile and recognise Lemkin’s approach as equally, if not more, significant, given the reality of atrocities being committed with the intent of eliminating the existence of specific groups. Both approaches have since worked in tandem to bring justice to millions.

The Genocide Convention in Article 2 defines genocide as acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group.

Further, Article 3 outlines punishable acts to include genocide, conspiracy to commit genocide, direct and public incitement to commit genocide, attempt to commit genocide, and complicity in genocide. South Africa contends that Israel’s acts and omissions since 7 October 2023 in the Gaza Strip are genocidal in character, aiming to bring about the destruction of a substantial part of the Palestinian national, racial, and ethnical group.

Moreover, the application meticulously points to eight (8) grounds of genocidal acts committed against the Palestinian people, ranging from killings and causing bodily harm to mass expulsions, deprivation of essentials, and measures intended to prevent births.

It is essential to underscore that reliance on the acts and omissions alone is insufficient to achieve the threshold for a claim of genocide to stand. For the claim of genocide to stand, it requires fulfilment of the *mens rea*, i.e., a specific intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a particular group.

This intent requires actions aimed at removing the existence, nature,

lives, and livelihoods of that specific group, through acts that shock the conscience of humanity. As such, that is why in its application, South Africa clinically evidenced expressions of genocidal intent by Israeli state officials.

Another critical aspect of South Africa’s application is the request for provisional measures, which entails the immediate suspension of military operations in and against Gaza, adherence to the cessation of military hostilities, and measures to prevent genocide.

These measures serve as vital steps to prevent irreparable harm and to bring about a halt to a deteriorating situation of continued military attacks, significant loss of life and property, and grave human rights violations.

This move by South Africa transcends legal proceedings; it sends a clear message that law and justice must prevail over violence and vengeance in accordance with obligations “*erga omnes and erga omnes partes*”, under international law and the convention.

The obligations encompass those duties and responsibilities to the international community as a whole in protecting basic norms along with those under a multilateral treaty owed to all the other state parties based on common values and concern for compliance.

As such, a breach of norms and the convention itself enable state parties to take action. Further, the choice of the ICJ as the forum is strategic, emphasising state responsibility in contrast to individual responsibility, which is the focus of the International Criminal

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Lifestyle



Dominican Republic women fight teen pregnancy while facing total abortion ban

It was a busy Saturday morning at Marcia González's church. A bishop was visiting, and normally she would have been there helping with logistics, but on this day she was teaching sex education at a local school.

"I coordinate activities at the church and my husband is a deacon," González said. "The bishop comes once a year and children are being confirmed, but I am here because this is important for my community."

For 40 years, González and her husband have pushed for broader sex education in the Dominican Republic, one of four Latin American nations that criminalizes abortion without exceptions. Women face up to two years in prison for having an abortion; penalties for doctors or midwives



Members of the National Confederation of Rural Women (CONAMUCA) sing during a visit from US legislators and members of Women's Equality Centre at the organization's headquarters in San Cristobal, Dominican Republic, Friday, December 8, 2023. (AP Photo/Maria Hernandez)

range from five to 20 years. With a Bible on its flag, the Caribbean country has a powerful lobby of Catholics and evangelicals who are united against decriminalising abortion.

President Luis Abinader

committed to the decriminalisation of abortion as a candidate in 2020, but his government hasn't acted on that pledge. For now, it depends on whether he is re-elected in May.

To help girls prevent un-

planned pregnancies in this context, González and other activists have developed "teenage clubs," where adolescents learn about sexual and reproductive rights, self-esteem, gender violence, finances and other topics. The goal is to empower future generations of Dominican women.

Outside the clubs, sex education is often insufficient, according to activists. Close to 30% of adolescents don't have access to contraception. High poverty levels increase the risks of facing an unwanted pregnancy.

For the teenagers she mentors, González's concerns also go beyond the impossibility of terminating a pregnancy.

