

# STOP THE GRIFT

*Major overhaul of government procurement*

Story on Page 2



Happy smiles from five newly minted medical doctors. From left: Dr. Lee-Ann Sandy, Dr. Doniece Thomas, Dr Jason Thwaites, Dr. Phillescia Jean, and Dr. Grace Edwards *Story on page 8.*

## Stop the grift: Major overhaul of government procurement

Government is moving to bring greater control to an area of its operations; the outsourcing for goods and services, which has been subjected to systemic 'bobol' for many years.

The Finance Secretary, Rasona Davis-Crump, has issued a circular outlining new procedures for anyone providing goods or services to the government. These go into effect from March 1.

"The procedures for engaging in a legal transaction to provide goods and services to the Government of Antigua and Barbuda have been revised and take effect March 1, 2024. This is part of the Government's effort to strengthen expenditure management and controls, ensure it receives value for money, and improve relations with suppliers and contractors," the circular stated.

It added that all merchants, vendors, service providers or contractors doing business with the Government must be duly registered and compliant with the Inland Revenue Department, Social Security, Medical Benefits and Board of Education as required by law.

Speaking on the Browne and Browne Show on Pointe FM on Saturday, Prime Minister Gaston Browne explained that there are some merchants who claim



Prime Minister Gaston Browne

the government owes them millions of dollars but who do not pay 'even a dollar' in taxes. This must end, he declared.

The prime minister reported that the officials of the ministry of finance will meet with the suppliers to do a complete review of their bills as he is of the view that these may be subject to overpricing.

"What the suppliers/contractors have been doing, for decades, as we are only now trying to reign them in, is that some have equipment that have been down (for mechanical or other reasons), yet they still submit bills. Unfortunately, we have some public servants in the system, who 'see nothing, hear nothing' as they validate these bills, all for a little \$500 on the side," he revealed.

The plan is for the min-

istry to meet with vendors and service providers 'to go through these bills' carefully, which according to the prime minister all involve 'at least fifty percent fat'.

One of the goals for the upcoming meeting is to ensure that all these entities pay their required amount of taxes to the Inland Revenue Department.

The other rules being introduced by the ministry of finance to cover all government outsourcing include; once a Ministry or Department approaches a merchant, vendor, or service provider to acquire a good or service the following steps must be followed:

The merchant, vendor or service provider submits an invoice to the relevant ministry/department detailing the exact quantities and itemised costs of the requested goods or services.

The merchant, vendor or service provider delivers the good or service to the ministry or department upon receipt of payment issued by the Treasury Department.

At no point should a merchant, vendor or service provider supply any good or service to any ministry or department on credit - that is, before being issued payment by the Treasury - without the expressed approval of the Office of the Financial Secretary.

For contractors doing business with the Government, the relevant Permanent Secretary and the Contractor must execute a contract having followed the requisite procurement procedures. This contract must then be signed by the Financial Secretary BEFORE a contractor can commence work on any project. If the contract is not signed by the Financial Secretary it is not valid and payment cannot be made from the Treasury Department.

Any good or service supplied, or work undertaken by a merchant, vendor, service provider or contractor in breach of the Government's procurement procedures may NOT be considered a legitimate liability of the Government.

All merchants, vendors, service providers, and contractors should be guided accordingly.

## One step closer: LIAT 2020

LIAT 2020, the airline entity that is being created to provide reliable air services between the countries of the Caribbean, is one step closer to becoming a reality.

Prime Minister Gaston Browne has announced that one of the major hurdles, securing approval from the shareholder governments of LIAT (1974) Ltd. for the sale of the three aircraft that had been leased to the now-defunct airline, has been overcome with all three governments giving that approval in writing.

Speaking on the Browne and Browne show on Saturday, PM Browne also announced that the Caribbean Development Bank which financed the LIAT (1974) Ltd.'s purchase of the three aircraft, has also signaled its approval of the purchase.

The Antigua and Barbuda and the CDB have agreed that the planes will be sold for US\$12.1 million. "We already have some of the money in an escrow account and we are willing to make the first payment of US\$4.1 million with financing for the reminder already secured," the prime minister declared.

The prime minister said the new airline will have two shareholders initially and both have committed to spend significant amounts to get LIAT2020 up and running.



