

GOV'T COMMITTED TO WOMEN'S HEALTH

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Government House has announced that the 2-acre property is being transformed into a cultural heritage site, managed by The Heritage Trust Antigua and Barbuda (HTAB) Inc. *Story on page 7.*

Cervical cancer elimination programme: A commitment to women’s health

Health Minister, Sir Molwyn Joseph, says this week’s launch of the National Cervical Cancer Elimination Programme underscores the government’s commitment to women’s health.

Speaking at the programme launch on Sunday, Sir Molwyn described the move as ‘historic’ noting that Antigua and Barbuda is the only place in the region where this programme is taking place.

“This initiative is a testament to our unwavering

dedication to the health and well-being of our nation’s women through the deployment of comprehensive and scientifically-backed approaches to combat cervical cancer. This is not guesswork!” he declared.

The minister explained that cervical cancer is primarily caused by the Human papillomavirus (HPV) and that it represents a significant public health challenge that is both preventable and treatable with the right interventions. He stated that the ministry’s strategy is based



Health Minister, Sir Molwyn Joseph

on three essential pillars.

“Prevention through HPV vaccinations, early detection through regular and high-quality screening and effective treatment for those diagnosed,” he disclosed.

As part of the services that will be offered, the minister revealed that an oncology surgeon has been appointed to undertake any surgeries that may become necessary.

Sir Molwyn noted that in 2018, Antigua and Barbuda became the first in the Caribbean to access the HPV vaccines through the Pan American Health Organisation’s revolving fund and made it available to the nation’s young girls and boys aimed at drastically reducing the future incidence of cervical cancer.

“This pro-active mea-

sure is now complemented by our national guidelines for cervical cancer screening which utilizes HPV testing to identify pre-cancerous conditions early when they are most treatable,” Sir Molwyn reported.

The minister further disclosed that technical advancement and guidelines underpin the ministry’s efforts, which has invested in the latest technologies and training of healthcare professionals to ensure high quality screening and treatment. He added that the policy has been designed to integrate with global ‘best practices’.

According to Sir Molwyn the strategy also aligns with the WHO policy to reduce the incidence of cervical cancer to less than four per one hundred thousand.

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GG: Cervical cancer prevalence is a reminder of inequalities in the world

The Governor General Sir Rodney Williams is of the view that the prevalence of cervical cancer in the Americas is a reminder of the inequalities that exist in the world.

Sir Rodney made the observation as he addressed Sunday's launch of the Cervical Cancer Elimination Programme organized by the ministry of health and held at Sandals Resort.

"Cervical cancer, a leading cause of death among women in Latin America and the Caribbean, is a stark reminder of the inequities that persist in wealth, gender, and access to health services. The mortality rates, three times higher in our region compared to North America, demand urgent and targeted interventions. The statistics are sobering, with over 35,000 women losing their lives to

this preventable disease annually in the Americas," he reported.

With its launch of the elimination programme for cervical cancer, Sir Rodney feels that Antigua and Barbuda is aligning itself with a positive global initiative.

"The World Health Assembly's resolution in 2020 set a bold target to eliminate cervical cancer by achieving an incidence rate of less than 4 cases per 100,000 women. Achieving this goal rests on three key pillars. The pillars are:

90% of girls fully vaccinated with the HPV vaccine by age 15.

70% of women screened with a high-performance test by age 35 and again by age 45.

90% of women with pre-cancer treated and 90% of women with inva-

sive cancer managed.

Each country should meet the 90-70-90 targets by 2030 to get on the path to eliminate cervical cancer," he explained.

According to Sir Rodney Antigua and Barbuda now leads the Eastern Caribbean Countries in this critical initiative.

"Our journey began in earnest in 2016, and over the years, the members of our medical fraternity have worked diligently to establish a national Cervical Cancer Task Force, conducting a needs assessment, and implementing a successful pilot project for high-quality cervical cancer screening. The collaboration with PAHO/WHO and Basic Health International has been most helpful, and we express our heartfelt gratitude for their support," he added.



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KEEP ANTIGUA CLEAN

More details on pending purchase of planes for LIAT 2020

More details of the arrangements for the purchase of the three aircraft from the Caribbean Development Bank for use by LIAT 2020 are now coming to hand.

Prime Minister Gaston Browne has announced that both the CDB and the Antigua and Barbuda government have agreed to an arrangement where the bank will sell the planes for a total of US\$12.1 million.

“The proposal of the government of Antigua

and Barbuda should be approved by the other shareholder governments and at least one – Dominica’s Roosevelt Skerritt – has already dispatched his letter of consent.

“We have agreed to purchase the aircraft at US\$12.1 and we also have US\$4.1 million which has been placed in escrow and which will be paid over to the CDB as soon as the agreement is signed with the understanding that the first aircraft will be hand-

ed over to LIAT 2020,” PM Browne revealed.

The prime minister indicated earlier that the new airline needs to have its first plane in hand in order to attain an Air Operator’s Certificate (AOC).

Within sixty days of the hand over of the first aircraft, the prime minister said the remaining US\$8 million will be paid to the CDB.

He said the government already has the funding arrangement in place to do

so and that this has already been communicated to the other shareholding governments.

The next step, according to the prime minister is for the court-appointed administrator, Cleveland Seaforth, to apply to the court for its approval to proceed with the purchase of the three aircraft.

Armed with the expected court approval, the government will then pay the money over to the CDB, and have the first aircraft registered in the name of LIAT 2020 as a first step towards getting the airline up and running.

PM Browne noted that the government will have to spend a further US\$7 million on two of the aircraft that are grounded for repairs.

In total, it will cost the Antigua and Barbuda government US\$20 million to get LIAT 2020 operational.

He also shared some good news as it relates to the partnership with Air Peace.

That airline is to make available an additional three aircraft to LIAT 2020 making the airline’s fleet up to six planes.

“We are expecting to start LIAT 2020 with six aircraft and as the need arises, we hope that we will be able to expand the service,” he added.

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Health Minister Sir Molwyn Joseph continues his monitoring of the ongoing upgrade at the SLBMC.