According to activists, poverty forces some Dominican mothers to marry

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Court (ICC). More so, it underscores South Africa's commitment to a fair assessment, allowing Israel the opportunity to present its case before the ICJ.

International law academics and practitioners have noted that South Africa's move sends a resounding message to all – that peace, law, and justice must prevail over war, conflict, and vengeance.

Further, it aligns with a positive trend observed in which countries in

the global south have taken the initiative, more so in recent times, to address key challenges of our times and uphold preemptory norms.

From Small Island Developing States in the Caribbean and the Pacific to countries on the African continent, a shared history of enslavement, exploitation, colonial oppression, fight to become independent states, refusal to address historical wrongs, and the continued unequal treatment brought about an imperative force to act on a moral obligation to prevent history

from repeating itself. It can be argued that this imperative force motivated South Africa to act, given its own history of apartheid.

The international community should follow this case closely as it serves as a litmus test for the international system's ability to act as a bulwark against increasing conflicts and acts that shock the conscience of humanity. The echoes of justice resound, urging us to witness and reflect on this pivotal moment in international relations and the rule of international law.

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their 14 or 15-year-old daughters to men up to 50 years older. Nearly 7 out of 10 women suffer from gender violence such as incest, and families often remain silent regarding sexual abuse.

For every 1,000 adolescents between 15 and 19, 42 became mothers in 2023, according to the United Nations Population Fund. And until 2019, when UNICEF published its latest report on child marriage, more than a third of Dominican women married or entered a free union before turning 18.

Dominican laws have prohibited child marriage since 2021, but community leaders say that such unions are still common because the practice has been normalized and few people are aware of the statute.

"In my 14-year-old granddaughter's class, two of her younger friends are already married," González said. "Many mothers give the responsibility of their younger children to their older daughters so, instead of taking care of little boys, they run away with a husband."

Activists hope education can help prevent girls from facing this situation.

"There are myths that people tell you when you have your period," said Gabriela Díaz, 16, during a recent encounter organized by the Women's Equality Center.

"They say that we are dirty or we have dirty blood, but that is false. We are helping our body to clean itself and improve its functions."

Díaz calls González "godmother," a term applied by Plan International to community leaders who implement the programs of this UK-based organization, which promotes children's rights.

According to its own data, San Cristóbal and Azua, where González lives, are the Dominican cities with the highest rates of teenage pregnancy and child marriage.

To address this, its clubs accept girls between 13 and 17. Each group meets 2 hours per week, welcomes up to 25 participants and is led by volunteers like González.

In San Cristobal, also in southern Dominican Republic, the National Confederation of Rural Women (CONAMUCA) sponsors teenage clubs of its own.

"CONAMUCA was born to fight for land ownership, but the landscape has changed, and we have integrated new issues, such as food sovereignty, agrarian reform, and sexual and reproductive rights," said Lidia Ferrer, one of its leaders.

Its clubs gather 1,600 girls in 60 communities, Ferrer said. The topics they study vary from region to region, but among the recurring ones are adolescent pregnancy, early unions and femicide.

"The starting point is our own reality," said Kathy Cabrera, who joined CONAMUCA clubs at age 9 and two decades later takes new generations under her wing. "It's how we live and suffer."

Migration is increasingly noticeable in rural areas, Cabrera said. Women are forced to walk for miles to attend school or find water, and health services fail in guaranteeing their sexual and reproductive rights.

"We have a government that tells you 'Don't have an abortion' but does not provide the necessary contraception to avoid it."

She has witnessed how 13-year-old girls bear the children of 65-year-old men while neither families nor authorities seem to be concerned. On other occasions, she said, parents "give away" their daughters because they cannot support them or because they discover that they are no longer virgins.

"It's not regarded as sexual abuse because, if my grandmother got pregnant and married at an early age, and

my great-grandmother too and my mother too, then it means I should too," Cabrera said.

In southern Dominican communities, most girls can relate to this, or know someone who does.