"Along with the US\$12.1 million that we will use to purchase the three aircraft, we will have to spend an additional US\$8 million as only one of the planes is currently operational. Air Peace, (the Nigerian airline) will spend another US\$60 million into the airline and they will be the largest shareholder and will operate the new airline. Together, this means that between our government and Air Peace you are looking at EC\$200 million dollars that will be spent to improve air connectivity and to strengthen the integration movement," PM Browne explained.

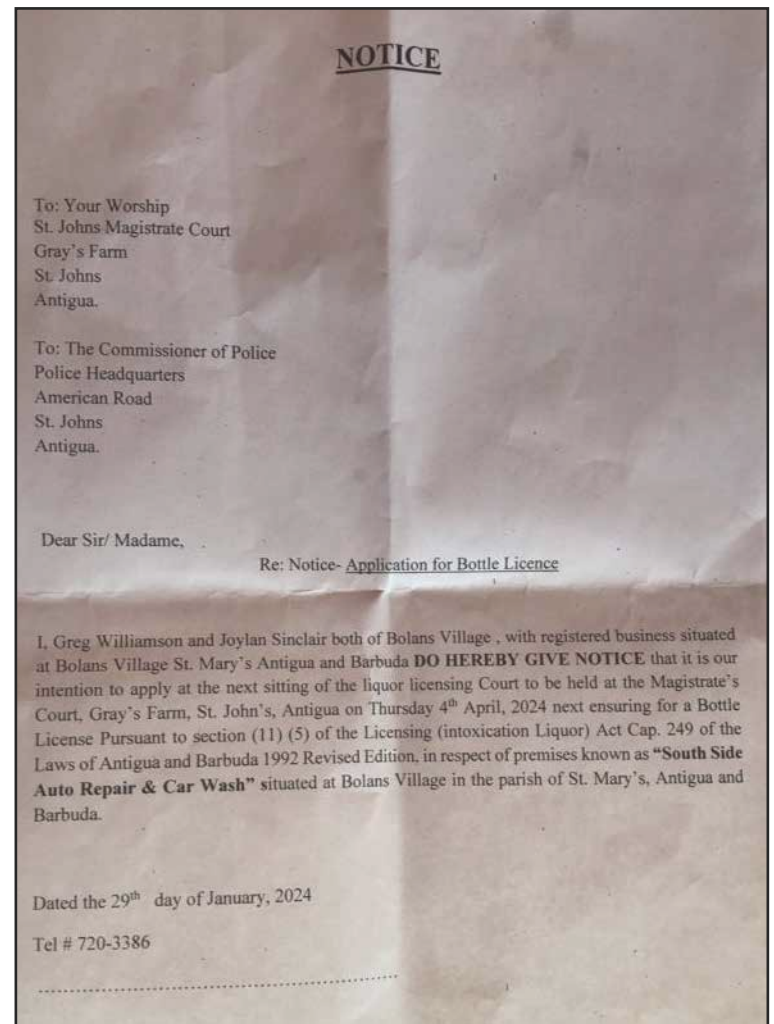
The prime minister scoffed at suggestions regarding Air Peace's ability to live up to its end of the arrangement and even the suggestion that some of its officers are not able to travel to the United States.

PM Browne provided information indicating that Air Peace has just secured

a route to fly into JFK Airport in New York. "This confirms that Air Peace is the largest airline in Africa which continues to expand. We are just happy to have

this partnership with them and to get LIAT 2020 going," he emphasised.

The prime minister used the opportunity to restate his position on the decision in the year 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic to close down LIAT (1974) Ltd. and his government's refusal to support that view. "COVID didn't cause us to close down LIAT, if anything, we saw an opportunity to 'right-size LIAT'. There is a principle that says wherever there is a crisis there is an opportunity; we saw that opportunity and we took it," he stated.



## ‘We are ready to settle’ – PM tells former LIAT (1974) Ltd. staff

Prime Minister Gaston Browne said he is ready to resolve the issue of outstanding payments to the former LIAT (1974) Ltd. noting that he is prepared to meet with the Antigua and Barbuda Workers Union ‘as early as today (Monday)’ to bring closure to the issue.

While the prime minister said government is willing to pay the workers, he is not prepared to pay the 100 percent of the monies owed to the staff as the union has been demanding.

“If the union wishes to engage us first thing Monday morning on the 32 percent compassionate payment, we will do so.

“I have also indicated in the past that this offer will not remain indefinitely. So its now for the union to act; the matter is solely in the court of the

ABWU.

“However, if it is that they want to bully my government into paying one hundred percent of the outstanding amounts, it is not going to happen,” he stated emphatically.