Emergency Room at the Sir Lester Bird Medical Center is undergoing expansion

The Emergency Room at the Sir Lester Bird Medical Centre is undergoing an expansion as part of the ongoing upgrade taking place at certain areas of the nation's main health facility.

The ministry of health said this expansion project marks a significant milestone in its commitment to enhancing healthcare services for the citizens of Antigua and Barbuda.

The expansion initiative

aims to triple the size of the Emergency Room, a crucial step towards improving its capacity to address the growing healthcare needs of the community.

Health Minister, Sir Molwyn Joseph, expressed his enthusiasm for the project, stating, "The expansion of the Emergency Room at the Sir Lester Bird Medical Center is a pivotal step in enhancing healthcare services for our citizens. This significant



increase in size will greatly improve our capacity to cater to the needs of patients in emergency situations."

Furthermore, Minister Joseph emphasized, "This expansion not only triples the size of the ER but also prioritizes patient privacy, fostering a conducive environment for effective Doctor/Nurse to patient interactions. Our commitment to continually improve and expand health-

care services at the Sir Lester Bird Medical Center remains unwavering, aligning with the evolving needs of the public."

The Ministry of Health said it remains dedicated to ensuring that the Sir Lester Bird Medical Center continues to serve as a beacon of quality healthcare delivery, meeting the needs of the community with excellence and compassion.



Public Safety Minister ‘saddened’ by the passing of first female COP



Delano Christopher

Public Safety Minister, Sir Steadroy Benjamin, says he is ‘saddened’ to learn of the passing of the nation’s first female Commission of Police, Delano Christopher, who died at her home on Sunday morning.

He said her appointment as commissioner in 2005 paved the way for other females to be appointed to the post in the future.

“Commissioner Christopher was an outstanding officer in the conduct of her duties and she was determined to ensure the safety of all in society.

“Her interactions with the officers and members of the RPFAB during her tenure was exemplary.

“She was the ultimate professional in her performance of the functions of Commissioner of Police,” he stated.

Sir Steadroy says he is extending condolences on behalf of the Ministry of Legal Affairs, the government and people of Antigua and Barbuda to her family in this their hour of sadness. “May her soul rest in peace,” he concluded.

“We should not be taking sides” - Ambassador Ronald Sanders speaks on ongoing international wars

As the death toll continues to skyrocket in the Israel/Gaza war and destruction and death take place in the Ukraine/Russia conflict, Ambassador Sir Ronald Sanders is sharing bits of advice on the way forward.

Sir Ronald while speaking on Monday morning on the Morning Point Show with Winston Williams, believes that the goal of world leaders should be to resolve these issues in the best possible way.

He thinks that no one should be taking sides but instead finding amicable ground where resolutions can be fostered.

This is not the first time, the Ambassador to the United States and the Organization of the American States (OAS) has shared his views on the matter.

In a recent article published in the Pointe Express newspaper, the diplomat expounded on the fact that the goal for all should be peace.

He further explained his reasoning during his latest media appearance.

“People were taking sides in the Russia/Ukraine war or taking sides in

the Israeli/Gaza war when indeed we ought not to be taking sides at all. Whenever death and destruction happen the responsibility of men and women in the world community is to end it and end it quickly,” Sanders said.

According to Sanders, the United Nations (UN) charter and laws stipulate that it is an illegal act to invade another country. It also has specifics where it admonishes individuals to find peaceful ways of resolving matters before even turning to war.

But Russia did not abide by these laws and almost two years ago invaded Ukraine.

Fast forward to October 7, 2023, when Hamas’ militants killed some 1,200 Israelis and took more than 200 hostages plummeting the two peoples that already were intertwined in decades-long conflict into a drastic state where thousands of persons continue to die.

More than 27,700 Palestinians have been killed and at least 65,000 injured by the war launched by Israel in response, according to the Hamas-run health min-



Ambassador Sir Ronald Sanders

istry. Reported Israeli air strikes on Gaza on Friday killed at least 15 people including eight in Rafah and much of northern and central Gaza has been reduced to ruins by sustained Israeli bombardment since the war began.

Last week, Hamas laid out a series of demands, including exchanging hostages for Palestinian prisoners and rebuilding Gaza, in response to an Israel-backed ceasefire proposal.

The group wants a full withdrawal of Israeli forces and an end to the war after three 45-day truce periods.

That proposal was however rejected by Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Government House poised to become important historic attraction

The grounds of Government House are currently undergoing a major metamorphosis as restoration work on the over 200-year-old historical landmark continues.

Government House has announced that the 2-acre property is being transformed into a cultural heritage site, managed by The Heritage Trust Antigua and Barbuda (HTAB) Inc.

It said following an intense tendering and selection process, C G Construction M W Pro Design and Homes That Last was awarded the contract to continue the restoration of the outer buildings and main structure. Now in its second phase, the project is slated for a West Wing completion by May 2024. It is guided by a Master Plan that was developed



by HTAB Director Gabrielle Howell. Restoration work on the entire property is targeted for an extremely ambitious December 2024 wind

up - (the project is totally dependent upon donations and grants for its execution) - and its overall objective is *cont'd on pg 8*

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to provide a unique experience for both locals and visitors alike, giving them the opportunity to explore the site and appreciate the rich history of both Government House and its environs.

The newly renovated “West Wing”, the oldest known surviving slave quarters in the Eastern Caribbean, comprises a small conference and event room, a souvenir/gift shop, café, restaurant, toilets and art gallery- cum-museum space.

The art gallery will showcase over 50 pieces of repurposed paintings that originally adorned the walls of the two-plus centuries old building. Included in the inventory is a collection of Royal Portraits of King Edward VII, Queen Alexandra, King George V and Queen Mary. This

gallery will also host the Parham Hill House art collection.

The cultural hub will offer tours for students, residents and visitors to view both permanent displays and temporary exhibitions — and will continue to house the official office of the Governor General.

The third phase of the project will cover content generation, and as a precursor to this, a review of Government House’s sovereign paintings was recently completed by international art experts. The restoration of the main house is also a crucial next step.

The tendering process has been completed for this work, with the contracts awarded to CG Construction MW Pro Design. The Museum of London Docklands will be engaged in the curation of the museum,

and two representatives from this establishment will be travelling to Antigua and Barbuda this month in order to commence work.