"My sister got pregnant at 16 and that was very disturbing," said 14-year-old Laura Pérez. "She got together with a person much older than her, and they have a baby. I don't think that was right."

The clubs' dynamics change as needed to create safe and loving environments for girls to share what they feel. Some sessions kick off with relaxation exercises and others with games.

Some girls speak proudly of what they have learned. One of them mentioned she confronted her father when he said she shouldn't cut any lemons from a tree while menstruating. Another said that her friends always go to the bathroom in groups, to avoid safety risks. They all regard their godmothers as mentors who have their backs.

"They call me to confide everything," González said. "I am happy because, in my group, no girl has become pregnant."

Many girls from teenage clubs have dreams they want to follow. Francesca Montero, 16, would like to become a paediatrician. Perla Infante, 15, a psychologist. Lomelí Arias, 18, a nurse.

"I want to be a soldier!" shouted Laura Pérez, the 14-year-old who wants to be careful not to following her sister's footsteps.

"I was undecided, but when I entered CONAMUCA I knew I wanted to become a soldier. In here we see all these women who give you strength, who are like you, but as a guide," Pérez said.

"It's like a child seeing an older person and thinking: 'When I grow up, I want to be like that.'"

Mickey Mouse horror film unveiled as copyright ends

By Noor Nanji

It's Mickey, but not as you've ever seen him before.

A trailer for a slasher film, featuring a masked killer dressed as Mickey Mouse, was released on 1 January, the day that Disney's copyright on the earliest versions of the cartoon character expired in the US.

"We wanted the polar opposite of what exists," the movie's producer said.

A new Mickey-inspired horror game, showing the rodent covered with blood stains, also dropped on the same day.

Steamboat Willie, a 1928 short film featuring early non-speaking versions of Mickey and Minnie, entered the public domain in the US on New Year's Day.

It means cartoonists, novelists and filmmakers can now rework and use the earliest versions of Mickey and Minnie.

In fact, anyone can use those versions without permission or cost.

Creatives have been quick to take advantage of the new rules, with a trailer (contains violent scenes) for a Mickey horror film dropping on the same day.

In the horror comedy thriller, called Mickey's Mouse Trap, a young woman is thrown a surprise birthday party in an amusement arcade - but things quickly

take a turn for the worse when she and her friends encounter a knife-wielding murderer in a Mickey costume.

"A place for fun, a place for friends, a place for hunting. The mouse is out," the trailer screams in red text.

"People need to not take it too seriously, we made a ridiculously fun movie," said Simon Phillips, who wrote and produce the film and plays the man behind the Mickey mask.

Mr Phillips told the BBC that "if you put Mickey into a family movie, you don't cover new ground".

"In order to flip the coin, you have to come up with something that's the polar opposite of what already exists," he said.

The film itself does not have a confirmed release date but is expected to be out this March.

Not to be outdone, a new video game has been unveiled, also featuring the 1928 version of Mickey.

Game studio Nightmare Forge Games said the game, titled Infestation 88, is a survival horror game in which an outbreak of vermin turns into something more sinister.

At the start of the trailer, a man is heard saying nervously: "I thought it was just rodents, but there's something else in here."

A huge, blood splattered



Mickey then pops up on screen, while mice scurry around him.

A spokesperson from Nightmare Forge Games told the BBC that Steamboat Willie entering the public domain "allowed us to include our own derivation of the film's starring character in our game, which fits perfectly as an antagonist causing an infestation".

Mickey's not the first childhood character to be given the horror movie treatment.

When Winnie the Pooh entered the public domain, the loveable bear was turned into the R-rated horror film Blood and Honey, which was one of last year's worst-rated films.

US copyright law says the rights to characters can be held for 95 years, which means the characters in Steamboat Willie entered the public domain on 1 January 2024.

Disney has faced losing the copyright over its original cartoons several times in the past.

The characters were first expected to go into the public domain in 1984, but Congress extended the term by 20 years.