According to the prime minister those LIAT (1974) Ltd. staff who wish to bring a resolution to the matter ought to bring pressure to bear on the union to act.

“What the LIAT staff should do, those who understand logic and are rational with no political agenda, should push the ABWU to accept the offer. It is a compassionate offer as I have said repeatedly, if the union felt that the government had a legal responsibility to make the full payment, then they would have brought the matter to the court.

“The fact that this has not happened is testimony that they recognize that we do not have any legal exposure here,” he explained.

The prime minister further explained that the matter is not one that can be done in a piecemeal manner; that the union has a responsibility to sit down with the government and come to an amicable resolution.

The government had previously offered to settle the matter with a combination of cash, bonds and lands with no determination of what percentage goes to either category.

These he added are matters that ought to be worked out at the negotiations table.

The offer of 32 percent represents the government’s share holding in the defunct LIAT (1974) Ltd.



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V.C. Bird International Airport

## Negotiations ongoing regarding installation of kiosks at V.C. Bird International Airport

With roughly three full months before the start of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS)4 conference here in Antigua and Barbuda, the government

is accelerating its drive to acquire several kiosks for the VC Bird International Airport.

The installation of these kiosks is designed to speed-up the processing of individuals entering the country. It would also eliminate the need for the current paper ED cards which have to be manually completed prior to entry into the country. The kiosks will bring all that to an end.

“We want to ensure that there are sufficient technologies available to ensure that when persons are returning to the country or when they are departing, that their ED forms can be completed online, and that is the purpose of the kiosks.

“When persons arrive they will be able to obtain a certificate of clearance

from the kiosks as they would have already submitted their information,” Minister of Information and Technology, Melford Nicholas explained.

He added that after obtaining the certificate from the kiosks, when the individual presents himself/herself to the immigration officer it would be a routine matter as much of the process of clearance would have been completed electronically.

The government is in discussion with CBN out of Canada to supply the kiosks. There is no word yet of how much this move would cost the government nor just how soon these kiosks will be deployed.

The government has signaled for some time now that it intends to move to a paperless entry system for the country.

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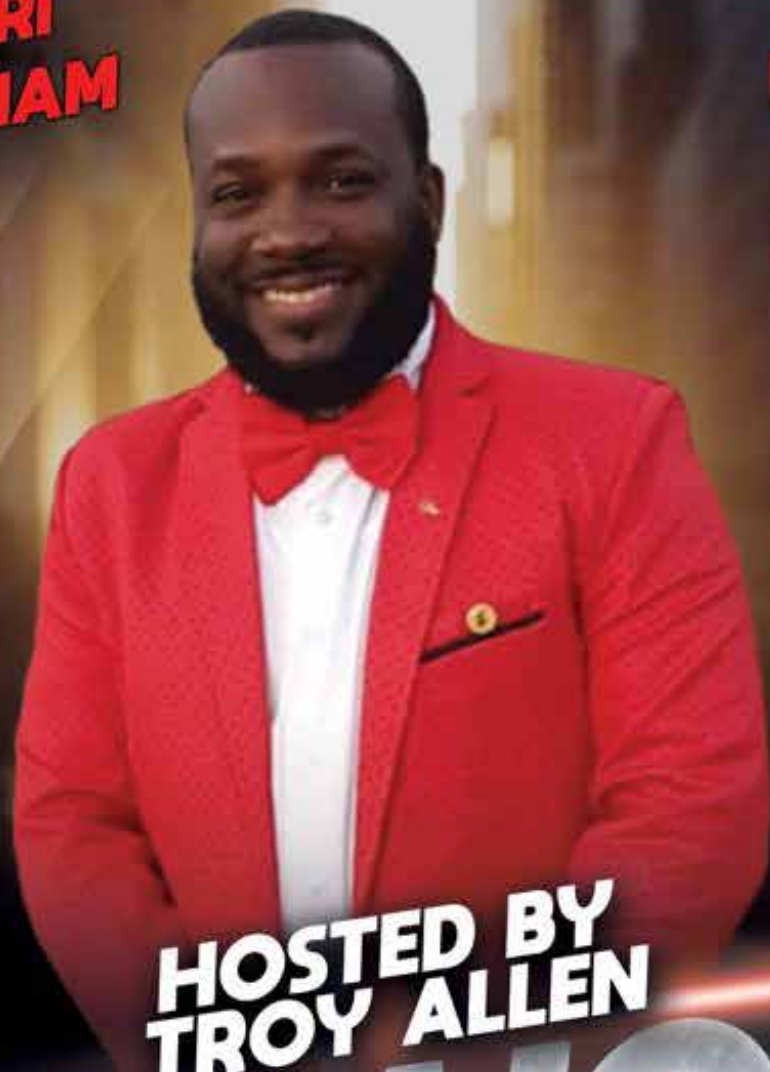
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## Antigua and Barbuda students excel at medical school in Cuba



Top foreign student, Dr. Phillescia Jean speaking at the graduation exercises

Five Antigua and Barbuda students were among the graduating class of students who successfully completed their studies at one of the top medical schools in Cuba.