Governor General, Sir Rodney Williams noted that the HTAB was committed to sourcing a further US\$2.3 million to meet the immediate goals of the project.

He added that meticulous strategic planning by the Board has allowed for self-sustainability, which will guarantee the upkeep of future operations.

Government House was included on the World Monuments Worldwide Watchlist of 2018, globally earmarking this building as one of the special properties deserving of preservation. In 2016, Government House had also been registered as a LEED project for that particular year.

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African penguins have seen their populations diminish due to overfishing, climate change and oil pollution.

Migrating species crucial to planet under threat, says UN

By Esme Stallard

The world's most vulnerable migratory species face an increasing risk of extinction, a landmark UN report warns.

From turtle doves to green turtles, from the European eel to the African penguin, migratory species are the great explorers of the animal kingdom.

They play an essential role in protecting the Earth's habitats by transferring nutrients, pollinating and maintaining woodlands.

But decades of exploitation has left "species on the edge of extinction".

More than 40 years ago, many of the world's nations signed an agreement to protect the world's migrating species, known as the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS).

Now, a first global assessment has been undertaken looking at the numbers and health of these animals.

Of the 1,189 species assessed, the

researchers found one in five are threatened with extinction. For some species the situation is much worse - 97% of fish listed under the convention are at risk.

Amy Fraenkel, the UN Executive Secretary to the convention, told the BBC: "There has been a lack of attention for migratory species and if we don't succeed in turning this around, we will see extinction. There are species that are already on the edge".

The report's overwhelming conclusion is that the decline is driven by human activity - excessive hunting and killing of animals, habitat destruction, climate change and the expansion of towns and cities bringing noise and light pollution.

Dr Rob Cooke, an ecological modeller at the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, said the report shows: "Migratory species face a cocktail of threats because they are moving through different habitats".

Ms Fraenkel said although countries signed the convention four decades ago, "clearly some of these findings show there is illegal killing going on and lack of upholding the law".

She said there has been a lot of work done to prevent the illegal trading of animals but less focus on animals that are killed for sport, leisure and food, and never traded.

It is estimated that between 11 and 36 million birds are illegally killed or taken annually in the Mediterranean region, with a further few million estimated to be illegally killed or taken in the Arabian Peninsula, Iran and Iraq.

Kelly Malsch, lead author of the report and head of UNEP-WCMC's Species Programme, said it is also the very nature of migration that makes it challenging to protect these animals. Some, like the Monarch Butterfly, will travel thousands of miles over a dozen country borders.

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Usher joined by Alicia Keys and more at Super Bowl half-time show

By Steven McIntosh

R&B star Usher delivered a hit-heavy half-time show at Sunday's Super Bowl - with help from will.i.am, Alicia Keys, Ludacris... and a pair of roller skates.

A disclaimer shown before the performance jokingly warned viewers it may cause "singing, dancing, sweating, gyrating, and possible relationship issues". It would go on to deliver on all fronts.

Dressed in all-white and surrounded by a swarm of energetic dancers, Usher emerged on the stage at the Allegiant Stadium in Las Vegas and launched straight into one of his best-known songs, Caught Up.

It kicked off a dynamic performance which took advantage of the 45-year-old's dancing skills and sizeable back catalogue.

Before his half-time show, Usher admitted it had been "a challenge to squeeze



Alicia Keys appeared on stage behind a giant red piano and began performing her hit If I Ain't Got You.

30 years in to 13 minutes". But the singer did an admirable job of cramming in as many of his most recognisable songs as possible.

The set featured acrobats and a brass band so large there were enough members to spell out "USHER" on the grounds of the stadium as he was performing.

The singer switched effortlessly between the two apexes of his music: club anthems and sex jams.

Some songs ran for a

full verse and a chorus, others for just a few seconds. A tiny snippet of Superstar appropriately saw him sing only the lyrics: "Spotlight / big stage / 50,000 fans screaming in a rage" - as if to hammer home the magnitude of his Super Bowl show.

The dancers who surrounded him - many of whom had only travelled a short distance from his Vegas residency - wore colourful, even outlandish outfits,

perfectly complementing his central performance and adding to the sense of spectacle.

Once Usher was a few songs deep and well into his groove, he took a back seat as his first guest, Alicia Keys, appeared behind a bright red piano wearing a matching sparkly red outfit, launching into one of her own biggest hits If I Ain't Got You.

The pair then joined *cont'd on pg 12*

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She told the BBC: "Whether it is birds, or animals on land, or those swimming in our oceans, they are interacting with different country regulations which highlights the need for consistent approaches."

By mapping migration corridors, it is hoped that animals can be protected from human activities. One of the biggest threats facing sharks and rays is being incidentally fished as bycatch. Satellite imagery has previously revealed that there is extensive overlap between the areas used by migrating

sharks and those frequented by global fishing fleets.

Inger Andersen, executive director of the UN Environment Programme, said she remains optimistic. "There is hope," she added.

Some species have seen their populations climb thanks to conservation efforts. The South Atlantic population of Humpback Whales numbered just 450 in the mid-1950s after being extensively hunted. Following the introduction of protections, there are now estimated to be more than 25,000.

Dr Cooke welcomed the report but

said there were still thousands of migratory species, particularly insects, not currently assessed. Only one insect is listed under the CMS.

"This is a clear area to improve on," he said.

Insect populations are difficult to measure - their small frames means they cannot wear trackers, and some, like dragonflies, cannot be easily seen as they do not swarm like birds.

On Sunday, government officials began gathering in Uzbekistan to develop a coordinated plan in response to this research.



Front row left to right: Ludacris, Usher, Lil Jon and Jermaine Dupri.

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forces to perform their duet My Boo - providing one of the sweetest moments in a performance full of reunions as the pair joyously recreated their 2004 smash.

After the song had drawn to a close and Keys was whisked away, the other guest stars started coming thick and fast.

Producer-rapper Jermaine Dupri joined Usher for a quick blast of Confessions Part II - and prompted one of the night's viral trends as some viewers made light of the way his suit exposed his bare legs.

The fact that ballads were blended so seamlessly with club anthems gave Usher moments to catch his breath, as well as show off his vocal prowess and, crucially, take his shirt off.