Before the next expiry date came up in 2004, another 20-year extension was passed.

Disney's efforts to protect its characters have even led to the law being dubbed "the Mickey Mouse Protection Act". But the moment finally came, and was hailed as being "deeply symbolic" by experts.

The company still separately holds a trademark on Mickey as a brand identifier and a corporate mascot. That means there are still limits on how the public can use these images.

And Disney has insisted that more modern versions of Mickey are still covered by copyright.

"We will, of course, continue to protect our rights in the more modern versions of Mickey Mouse and other works that remain subject to copyright," the company said.



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Regional News



SVG: Cops urge illegal gun owners to surrender them to the authorities

CMC - The Royal St. Vincent and the Grenadines Police Force (RSVG-PF) has thanked citizens who have chosen to hand over illegal weapons even before a national amnesty is announced.

“The RSVGPF thanks the citizens who have chosen to surrender their illegal firearms, even before the amnesty commences.

“The RSVGPF encourages others who possess illegal firearms to hand them over immediately. You will not be prosecuted,” the police said in a statement.

The authorities said two people handed over four firearms and 40 rounds of



ammunition. They said the firearms surrendered are one Glock 22-C pistol, one Glock 33 Pistol, one .38 Revolver and one 12 gauge

The ammunition was made up of 30 rounds of .9mm, seven rounds of .40mm, three rounds of .38mm and two magazines.

The police reminded

citizens that the maximum penalty for possessing an illegal firearm and ammunition is seven years imprisonment or a fine of EC\$20,000 or both in the magistrate’s court.

“Be further advised that this penalty may be increased by an Act of Parliament later in 2024.

“Play your part in reducing crime and violence in St. Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG).

“Together, we can make SVG safer and more peaceful,” the police statement added.

Police said that there were 55 confirmed homicides in SVG in 2023.

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UWI Mona staff set date for industrial action

CMC - Academic and senior administrative staff at the Mona campus of the University of the West Indies (UWI) are planning to begin industrial action on Friday over demands for the payment of interim pay increases, while a compensation review takes place.

The Jamaica chapter of the West Indies Group of University Teachers (WIGUT) first issued the threat of industrial action on the UWI and the Jamaica government on November 30, following an emergency meeting of its members.

The union, which represents approximately 900 academics, senior administrative and professional staff, has in a newsletter headlined "Action Time" set January 5 for the start of the action.

WIGUT Jamaica president, Professor Paul Brown, said talks have been held with the university's management but there have been no formal discussions with the ministries of education and finance.

"A lot depends on what happens now, clearly, with the line ministries,"

he told The Jamaica Gleaner newspaper on Tuesday.

WIGUT has complained about there being "no meaningful offer on an interim financial relief/ cost-of-living package" while a compensation review takes place.

The union is seeking an interim 25 per cent increase in salary and associated allowances, payable no later than February 29.

"We, the West Indies Group of University Teachers (Jamaica) ask you, our members, to act. The actions you take are to express to the Government of Jamaica and The University of the West Indies our total disgust at the situation," the union said in the newsletter, warning that members "shall engage in all actions relevant to their job category".

The six protest actions are withholding of makers; not attending meetings; not uploading course materials; not holding academic advising meetings; not providing systems support unless an emergency situation arises; and not providing learning support.

Teaching is scheduled to resume

for the second semester on January 22.

"Our main paymaster, the Government of Jamaica, is our target. Sadly, protest action is the only way now to get their attention. We should exercise discretion and flexibility where required. We should, at all costs, avoid any long-term harm to those whom we serve," the union said in the newsletter.

The UWI and the finance ministry are reportedly finalising the engagement of an international consulting firm to carry out the compensation review for employees at the institution.

The report is anticipated in May 2024.

UWI Mona Registrar Dr Donovan Stanberry told the Gleaner newspaper that he could not say at this time whether the payment demand will be met.