In fact, according to Antigua and Barbuda Ambassador to Cuba, George Goodwin, the institution – the University of Medical Sciences in Holguin, Cuba, singled out the Antigua and Barbuda students as being ‘very disci-

plined and who produced high academic results’.

One of the five students – Dr. Phillescia Jean – graduated with honours and she was the top foreign student in the graduating class.

The newly-minted medical doctors will return to Antigua and will undergo a year-long internship/orientation at the Sir Lester Bird Medical Centre before being able to practice on their own.

The other doctors are; Dr. Lee-Ann Sandy, Dr. Doniece Thomas, Dr. Jason Thwaites and Dr. Grace Edwards.



Antigua and Barbuda medical students graduate in Cuba (Ambassador George Goodwin is third from left)



Proud mom, May-Olga Browne with her daughter, Dr. Doniece Thomas at the Graduation ceremony

## Murder-accused to make first court appearance today

The police are appealing for help in solving a shooting incident, which resulted in one man nursing gunshot wounds at the Sir Lester Bird Medical Center.

The alleged incident occurred around 9:25 pm on Friday, 16 February in the McKinnon’s area.

It was reported that a man and his female companion were travelling

North to South along McKinnon’s Road, when an unknown person from another vehicle fired several shots at them.

They however, managed to get to the Percival Service Station on Fort Road where they asked for help. The man was transported to the hospital by the Emergency Medical Services where he is receiving

medical treatment.

The police have reported that the victim remains in a stable condition at the SLBMC. The female escaped unhurt. Anyone with information surrounding this incident is asked to contact the Criminal Investigations Department at 462-3913 or call the Crimestoppers Hotline at 800-Tips (8477).

Meanwhile, 59-year-old Eric Burton of Villa, who was arrested and charged over the weekend with the shooting death of 22-year-old Jamal Ryner of Yorks, will make his first court appearance today (Monday).

The alleged incident reportedly took place on Rowan Henry Street around 8:30 pm on Tuesday, 13 February.



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# The lion and the rooster

By Tony Deyal

This year, 2024, is the Chinese Year of the Dragon and many of us are hoping that, unlike other mythical fire-breathing animals, it won't drag on and on. For most people, the old year ended on December 21, 2023. At midnight, we welcomed the new year, January 1, with a lot of fireworks, parties, and special national events, including bell ringing in Japan, wearing special underwear in Brazil, and ball dropping in New York City's Times Square. The Year of the Dragon, or Lunar New Year 2024, was last Saturday, February 10, and was greeted with hope, joy and anticipation. What both had in common was not just Bangkok but horoscopes that can also become horror scopes if you can't cope or had the right kind of scope.

The key to it all is astrology. One person who went to the hospital claiming that he was obsessed with astrology was asked by the doctor, "What are the signs?" These are, however, different from astronomy in that astronomers base their studies on research and observation, while astrologers believe that the positioning of the stars and planets affect the way events occur on earth. In other words, astronomers see stars while astrologers just see dollar signs.

Astrologers keep tabs on the celestial bodies and work out their influence

on what we do or don't do. They give us valuable information about the lives of individuals, as well as trends to watch out for. These are 'horror-scopes' very much like Caribbean politicians. In other words, they're always telling everyone else what to do, and they're almost always wrong. The 'horoscopes' that millions of people follow in the newspapers predict how all of us, in each of the 12 zodiac signs, can be affected by things coming our way. However, not everyone believes in its worth. One unconvinced expert saw it as a waste of time and money "Because millions of stars and planets have spent billions of years lining themselves up just to let some woman know that 'she'll meet someone with nice eyes today'."