But even when performing two of his most famous slow jams, Burn and U Got It Bad, Usher couldn't stand still - jerking his body to the rhythm and commanding the attention of an

entire stadium.

During Burn, flames were projected onto the huge circular platform he was performing on - one of the most visually striking moments of the night.

Usher's other guests included H.E.R. - who played a rousing guitar solo during U Got It Bad before launching into the recognisable riff of Bad Girl as Usher disappeared for a costume change.

The singer re-emerged wearing a glittery black-and-blue outfit complete with roller skates as he introduced will.i.am for their collaboration OMG - a song title which reflected the crowd's reaction.

Usher recreated the skating sequence which had become a viral highlight of his recent Vegas residency - and impressively managed not to fall over.

The only drawback in an otherwise flawless half-time show was that the number of cameo appearances in the second half almost began to work

against the singer.

While a rumoured collaboration with Justin Bieber failed to materialise, Usher was nearly crowded out as dancers and star guests packed the stage.

Lil Jon appeared for a slightly random but entirely welcome detour into his own anthemic hit Turn Down For What. But his arrival on stage made obvious to fans what was coming next.

By the time a charismatic Ludacris appeared, anticipation was at fever pitch. The trio launched into a pulsing rendition of Usher's career-defining hit Yeah!

A number one around the world in the mid-noughties and an undeniable banger, the song provided the perfect climax in a half-time show full of highlights.

Watching Usher's set was US megastar Taylor Swift, rapper Jay-Z, Hollywood actor Paul Rudd and former basketball players LeBron and James Shaquille O'Neal.

Venezuela defends military build-up near border with Guyana

The government of Venezuela accused neighbouring Guayana Sunday of granting illegal oil exploration concessions in territory the two nations are disputing. Venezuela said it would reserve the right to take any diplomatic actions necessary.

The comments Sunday came after Guyana said Saturday that it has satellite imagery showing Venezuelan military movements near the South American country's eastern border with Guyana.

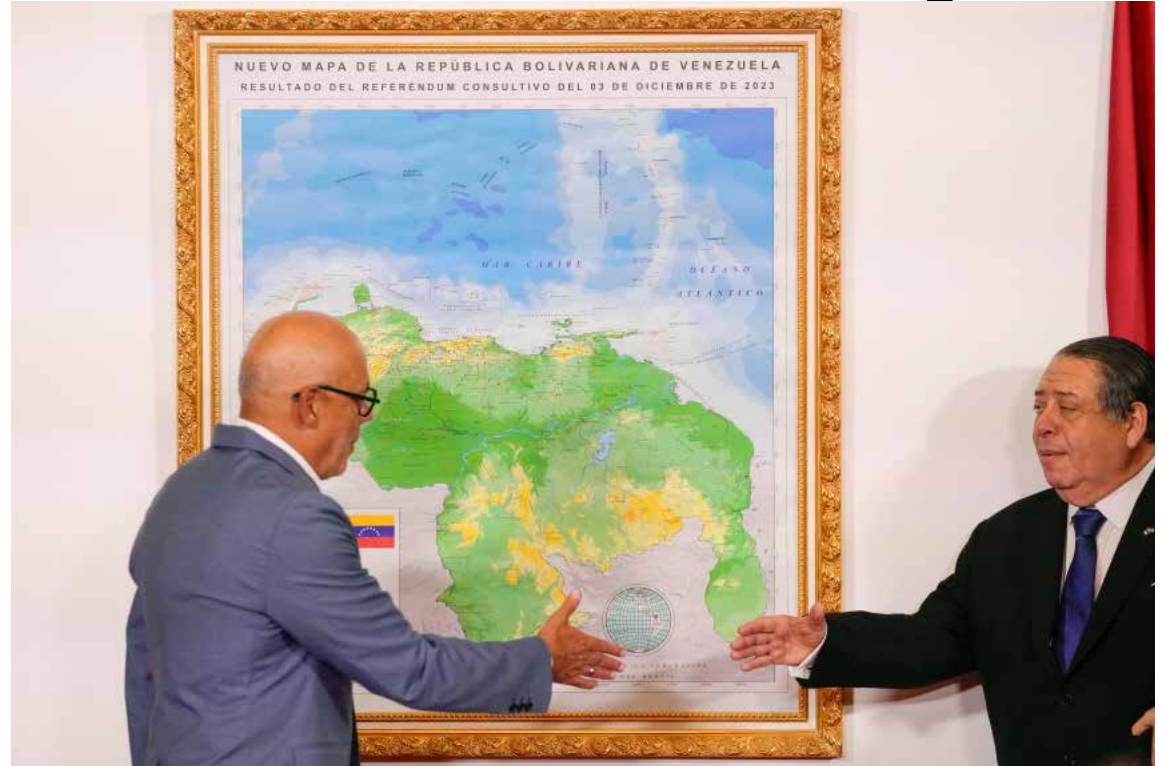
Venezuela's statement did not deny Guyana's claim of a military and infrastructure buildup. Rather, it said it was within its rights to beef up its border forces.

Venezuela claimed Guayana had granted "illegal oil concessions ... in a maritime area that is indisputably Venezuelan."

Oil giant ExxonMobil has said it will keep ramping up production in offshore fields off Guyana despite the escalation of the territorial dispute.

The two sides have feuded over borderlines for decades. Venezuela has been laying claim to the mineral-rich Essequibo region, which covers about two-thirds of Guyana's surface area.

Both sides accused the other of breaching a peace agreement signed in the Caribbean in December to ease



National Assembly President Jorge Rodriguez, left, and Chairman of the Special Commission for the Defense of Guyana Essequibo Hermann Escarra, shake hands after unveiling Venezuela's new map that includes the Essequibo territory, a swath of land that is administered and controlled by Guyana but claimed by Venezuela, in Caracas, Venezuela, Friday, December 8, 2023. (AP Photo/Matias Delacroix)

tensions over border demarcation lines.

Under the Argyle Agreement signed on the island of St Vincent in December, the two countries agreed not to use force or to threaten each other. The talks were brokered by Brazil and Caribbean governments.