"We are aware of the notice issued by WIGUT and the management of The UWI Mona is fully engaged with the union to find a resolution to the issue," he said, adding that talks are also taking place with the Andrew Holness government.

Hamas deputy leader Saleh al-Arouri killed in Beirut blast

Israel has insisted the assassination of a Hamas leader in Beirut was not an attack on Lebanon, as its enemies warned of “punishment” for his death.

An Israeli spokesman said Saleh al-Arouri had died in a “surgical strike against the Hamas leadership”.

Hamas condemned the death, while its ally Hezbollah said it was an assault on Lebanese sovereignty.

Lebanon’s prime minister, meanwhile, accused Israel of trying “to drag Lebanon into... confrontation”.

Lebanese media report that Arouri, a deputy political leader of Hamas, was killed in a drone strike in southern Beirut along with six others - two Hamas military commanders and four other members.

He was a key figure in the Qassam Brigades, Hamas’s armed wing, and a close ally of Ismail Haniyeh, the Hamas leader. He had been in Lebanon acting as a connection between his group and Hezbollah.

Israeli spokesman Mark Regev stopped short of confirming Israel had carried out the assassination, a standard position for Israeli officials, but he told MSN-BC: “Whoever did it, it must be clear that this was not an attack on the Lebanese state.

“It was not an attack even on Hezbollah, the ter-



Arouri is reported to have been killed in a drone strike on a third floor.

rorist organisation.

“Whoever did this did a surgical strike against the Hamas leadership. Whoever did this has a gripe with Hamas. That is very clear.”

Arouri, 57, is the most senior Hamas figure to be killed since Israel went to war with the group after its 7 October attack.

On that day, waves of Hamas gunmen invaded Israel and attacked communities around the border, killing about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking around 240 to Gaza as hostages.

Israel launched a military offensive in response, with the declared aim of destroying Hamas.

Since then, more than 22,000 Palestinians - mostly women and children - have been killed in Israeli strikes on Gaza, according to Gaza’s Hamas-run health

ministry.

Hezbollah has fired scores of rockets into Israel and fought several skirmishes with Israeli forces during the Gaza war.

Lebanon’s state news agency said Arouri had been killed by an Israeli drone attack on a Hamas office in the southern Beirut suburb of Dahiyeh.

A witness from Reuters news agency saw firefighters and paramedics gathered around a high-rise building where there was a large hole in what appeared to be the third floor.

Video footage on social media showed a car in flames and extensive damage to buildings in what is a busy residential area.

Dahiyeh is known as a stronghold of Hezbollah.

Mr Haniyeh, the head of Hamas’s political wing, called the attack a “coward-

ly... terrorist act, a violation of Lebanon’s sovereignty, and an expansion of its circle of aggression”.

Hezbollah said that it considered Arouri’s death “to be a serious assault on Lebanon, its people, its security, sovereignty, and resistance, and the highly symbolic and significant political and security messages it contains”.

It said the attack was “a dangerous development in the course of the war... and we in Hezbollah affirm that this crime will never pass without response and punishment.

“Its hand is on the trigger, and its resisters are in the highest levels of readiness and preparedness,” it added.

Iran, a major supporter of both groups, said Arouri’s killing would “undoubt-

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Trump challenges his 'arbitrary' removal from Maine's ballot

By Bernd Debusmann Jr

Donald Trump has appealed against a decision by Maine's top election official to remove him from the ballot in the 2024 presidential election.

Mr Trump, the current Republican frontrunner, asked that a state court overturn the move by Maine Secretary of State Shenna Bellows.

Ms Bellows has previously defended her decision by saying she has a "sacred obligation" to uphold the law.

The former US president has also been removed from the ballot in Colorado.

In both Maine and Colorado, Mr Trump was removed from the ballot using the US constitution's insurrection clause, with state electoral officials pointing towards his alleged incitement of the 2021 US Capitol riot.