Actually, for those of us who buy newspapers and magazines to read the astrology, the question is really, "If there are over 400 million people for each of the 12 signs of the zodiac, do you really think that, despite where they live, the language they speak, their age, sex and jobs, they will all have the same kind of day?" Well, one way is what the newspapers and their experts do now. They make sure that the predictions are so vague that they can be applied to situations in almost everyone's life. There is also another major consideration by the experts, "Why is it



Tony Deyal

that the moment of birth instead of the moment of conception is the basis for calculating a horoscope?" They argue that, when astrology was first set up thousands of years ago, the moment of birth was seen as "magical" and the birth of the baby was the start of a new day in a new world. However, the experts are now convinced that birth is the culmination of roughly nine months of complex, intricately orchestrated development inside the womb, and many aspects of a child's personality are set then, and not when they're born.

While I understand the concerns, I play both sides. I read the daily horoscopes where I am a 'Leo' (born on August 10, 1945) and I follow the Chinese zodiac where I was born in their year of the Rooster or 'mail domestic cock'. Additionally, based on the five elements of the Chinese, I am a Wood Rooster. In a way, this is very close to my being a

'Leo' who, as one astrologist claimed, "are natural-born leaders, especially in the bedroom". However, while this ability does not count for much with the Chinese, being a Rooster in the Year of the Dragon means that exciting times await me. According to one of the readings, "The Rooster and the Dragon share a great connection, promising many opportunities, especially money and career." In fact, I can relax and redirect my focus towards other aspects of life, including investing in real estate, luxury cars or even jewellery, and even a taste of the high life.

One thing about the Chinese astrologers is that they know how to make us feel good. Under 'Leadership and Accomplishment' the Rooster's "remarkable agility and problem-solving abilities will shine. You'll excel as a natural leader, wholeheartedly pursuing numerous ambitions. Communication

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skills and teamwork will be enhanced, leading to remarkable growth and accomplishment.” Interestingly, I got all this for free. I didn’t even have to buy a single newspaper.

The Leo Horoscope 2024 says that I “will embark on a transformative journey of change and self-discovery”.

It adds, “Dear Leos, welcome to 2024, a year that heralds momentous transformations and inspiring new beginnings for you. Be ready to say hello to challenging opportunities that will make you push your boundaries. Love, career, finance, health- everything will see a ripple of change ... . You love life this year, Leos, promising exciting times ahead.”

Well, I stopped there because I know, if my wife sees it, I would lose my head before the love live happens. This is why, despite saying that I am

generous, loyal, energetic and enthusiast (as well as arrogant, careless and self-complacent), it adds, “The roaring lions should give top priority to their health in 2024.”

This is where I started to think through what, if anything, we gain or learn from the scopes, even if we’re just scoping them and not spending too much of our money seeking answers that have no real questions.

For many people, horoscopes add an element of entertainment and engagement, and it does not cost extra. From early on, my mom got the horoscope and I got the Phantom, Dick Tracy, Tarzan, Lone Ranger, Flash Gordon and Superman. It is also why I take the horoscopes with more than a grain of salt. In fact, I add a little pepper.

So, why did the Leo, in addition to doing a column on horror scopes, bring a ladder to the party? Because he want-

ed to climb to new heights. What do you call a mischievous Taurus? A bulldozer. Actually, some folks say that astrology is just a load of bull but I think it’s a bunch of Sagittarius. There is the story of the doctor who asked his patient, “What’s your zodiac sign?” The man replied, “I’m a cancer, why?” The doctor responded, “Oh, what a coincidence!” Another doctor told his patient, “I’ve got bad news. Mercury is in Uranus.” The patient replied, “Doctor. I really didn’t think of you as being into that astrology stuff.” The doctor stated flatly, “I’m not. My thermometer just broke.” Actually, with a joke like that, I am like the astrologer that died in a fire. He became an ashtrologer and caught his ash for the rest of his life.

*Tony Deyal was last seen saying that, when he does not agree with the Chinese Zodiac, he switches to being a Leo in the local newspapers.*

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# Environment



## 'Zombie Fires' burning at an alarming rate in Canada

By Nadine Yousif

Even in the dead of Canada's winter, the embers of last year's record-setting wildfire season remain. So-called zombie fires are burning under thick layers of snow at an unprecedented rate, raising fears about what the coming summer may bring.

People driving on the highway through the town of Fort Nelson, British Columbia (BC) in the winter can easily see - and smell - the clouds of white smoke flowing from the soil around them.

Sonja Leverkus, a firefighter and scientist who is local to the small north-eastern BC town, recalled driving during a snowstorm in November, but the snowfall didn't look white.