The latest developments came hours after satellite images posted by the US Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) showed Venezuela is extending its base on Ankoko Island, half of which Venezuela seized from Guyana in the mid-1960s, and nearby Punta Barima, less than 50 miles (80 kilometres) from

the Guyana border.

The images showed significant infrastructure improvement of roads and other facilities near the two areas, the CSIS said. Foreign Secretary Robert Persaud noted that "Guyana will continue to respect the Argyle Declaration and hopes that Venezuela will do the same."

Guyana argues that an 1899 international boundary commission settled the border demarcation once and for all.

But for more than 60 years Venezuela has accused the commission of cheating it out of the Essequibo region.

Guyana has taken the issue to the World Court in the Netherlands for a definitive ruling, while Venezuela has said it prefers direct bilateral talks as the way forward.

On Friday, the Venezuelan defence ministry accused Guyana of threatening the St. Vincent agreement by irresponsible actions and media deception, maintaining that the "Essequibo is ours."

It also said that ExxonMobil, which is producing 645,000 barrels of offshore oil daily from Guyana, is collaborating with the government and the US military to exploit oil and gas

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Rocío San Miguel: Venezuelan rights activist detained over alleged plot

By Vanessa Buschschlüter

Venezuelan officials have confirmed they are holding a prominent human rights activist, Rocío San Miguel.

Ms San Miguel, a vocal critic of the government of President Nicolás Maduro, was detained on Friday and taken to an undisclosed location.

On Sunday, the prosecutor general, who is a close ally of Mr Maduro, accused Ms San Miguel of involvement in an alleged plot to kill the president.

The government has provided few details of the alleged plot.

Fifty-seven-year-old Rocío San Miguel is an expert on defence issues who leads the Control Ciudadano NGO, which advocates civilian oversight of Venezuela's armed forces.

Rights activists had sounded the alarm on Friday, when Ms San Miguel was detained by intelligence agents at Simón Bolívar international airport, near the capital, Caracas.

Her lawyer said she had not been informed where Ms San Miguel was being held



Rocío San Miguel (in this file photo from 2006) was arrested on Friday.

or what, if anything, she had been charged with.

It took two days for Prosecutor-General Tarek William Saab to confirm her arrest.

Mr Saab wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter, that a warrant had been issued for her arrest for being allegedly linked to "a conspiracy and the attempted magnicide known as 'White Armband'".

He said that the aim of the "conspiracy" had been to kill President Maduro and other high-ranking officials,

as well as attacking several military units in the city of San Cristóbal.

Ms San Miguel's arrest comes just weeks after 36 government critics were rounded up.

They, too, were accused of having links to alleged plots to kill President Maduro.

The wave of detentions comes as the government is preparing to announce the date of the presidential election, which is due to be held later this year.

The government had

agreed in talks held in Barbados with opposition representatives to lay the groundwork for the election to be held freely and fairly.

But rights groups say that rather than progress, there have been setbacks since the agreement.

Most notably, a ban which prevents the main opposition candidate, María Corina Machado, from running for office was upheld by the Supreme Court.

Members of her Vente Venezuela party are among those who have been accused of being part of the alleged plot against Mr Maduro.

Ms Machado has in the past denounced the arrests as part of a campaign aimed at intimidating her and suppressing any opposition to Mr Maduro, who has been in power since 2013.

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resources in waters claimed by Venezuela.

Guyanese President Irfaan Ali is expected to meet his Venezuelan counterpart, Nicolás Maduro in March for a second summit on the border issue.

Several top American administration and military officials have visited Guyana

in recent weeks as a show of support.

The US also supplied military overflights monitoring Venezuelan troops and other activities at the height of tensions in December, in the days leading up to a December 3 referendum in Venezuela that had authorized the annexation of the Essequibo.

Armed woman killed in Joel Osteen Texas megachurch shootout

By Chloë Kim

A woman clad in a trench coat and accompanied by a child opened fire in a crowded Texas megachurch before she was gunned down by security, officials say.

The suspect, named by police as Genesse Ivonne Moreno, 36, was with her seven-year-old son, who was critically injured in the Houston shootout.

Investigators said the attacker had “Palestine” written on the butt of her rifle and they had uncovered antisemitic writings.

But they said the motive is unclear.

A 57-year-old man was shot in the hip during the incident and has since been discharged from hospital.

The gunman’s unnamed son was shot in the head during the shootout and is currently “fighting for his life”, said police. It is not clear who shot the boy.

Police said the suspect used an AR-15 rifle for the attack. She also had a .22 calibre rifle, but did not fire that weapon.

Officials told Monday’s news conference the attacker has a history of mental health issues and was placed under an emergency detention order in 2016.

Public records indicate Moreno also has a long record of arrests and convictions on assault, drug, and



The woman entered one of America’s largest churches on Sunday and opened fire.

weapons charges.

She previously went by several other aliases, including Jeffery Escalante, and is variously listed as male and female in official records. Police described her in the news conference as a Hispanic female.

Police said they believe her apparent antisemitic views may have stemmed from a familial dispute with her ex-husband’s family, some of whom are Jewish.

The site of the shooting was Lakewood Church, one of the largest congregations in the country, run by the renowned televangelist pastor Joel Osteen.

Moreno’s connection to the church is still being investigated, but the KHOU local television station reports her mother attended Lakewood.

The outlet added that staff at the church may have

been questioned during Moreno’s contentious divorce and child custody proceedings, Montgomery County court records indicate.

Police said the suspect pulled up to the west side of the building in a white vehicle at 13:53 local time (19:53 GMT) just as a Spanish-speaking service was about to begin.

She displayed her weapon to an unarmed security guard, who proceeded to let her inside, and she then opened fire inside the church’s hallway at about 13:55.

A 28-year-old Houston police officer and a 38-year-old agent with the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission (TABC), both of whom were off-duty and had been hired as church security, returned fire.

Multiple rounds were

fired in the ensuing gun battle, officials said, before the attacker was “neutralised” and pronounced dead at 14:07.

Houston Police Chief Troy Finner said Moreno was seen spraying “some type of substance on the ground”, but investigators have determined it posed no risk.