The 14th Amendment of the US Constitution bans anyone who has "engaged in insurrection or rebellion" from holding federal office.

In Monday's court filing regarding the Maine decision, Mr Trump's attorneys said that Ms Bellows - a Democrat - was a "biased decision maker" without the legal authority to remove him from the ballot.

Additionally, the filing accuses Ms Bellows of making "multiple errors of law" and acting "in an arbitrary and capricious manner".

"President Trump will be illegal-



Donald Trump has been removed from the 2024 ballot in both Maine and Colorado, setting the stage for a Supreme Court battle.

ly excluded from the ballot as a result of the Secretary's actions," the filing says.

Several similar lawsuits against Mr Trump in other parts of the US - such as Michigan and Minnesota - have been rejected.

The US Supreme Court is expected to take up the issue. A ruling by the court on Mr Trump's eligibility would be applied nationwide.

In both Maine and Colorado, the decisions are on hold until the legal challenges are settled.

In an interview with the BBC last week, Ms Bellows defended her actions and said she hoped that the matter would ultimately be settled by the highest court in the land.

"I'm mindful that no secretary of state has ever deprived a presidential candidate of ballot access based

on section three of the 14th Amendment," she said. "But I'm also mindful that no presidential candidate has, ever before, engaged in insurrection."

She also denied that her decision was in any way politically motivated, instead arguing that it was "thorough and based on the rule of law".

Both Mr Trump and his campaign have repeatedly decried the rulings from Maine and Colorado as politically motivated and intended to harm his chances of winning the 2024 election.

In addition to the legal wrangling over his eligibility in the election, Mr Trump is facing trials in federal court and in Georgia stemming from his attempts to overturn his 2020 election loss to Democrat Joe Biden.

He has not been charged with inciting insurrection in either of the two cases.

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edly ignite another surge in the veins of resistance".

An Israeli security cabinet meeting scheduled for Tuesday evening to discuss the post-war plan for Gaza was cancelled.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has previously vowed to eliminate Hamas's leaders, wherever they are. Arouri was also considered the de facto leader of Hamas's military wing in the West

Bank, overseeing attacks there, according to Israeli media reports.

He is believed to have been involved in the kidnapping and killing of three Israeli teenagers in the occupied West Bank in 2014,

reports say, and had served time in Israeli jails for other attacks.

The Times of Israel says he was also one of the Hamas officials most closely connected to Iran and Hezbollah.

Willikies Super Stars are national domino champions

The Willikies Super Stars have been crowned the official overall champion team of the just-ended 2023 Antigua and Barbuda National Domino Association's (ABNDA) domestic season.

The Super Stars of Willikies claimed the title after finishing with an overall total of 36 points, which were accumulated from their final positions in all the 2023 domestic competitions.

The Willikies Super Stars won multiple team three-hand and four-hand competitions during the season.

Dominatrixx edged out A.S. Bryden and Stingray City Bolans Revellers to clinch the runners-up spot after both teams finished tied with 14 points.

Dominatrixx clinched second place ahead of Bolans Revellers by virtue of securing more second places in the domestic competitions during the season.

Everyday Service Station Double Six finished in fourth place with eight points.

They were followed by the Ram-



Players of the Willikies Super Stars domino team. (File photo)

Moise Eagles and Unstoppables both finished in the cellar with a point apiece. Stars with two points.

Nine member clubs participated in the 2023 domestic domino season.

Trott to continue as Afghanistan head coach for upcoming year



Former England batter Jonathan Trott. (AP)

KABUL (Reuters) - Former England batter Jonathan Trott has signed a contract extension as Afghanistan head coach following their remarkable World Cup campaign in India.

Afghanistan finished sixth of 10 teams at the 50-overs World Cup where they registered upset wins over former winners England, Pakistan and Sri Lan-

ka, and came close to humbling eventual champions Australia.

The 42-year-old, who has signed an extension to the end of the year, also oversaw Afghanistan's T20 series victory against Pakistan and a one-day series win against Bangladesh in his first stint.