Rather, she said, it was blueish-grey because of the smoke in the air.

"I've never experienced a snowstorm that smelled like smoke," said Ms Leverkus, who has lived in northern BC for more than 15 years.

These plumes were still visible into February, she added, even on bitter cold days when temperatures had plummeted to -40C (-40F).

The Fort Nelson smoke is the result of zombie fires - also called overwintering fires.

They are flameless smoulders that burn slowly



Smoke from a zombie fire pictured here in Fort Nelson, BC.

below the surface, and are kept alive thanks to an organic soil called peat moss common in North America's boreal forest and to thick layers of snow that insulate them from the cold.

These fires are not unusual. In the past 10 years, British Columbia has, on average, seen five or six that continue to burn during the cold months, experts say.

But in January, the province saw an unprecedented peak of 106 active zombie fires, raising concern among fire scientists about what these smoulders will mean for the upcoming wildfire season.

Most typically go out on their own before the spring, but 91 are still burning in BC, according to provincial data, and those that are not extinguished by March could reignite once the

snow melts and they are exposed to air.

Because of this, scientists have linked them to early starts of wildfire seasons.

The neighbouring province of Alberta is also seeing a spike in these winter fires, with 57 burning as of early February - nearly 10 times more than the five-year average.

"This continued smouldering through the winter, I think, is very alarming to see", especially after Canada's record-shattering wildfire season last year, said Jennifer Baltzer, a professor of biology at Wilfrid Laurier University and the Canada Research Chair in Forests and Global Change.

More than 18 million hectares (44 million acres) of land were burned by wildfires in Canada in 2023

- an area roughly the size of Cambodia - far surpassing the country's 10-year average.

The season was among the most fatal in recent history, with several firefighters dying in the line of duty.

Thousands of people were forced from their homes and the effect was felt well beyond Canada's borders when smoke blanketed a large section of the US in June.

That calamitous wildfire season is one of the reasons why BC is now seeing such a high number of zombie fires, said Mike Flannigan, a professor and fire management expert at Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, BC.

Most of them are fires that could not be put out fully by last autumn simply

*cont'd on pg 13*

## US Customs agents seize over 380 pounds of cocaine near Puerto Rico

The United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agency on Friday said that agents from its Air and Marine Operations (AMO) Unit seized 384 pounds (174.4 kilograms) of cocaine near Puerto Rico.

The drugs had an estimated street value of about US\$ 4.3 million.

“This successful interdiction near Mona Island is a testament to the dedication of our Air and Marine agents,” said Creighton Skeen, acting director of Air and Marine Operations in the Caribbean.

“Our collective efforts have dealt a significant blow to criminal enterprises seeking to exploit our maritime borders for illicit activities,” he added.

“We remain steadfast in our commitment to securing



our communities and preventing the harmful effects of drug trafficking.”

CBP said that during a routine patrol, the crew of a AMO Multi-Role Enforcement Aircraft (MEA) detected a “lights-out vessel moving east located northwest of Mona Island.”

“The MEA crew maintained surveillance of the vessel to assist an AMO Marine unit to reach the

vessel,” CBP said.

“The vessel captain failed to heave, and the other occupants started dumping bales into the water.

“The Marine Interdiction agents stopped the vessel and arrested the three vessel occupants, one Venezuelan and two Dominican Republic nationals,” it added. “The crew of a Marine unit recovered three bales from the water.”

CBP said the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and US Homeland Security Investigations took custody of the three men and the cocaine for investigation and prosecution.

“The dedication of all maritime surveillance assets is crucial to the success of the mission at hand,” said DEA’s Caribbean Division Special Agent in Charge Denise Foster.

“We will continue to work with our counterparts and allocate all our law enforcement resources to make a greater impact in vulnerable areas where criminal organizations dedicated to drug trafficking are causing greater damage.

“These individuals pose the greatest threat to the safety and health of our citizens”, she added.

*cont’d from pg 12*

due to a lack of resources, he said.

By the end of the year, officials recorded a total of more than 2,200 wildfires in BC.

Another reason, Prof Flannigan said, is the extreme drought that the province has been dealing with over the last two years.

As of February, most of BC has been under medium to extreme levels of drought, per the province’s drought map.

Like the zombie fires, the drought, too, has been noticeable, said Ms Leverkus.

When out in the forest last summer, she said she noticed that a creek that used to flow freely is now “just

puddles”.