After being shot, she told the two officers there was a bomb, but a search by law enforcement found no explosives in her backpack or vehicle.

TABC chairman Kevin Lilly identified his agency’s officer as Adrian Herrera.

Praising the duo for holding their ground in the face of gunfire, he said: “What happened yesterday was the personification of heroism and valour.

cont’d on pg 16

Palestinians sheltering in Rafah fear impending Israeli ground offensive

A Palestinian doctor in Rafah has said people are terrified about the prospect of an Israeli ground offensive in Gaza's southern-most city, after a night of some of the worst air strikes he has experienced since arriving there.

In a series of messages sent to the BBC by phone overnight, Dr Ahmed Abuibaid described the air strikes as incessant and everywhere.

“[The] most popular question on people’s minds is, where can we go?” he said.

Last week, Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that he had ordered troops to prepare to expand its ground operation into Rafah.

More than half of Gaza’s population of 2.3 million is now crammed into



the city on the border with Egypt, which was home to only 250,000 people before the war between Israel and Hamas.

Many of the displaced people are living in makeshift shelters or tents in

squalid conditions, with scarce access to safe drinking water or food.

On Monday, UN human rights chief Volker Türk warned that an assault on Rafah would be “terrifying, given the pros-

pect that an extremely high number of civilians, again mostly children and women, will likely be killed and injured”.

He also said it could mean that the “meagre” humanitarian aid getting into Gaza might stop, with most deliveries currently going through the Egyptian-controlled Rafah border crossing.

His warning follows an unusually sharp criticism from the US last week, with President Joe Biden calling Israel’s retaliatory campaign in Gaza “over the top”. On Monday, Mr Biden said Israeli operations in Rafah “should not proceed without a credible plan for ensuring the safety” of civilians.

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“They were a wall that existed between worshippers and terror. Between freedom of religion and murder.”

Mr Osteen, a 60-year-old televangelist, took the helm of one of the most popular megachurches in the country after his father and Lakewood’s founding pastor died.

The 16,000-seat church used to be home to the Houston Rockets, an NBA team, before undergoing renovations in the early 2000s.

Under Mr Osteen’s leadership, the church has grown in size and reputation, with 45,000 parishioners attending weekly services in person, in addition to thou-

sands who watch online and on television.

It is the third-largest church in the country, according to the Hartford Institute for Religion Research.

“Our community is devastated by today’s events and grateful for the swift actions of law enforcement,” Mr Osteen said in a statement.

“In the face of such darkness, we must hold onto our faith and remember evil will not prevail.”

Known for promoting what is called the prosperity gospel, Mr Osteen often preaches that financial blessings are gifts from God and has published many books promising that faith will increase one’s wealth.

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Speaking after a meeting with Jordan's King Abdullah, Mr Biden also said the US was working on a ceasefire deal lasting "at least six weeks".

The UK Foreign Secretary, Lord Cameron, said Israel should "stop and think seriously" before taking further action in Rafah.

The EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, on Monday urged allies of Israel to stop sending weapons, as "too many people" are being killed in Gaza.

In an interview with ABC News on Sunday, Mr Netanyahu said Israel was "working out a detailed plan" to move civilians to areas north of the city.

"Victory is within reach," he said. "Those who say that under no circumstances should we enter Rafah are basically saying, 'lose the war, keep Hamas there.'"

The Israeli military launched a large-scale air and ground campaign in Gaza after Hamas gunmen killed more than 1,200 people in southern Israel on 7 October and took 253 other people hostage.

The Hamas-run health ministry in Gaza says more than 28,100 Palestinians have been killed in the fighting since then.

One of the displaced people in Rafah is Dr Abuibaid, who was forced to abandon his job at Nasser Hospital in the nearby city of Khan Younis after his home was destroyed in an Israeli air strike and his father suffered a traumatic spinal injury.

He is now facing the possibility of having to move out of Rafah - but it is unclear where would be safe for him to go.

"People are very scared about a possible military ground operation soon in the city," he said.

Overnight Israeli strikes from Sunday into Monday, carried out

during a operation to rescue two Israeli hostages, frightened many others who have sought refuge in the city.

Abo Mohamed Attya said he was sleeping in a tent with his family when he woke up to the sound of the bombardment.

"Suddenly... missiles are being hit everywhere and firing as well and airplanes everywhere, all of this is on the tents and the people in the streets," he told the BBC.

Mr Attya, who previously fled Nuseirat refugee camp in the middle of the Gaza Strip after receiving Israeli evacuation orders, complained that there had been no warning from the Israeli military that they were going to target Rafah overnight.

"We hoped there was a warning to evacuate like they did in Nuseirat and we went to Rafah. We would have went out of Rafah to anywhere they told us. We have no problem, we would evacuate for our children," he explained.

The Hamas-run Palestinian health ministry said at least 67 people were killed in the Israeli strikes and hostage rescue raid in Rafah overnight.

"There is no safe place anymore; nowhere is safe, even the hospitals are unsafe. One hopes to die instead," Mr Attya said.

Aside from the continuing threat of Israeli air strikes and an impending ground operation, the situation for people in Rafah is made more difficult by the dire living conditions, with little access to water, food and sanitation, and rapidly dwindling medical supplies.

Dr Abuibaid said he had observed many diseases among the people in Rafah and that they had been exacerbated by the "severe decrease in the availability of drugs and treatment".

Another medic in Rafah, who did not want to be named, told the

BBC that many people were living in cramped and unsanitary conditions.

"I live here with 20 people in two rooms... and I know people that are 100 people in three rooms."

"We don't have water to wash, we don't have clothes, we don't have the option to do hygiene stuff," he said.

"My friends, all of the people I meet... all of them are having at least flu, cholera, diarrhoea, scabies, hepatitis A - which is a newcomer for us - and it's getting worse and worse."

"And the aid is less as the siege is increasing, the war is increasing, [Israeli soldiers] are getting closer to Rafah, and it feels very scary right now", he said.

Despite being located next to the only crossing point for goods and people between Gaza and Egypt, Rafah has not received nearly enough aid to satisfy the needs of the people there.

One man in the city told the BBC that currently people were waiting days for aid deliveries, and that when they did arrive, supplies of water were insufficient.