"The decision comes in *cont'd on pg 19*

Waugh slams South Africa for prioritising domestic T20 tournament over NZ Tests

SYDNEY (Reuters) - Former Australia captain Steve Waugh said South Africa's decision to send a shadow side to New Zealand for a Test tour while their top players take part in a domestic T20 tournament shows the longest format of the game is under threat.

Cricket South Africa (CSA) named seven uncapped players, including skipper Neil Brand, for next month's two-Test tour of New Zealand, which overlaps with the second edition of the SA T20 beginning on Jan. 10.

Waugh said the governing International Cricket Council (ICC) and other administrators should step in to protect Test cricket.

"Obviously, they don't care," he told the Sydney Morning Herald newspaper.

"If I was New Zealand I wouldn't even play the series. I don't know why they're even playing. Why would you when it shows a lack of respect for New



Former Australia cricket captain Steve Waugh. (Getty Images)

Zealand cricket? "If the ICC or someone doesn't step in shortly then Test cricket doesn't become test cricket because you're not testing yourself against the best players."

Reuters has requested comment from the ICC. The governing body has little role in scheduling bilateral cricket or domestic T20 leagues, which is done by the boards involved. Its chairman, Greg Barclay, previously told the BBC "there's not a lot we can do" about T20 leagues

dominating the calendar.

The proliferation of franchise cricket has put the squeeze on bilateral tours in recent years with the West Indies in particular struggling to put together their strongest squad.

The CSA cancelled a tour of Australia scheduled early last year to ensure the presence of their top players in the inaugural edition of the SA T20, which is bankrolled by the Indian Premier League franchises.

Australia's captain Pat

Cummins hoped South Africa's decision did not signal a drift away from Test cricket.

"I know the South African team aren't sending their strongest side, I'm hoping it's just a phase," Cummins told reporters on the eve of the third Test against Pakistan.

"I don't think it's as dramatic decline as it sometimes gets spoken about, but I think there is an issue just with the amount of other cricket out there."

Pakistan's captain Shan Masood said the situation could have been avoided by better scheduling.

"All the best sides have to play for the World Test Championship, so it's a pity that South Africa aren't being able to send their full-strength squad," the batter said.

"Hopefully, somewhere down the line, schedules can be made in a certain way where we see the strongest elevens playing Test cricket."

cont'd from pg 18

after his successful 18-month tenure, during which he made significant contributions to the team's progress and development," the Afghanistan Cricket Board said in a statement on Monday.

"Mr. Jonathan Trott expressed his

pleasure on the extension of his contract and stated that he is looking forward to spending more time with the squad and building on performances of the recently held Cricket World Cup 2023."

Afghanistan, currently playing a T20 series in the United Arab Emir-

ates against the home side, will play three 20-overs matches in India later this month.

Trott will then look to get his team playing the same brand of fearless cricket at the T20 World Cup in June in the United States and the West Indies.



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Mixed fortunes for Grill Box in MPL

Grill Box had mixed fortunes during the latest round of matches in the Cool and Smooth Mandy Premier League (MPL) Sherma Jackson Business Softball Cricket Competition on Sunday.

Grill Box romped to a 60-run victory against the Board of Education in the third and final game of the day at the Powells playing field.

Grill Box made 122 for eight off their allotted 10 overs. Their total benefited from an 18-run penalty, which was imposed on the Board of Education for being unable to field a female player in their team.

Denly Thomas cracked 33; male player of the game Ashfield Weatherhead hit 22 not out; and Deandre Harris chipped in with 15.

Kadeem Henry grabbed four wickets for 13 runs, and Rayn John picked up two for 14.

In reply, the Board of Education was restricted to 62 for five off their 10 overs. Mike France made 20, Conroy Smith scored 16, and Gawayne Allen chipped in with 11.

Weatherhead claimed two for 11, and female player of the game Menova Govia captured two for 18.