These drought conditions have persisted through the winter. The province has seen so little snow that one ski resort in BC’s South Cariboo region was forced to close its doors in early January for the remainder of the season.

Zombie fires were once infrequent, but scientists say they have become more common in recent years due to a rapidly warming climate.

For now, they are being monitored by officials, said Forrest Tower, a fire information officer with BC Fire.

He said that many of them cannot be put out manually as most of the province’s firefighting force is on break for the off-season. They do not

pose a risk yet, he said.

But the main concern is the fires could ignite again if BC continues to see very little snow or rain into the spring.

If this happens, he said the province’s seasonal wildfire force could be immediately thrust into action come March or April.

Prof Flannigan said it is too early to predict just exactly what the upcoming fire season will look like in BC, but what the province has seen so far “is quite unusual”.

And with it being an El Nino year, which spells out hot and dry conditions for western Canada, Prof Flannigan said that “the stage is set for a very active spring”.

## Bermuda gov't presents near one billion dollar budget to Parliament

CMC - Bermuda Premier David Burt Friday presented a national budget of US\$992 million to Parliament indicating that the Overseas British Territory is on course to record its first budget surplus in more than 20 years.

"It is my privilege to state to this Honourable House and the people of Bermuda that this Progressive Labour Party government has successfully balanced Bermuda's budget, with a projected surplus of US\$210,000.

"This budget surplus is only the second budgeted surplus in 35 years. The last time Bermuda achieved a balanced budget was in fiscal 2002-23, but today, 21 years after that was last achieved, through the turmoil of a great recession and after being battered by a once-in-a-century pandemic, we will return this country to a balanced budget," he told legislators.

Burt told legislators that projected revenue for the fiscal year 2024-25 is expected to reach US\$1.23 billion, which is 6.6 per cent or US\$76.8 million above the original estimates for this current fiscal year.

Capital expenditure for 2024-25 is forecast to be US\$112.3 million, \$16.3 million or 17 per cent more than the current year's original estimate with the government indicating that this level of capital expenditure is the largest budgeted investment in capital since 2010.

Burt, who is also the Minister of Finance, said his Progressive Labour Party (PLP) government is anticipating revenue of US\$750 million annually, on average, from the new corporate income tax.

He said US\$40 million of unused borrowing would be used to fund new affordable homes and to freeze health insurance rates.

Burt said that at the height of the



Bermuda Premier David Burt.

coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in 2020, the government borrowed funds to "ensure Bermudian families in need could keep their lights on and had food on their tables."

He said that at the time the government expected to accumulate US\$408 million in deficits "prior to reaching a balanced budget.

"However, due to our sound financial management, combined with significant economic growth, we only accumulated US\$322 million of deficits over the last four years, leaving us with US\$89 million more in the bank than we expected a few years ago."

Burt said the funds the government borrowed in 2020 were sitting in an account earning interest and that the law requires that it can be invested or used to fund future deficits only.

But he said the government will seek to amend the Government Loans Act "to enable the transfer of funds from the excess borrowing account if those funds would not be required to meet deficit spending".

He said it was the government's intention to use US\$40 million of the funds, with \$30 million to be transferred to the Mutual Reinsurance Fund and \$10 million to pay for more affordable homes.

"The government's actuaries have

advised the Ministry of Health that in order to keep up with health insurance claims, which continue to escalate due to our ageing population, the government will need to increase its health insurance rates by \$45 a month.

"This government cannot and will not allow that to happen. Therefore, we intend to transfer US\$30 million from the excess borrowing fund to the Mutual Reinsurance Fund to ensure that our health funds are able to pay claims without asking every resident in Bermuda to pay an extra US\$540 a year."

Burt told legislators that his government will invest an additional US\$10 million into the Bermuda Housing Corporation to accelerate the provision of affordable housing and enable a significant expansion of the private sector rental programme."

Last year, the government passed the corporate income tax (CIT) legislation which will introduce a 15 per cent tax on the profits of multinational enterprises with more than Euro 750 million of revenue annually.

"The estimates of CIT revenue that have come to the Ministry of Finance and that have been shared with the Tax Reform Commission are that the government should expect to receive, on average, at least \$750 million in additional revenue each year and that initial payments on account from the CIT could commence by July 2025," he told legislators.

"Even if the government were only to receive half of the estimated cash inflows that our advisers have stated could come to the government in the next two fiscal years, US\$187.5 million in 2025-26, US\$375 million in 2026-27, there will be significant additional funds.