"We can't find water nor do we get enough of it, our throats are dry from the shortage of water," another woman in Rafah said.

The head of the UN's agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA), which is the largest humanitarian organization in Gaza, said on Monday that civil order was breaking down, with members of the local Hamas-run police force being killed or reluctant to protect aid lorries because of fears for their own safety.

"Yesterday, for the first time, the UN could not operate with a minimum of protection, which was local police. And because we had no local police, our trucks, our convoys at the border have been looted, and trucks have been vandalised by hundreds of young people."

Guyanese pacer Ronsford Beaton suspended from bowling

Ronsford Beaton, the Guyana Harpy Eagles fast bowler, was reported for a suspect bowling action during the ongoing West Indies Championship four-day first-class competition.

Beaton's action was cited by match officials during the first-round match between Guyana Harpy Eagles and Trinidad and Tobago Red Force at the Conaree Cricket Centre in St. Kitts, which ended last Saturday.

As part of the process, once a player is reported for a suspect bowling action, video footage from the match in which the player was reported is provided to CWI.

The video footage along with the written report is then sent to the CWI Bowling Review Group (BRG) and Loughborough University for analysis using an



Ronsford Beaton (CWI Media) Opinion Report.

On Sunday, Cricket West Indies (CWI) confirmed that the Opinion Report by the Independent Assessor at Loughborough University, has found Beaton's bowling action to be illegal and, as such, he has been suspended from bowling in all West Indies international and regional matches with immediate effect.

The assessment re-

vealed that Beaton's deliveries exceeded the level of tolerance for extension of the elbow permitted under playing regulations. As per the International Cricket Council (ICC) regulations, the suspension will also apply to all other domestic leagues worldwide.

Beaton will remain suspended until such time as his action is found to be legal, either by an Opinion

Report from Loughborough University or by an independent analysis from an accredited ICC testing centre, in accordance with the CWI Regulations for Dealing with Suspected Illegal Bowling Actions.

Isai Thorne, who returned from competing with the West Indies Men's Under 19 team at the recently concluded ICC Men's Under-19 World Cup in South Africa, will replace Beaton in the Guyana Harpy Eagles squad.

The Round 2 of matches in the West Indies Championship start on Wednesday, February 14.

Guyana's first-round match against Trinidad and Tobago was abandoned with no result due to seepage of water onto the pitch from 24 hours of persistent rainfall.

Rising Sun beat Bethesda on first innings in rain-affected ABCA two-day competition

Host WES Rising Sun Spartans claimed first innings points in a drawn affair with Caribbean Union Bank (CUB) Bethesda Golden Eagles in the only encounter in which play was possible in the Antigua and Barbuda Cricket Association (ABCA) two-day championship over the weekend.

Following the loss of play on the first day, losing the toss, and being sent in to bat at the Rising Sun playing field in St. John's, the Bethesda Golden Eagles were dismissed for 138 in 39.1 overs.

Opener Teron Payne top-scored with 63 off 88 balls, including six fours and three sixes. However, only three other Golden Eagles batsmen were able to reach double figures.

Deago Joseph made 20, Roland Francis got 15, and opener and captain Shacoy Floyd scored 13. Tassilo Allen grabbed four for 32, and medium pacer Shane Burton picked up three for 23.

In reply, the Rising Sun Spartans reached 142 for three in 16 overs at the end of play. Opener Junior Henry slammed 54 off 26 balls, including

five sixes and three fours.

Allen, who opened the innings, made 44 off 34 balls, including six fours and a six, and Burton was not out on 38 off 24 balls, which included three sixes and two fours.

Heavy rain last Wednesday and Thursday, plus light showers and heavy overcast conditions on Saturday, ruled out the possibility of any play taking place in any of the other four scheduled matches across the island.

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2024 softball cricket season commences with T10 mixed contest

The 2024 domestic season of the Antigua & Barbuda Softball Cricket Association (ABSCA) commenced with the opening round of matches in a T10 mixed (male and female) competition on Sunday.

Bryson's Shipping & Insurance Bullets Mixed defeated Sisserou Mixed by 10 wickets.

Sisserou Mixed won the toss and batted, scoring 32 for seven from 10 overs. Stacey Telemaque made 13, and Kimani George claimed two wickets for seven runs.

The Bullets achieved victory by scoring 38 without loss, with Deran Benta cracking 34 not out.

Essan Warner slammed a century as Bullets Mixed crushed Rackaman Construction Strictly Business Mixed by 103 runs.

Bullets made 160 for one from 10 overs, with Essan Warner smashing 116, including 17 sixes and two fours, and Sidella Naomi Bellot striking 21 not out.

Strictly Business Mixed were dismissed for 57 in 9.3 overs. Egbert Francis scored 30. Yolanda Celestine snatched three wickets for one run,

Warner grabbed two

wickets without conceding a run, and Kimani George claimed two wickets for six runs.

Rackaman Construction Strictly Business Mixed rebounded to trounce PMS Mixed by 50 runs. Strictly Business Mixed made 100 for three from 10 overs.

PMS Mixed was restricted to 50 for seven from 10 overs. Vishal Gobin scored 17, while Debra Phillip grabbed two wickets for two runs, and Egbert Francis took two for 13.

Buckley's 3J's Mixed prevailed by 67 runs against Sisserou Mixed.

3J's won the toss and batted, scoring 97 for two from 10 overs. Denley Thomas cracked 52, including five sixes and three fours, and Kimberly Anthony scored 16.

Sisserou Mixed tumbled to 30 all out in 7.5 overs, with Stacey Telemaque getting 10. Ashfield Weatherhead snapped up three wickets for five runs, and Menover Govia captured three for 11.

Buckley's 3J's Mixed also claimed a 44-run victory against the Dredgers.

3J's made 85 for seven from 10 overs. Denley Thomas hit 25, Randino



Essan Warner hit a century for Bryson's Shipping & Insurance Bullets

Turner struck 23, and Steve Martin got 19. Mervin Higgins bagged four for 21, and Gaynell O'Garro had two for 15.

Dredgers Mixed were dismissed for 41 in 7.5 overs. Menover Govia took three wickets for six runs, and Kimberly Anthony and Randino Turner each claimed two for 11.