However, Grill Box tumbled to a 43-run loss against unbeaten leaders, TG Welding, in the day's second encounter.

TG Welding was all out for 132 in 8.2 overs, with male player of the



Grill Box female player of the match Menova Govia captured two for 18. His knock included a total of one four and 10 sixes, six of which were struck in one over.

Deran Benta got 21, and Essan Warner chipped in with 20. Kimani George snapped up three wickets for eight runs, and Ashfield Weatherhead captured two for 32.

In reply, Grill Box was restricted to 89 for six off their 10 overs. George top-scored with 39, Kenar Christian made 17, and Weatherhead scored 15.

Charanlall Ramjohn claimed two wickets for six runs, and Vishal Gobin



TG Welding male player of the match Demari Benta. (Photos courtesy MPL) captured two for 19.

PEL Boys snatched a 10-run victory against Polished Concrete Floors and Countertops (PCF&C) in the opening encounter.

The PEL Boys made 133 for one in their 10 overs. Male player of the match Clarence Francis slammed 68, which included six sixes and six fours, and Federick Floyd struck 28.

PCF&C was restricted to 123 for five off their 10 overs. Steve Martin cracked 74, which included seven sixes and five fours, and Malinga Bruney made 29. Francis captured two for 25.

cont'd from pg 22

JSC Sports Complex while serving as president of the Antigua and Barbuda Basketball Association several years ago.

"Some people complained that we don't have bathroom facilities, and they are right; I am not disputing it. But I had been

privileged enough to manage an association that had a bathroom facility, and that's at the JSC Sports Complex," he said.

"I can tell you, throughout my tenure as president of the basketball association, there was not a year where we didn't have to keep repairing that bath-

room.

"You had people who go there and throw sand in the toilets; they stand on the sinks and defecate; they plaster the walls with feces; and so every single year we had to repair that bathroom facility at JSC.

"So we simply locked it until there was an event

taking place there. But of course, by doing that, you will irritate people because people feel it's a public facility, so it should always remain open.

"But there must be inherent responsibility in having access to public infrastructure and taking care of it."

Matthew: Government will renovate ARG

Minister of Sports, Daryll Matthew, said the government wants to end the lease for the Antigua Recreation Grounds (ARG), the world's 52nd Test cricket venue, from the Antigua and Barbuda Football Association (ABFA) to facilitate plans to renovate the facility.

Matthew, who is also the Minister of Education and Creative Industries, made the disclosure during his contribution to the 2024 Budget Debate in the Lower House of Parliament in late December 2023.

"As I have mentioned previously in the public space, we have now taken concrete steps to revoke the lease that the football association has for Antigua Recreation. They (ABFA) now have their center on Factory Road," Matthew stated.

"I am currently in discussions with two international cricketing entities, who are going to be doing business in Antigua, to put funds into renovating the Antigua Recreation Grounds and using it as a home for cricket once again."

This latest update came more than five years after the previous Minister of Sports, Paul Chet Greene, announced in 2017 that the same Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party (ABLP) government had rescinded the lease, which was granted in 2013 by the former United Progressive Party (UPP) administration to the ABFA to manage the facility.

Greene had said the ABFA should



An aerial view of the Antigua Recreation Grounds

not have been given a lease for the ARG from the onset, as it was never in a position to improve the facility or its surroundings.

Meanwhile, Matthew also hinted that the government has plans to make some repairs to bathroom facilities at sporting venues across the island in 2024.

"In 2024, we have now put together a programme to deal with one of the main issues affecting our sporting facilities, and that is bathrooms and

changing rooms," Matthew stated.

However, Matthew pointed out that the people who access the facilities are guilty of carelessly destroying the bathrooms at these public establishments.

He said there must be inherent responsibility in having access to public infrastructure and taking care of it.

Matthew said he was exposed to the reality of people recklessly destroying the bathroom facilities at the

cont'd on pg 21