Dredgers Mixed re-



Tyrone Williams Jr. hammered 59 not out for Dredgers

bounded to claim a nine-wicket win against PMS Mixed, who won the toss and batted, scoring 92 for three from 10 overs.

Kenny Benjamin hit 28, Denfield Roach struck 20 not out, and

Clarence Francis got 18. Gaynell O'Garro had one wicket for seven runs.

Dredgers Mixed achieved victory by scoring 93 for one in 5.5 overs.

Tyrone Williams Jr. hammered 59 not out, which included eight sixes and one four, and Mervin Higgins struck 23 not out.

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The match at Mack Pond in All Saints between the All Saints Pythons and the Bolans Blasters was abandoned due to the wetness of the bowler's run-up.

The other three matches were also abandoned without a ball being bowled. Pigotts Crushers were slated to face cup-holders PIC Insurance Liberta Black Hawks at Pigotts.



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Ivory Coast fans take to streets to celebrate Africa Cup of Nations win

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast (AP) - Thousands of jubilant Ivory Coast supporters were taking to Abidjan's city streets on Monday to celebrate the country's Africa Cup of Nations victory.

Blowing whistles and vu-zuzelas, singing and chanting, the supporters poured out of commuter buses near the Félix-Houphouët-Boigny Stadium, where many then ran to arrive in time for the culmination of the team's victory parade through the city.

The Elephants defeated Nigeria 2-1 in Sunday's final to claim the country's third title after wins in 1992 and 2015. It set off unbridled celebrations that lasted through the night in Abidjan and beyond.

Interim coach Emerse Faé became the first in the history of the tournament to win it without having been in charge at the start.

"It's a fantastic story," supporter Sanogo Karamoko told the AP. He referred to the long wait since a host country won the biennial tournament. Egypt was the last in 2006.

Fans danced and cheered to loud music in the stadium



Ivory Coast players celebrate after winning the African Cup of Nations final soccer match between Nigeria and Ivory Coast, at the Olympic Stadium of Ebimpe in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, Sunday, Feb. 11, 2024. (AP)

as they awaited their heroes, while some simply rested while they could as the toll of their evident all-night celebrations took hold.

Supporters also made their way directly to the team's hotel in the district of Cocody, from where the procession began its slow crawl through a sea of fans on the road.

Some waved Morocco flags to thank the Atlas Lions for keeping the Ivory Coast in the competition. The host nation was facing an early exit

until Morocco defeated Zambia in another group to allow Ivory Coast squeeze into the knockout stage as one of the best four third-place finishers in the six groups.

"Without this win from Morocco, we wouldn't have qualified," said Aminata Sahoné, who wore a Morocco cap and had a Morocco bag on her back.

"It would have been finished for us, but they came, they scored, they won. It gave us a chance and some strength, some belief in fight-

ing to make something possible. Well, it paid off."

Ivory Coast's progression to the final remained fraught with setbacks as it overcame the firing of its coach and claimed very late come-from-behind wins over defending champion Senegal and Mali in the knockout stage.

Sébastien Haller fired the team into the final with the winning goal against Congo in the semifinals, then scored the winner against Nigeria in the final.

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Antigua and Barbuda.

"This would help grow tourism quite a lot. I traveled to a lot of these different islands; they put on races, and they brought me there as a special guest," Moore said.

"The Americans already want to come here, and so if the track is good,

you are just giving them a better excuse to come.

"The biggest thing with the track is to make the race surface smooth. Concrete is much smoother and gives a much better grip than blacktop. So a lot of the tracks back home in America are mostly constructed with concrete.

The Prime Minister, Gaston

Browne, said his government will continue to give the Antigua and Barbuda Drag Racing Association (ABDRA) support to develop the track at the North Sound International Raceway.

"My administration can take some credit for the preparation of the race track, and we are committed to enhancing it," PM Browne stated.

Drag-A-Geddon reschedule to take place next month

Drag racing enthusiasts in Antigua and Barbuda will have to wait a little while longer to see some much-anticipated competition during the Drag-A-Geddon event at the North Sound International Raceway.

The event, featuring cars and motorbikes from the United States and several Caribbean islands, was slated to take place last weekend but has been postponed to next month due to inclement weather and the inability to get the track prepared.

It has been rescheduled to take place at the same venue on the weekend of March 23-26.

Several top international drag racers and cars, including the Marsh Built team of United States-based Antiguan Sports Ambassador Jason Marsh, arrived in Antigua last week for the Drag-A-Geddon event.

During a career spanning 18 to 20 years, Ambassador Marsh has developed into an elite mechanic and driver and has claimed several top records and awards on the US drag racing circuit.

One of the organizers, Gaston Browne III, said that with international experts



Several members of the drag racing fraternity appeared as guests on the Browne and Browne Show on Pointe FM Radio on Saturday, February 10, 2024. From left to right: drag racer Chris 'Mafia' Moore; Marsh Built car tuner Jamie Marsh; Marsh Built Manager Neil 'Geese' Francis; Prime Minister Honourable Gaston Browne; drag racer Charles Webb (a.k.a. 45 NYC); and Minister of Health and the Environment Honourable Sir Molwyn Joseph.

attending and Marsh Built's cars on display, Drag-A-Geddon aims to prove the prowess of Caribbean drag racing and secure Antigua's place among elite racing destinations.

"What we are trying to accomplish here is that when the American drag racers have their off-season during the winter, we can have a special track here that can facilitate them by bringing them here," Gaston Browne III said on the Browne and

Browne Show on Pointe FM on Saturday.

"In this way, there will be no downtime in the drag racing industry. You can come here to the Caribbean, where it is warm and has a nice climate. They can bring their families here and go to the beach on the weekends, so it's like a one-stop shop.

"So there are different things that we could accomplish here, and this would definitely boost the sports tourism industry. We need

to build a track. We have a car racing track here, but it is not up to par with United States standards."

The famous world record drag racer Chris "Mafia" Moore, who has a five-second non-wheelie bar bike, also came to Antigua for the Drag-A-Geddon event.

Moore agreed that a proper track would certainly enhance drag racing as well as boost sports tourism in

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