*cont'd on pg 15*

*cont'd from pg 14*

“It is important that we adopt a conservative mindset towards additional revenues as there are many uncertainties, especially with the package of qualified refundable tax credits that will be recommended by the Tax Reform Commission and the government’s stated view that companies ‘in scope’ of the global minimum tax will not be liable for employer payroll taxes.”

Burt said notwithstanding, there are urgent needs in the community including the need for tax relief for workers and businesses, the need for investment in infrastructure, the need for relief from high electricity and food prices, and, most importantly, the cost of health-care.”

Regarding the health sector, Burt said if the \$187.5 million of CIT revenue is available in fiscal year 2025-26, “it is this government’s view that we must take care of the most pressing issue that affects the most people, and that is the cost of living.

“The government is committed to implementing universal healthcare, and it will be important to seed a new health insurance fund with an injection of capital. This will benefit all residents and businesses in Bermuda, as reduced health insurance costs make Bermuda’s economy more competitive”.

Burt said that “there will be the opportunity to reduce or eliminate customs duty

on fuel imports, which could save the average household up to US\$300 a year.

“With expectations of at least US\$375 million in additional revenue in fiscal year 2026-27, there will be the ability to provide more relief ... one of the challenges in operating a business in Bermuda is employer payroll tax, which is a tax on employment.

“By 2026-27 there will be the capacity to lower employer payroll taxes to reduce this burden on employers, which can only assist in bringing down the cost of

doing business while boosting economic growth.”

Burt told Parliament that the government’s pension fund is hugely underfunded, and the CIT revenue could support “topping up” of the Contributory Pension Fund “to minimise the increases required on businesses and residents to make the fund whole”.

Regarding the island’s debt, Premier Burt said “although the next tranche of debt does not mature until 2027, the government will collaborate with its advisers to, as appropriate, and sub-

ject to the recommendations of the Tax Reform Commission, channel excess cash-flows to the early repayment of debt.

“It is the intention of the government to bring legislation to the House in next year’s Budget session to enshrine the recommendations of the Tax Reform Commission. This will ensure the excess funds received from the global minimum tax are invested and preserved for future years, with the necessary protections so that they can benefit all Bermudians,” he told legislators.

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## WHO says Gaza's Nasser hospital not functional after Israel raids

The World Health Organization has said Gaza's Nasser hospital has ceased to function following an Israeli raid.

Israel Defense Force (IDF) troops entered the complex on Thursday, saying intelligence indicated hostages taken by Hamas were being held there.

The WHO said it had not been allowed to enter the site to assess the situation.

The IDF has described its operation in Nasser as "precise and limited" and accused Hamas of "cynically using hospitals for terror".

Writing on X, formerly Twitter, WHO head Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said: "Nasser hospital in Gaza is not functional anymore, after a week-long siege followed by the ongoing raid."

"Both yesterday and the day before, the WHO team was not permitted to enter the hospital to assess the conditions of the patients and critical medical needs, despite reaching the hospital compound to deliver fuel alongside partners," he said.

"There are still about 200 patients in the hospital. At least 20 need to be urgently referred to other hospitals to receive health care; medical referral is every patient's right."

The Hamas-run health ministry in Gaza says only



four medical staff were left in the hospital trying to care for the remaining patients.

The BBC has not been able to access the hospital and has been unable to independently verify the situation there.

One source inside the hospital, who did not want to be named, told BBC News that 11 patients had died due to interruptions in the supply of electricity and oxygen, and that several doctors had been arrested.

The Israeli military said no-one died as a result of its actions, adding that its troops had been told to keep the hospital running.

It said diesel and oxygen supplies had been taken to the facility, and that a temporary generator was operating.

Fighting has raged around the Nasser site for weeks. Israel has repeatedly claimed Hamas is using hospitals, along with schools, as operational bases.

The Israeli military says it has killed about 20 Hamas fighters and seized numerous weapons in the area of the hospital.

"Over the past day, dozens of terrorists were eliminated and large quantities of weapons were seized," the IDF said.

At least 1,200 people were killed during attacks in Israel by Hamas-led gunmen on 7 October last year.

In response, Israel launched a military campaign in the Gaza Strip. More than 28,400 Palestinians, mostly women and children, have been killed

and more than 68,000 wounded since the war began, according to the Hamas-run health ministry.

It added that at least 127 Palestinians have been killed and 205 others injured in the past 24 hours.

Despite the continued fighting in Gaza, efforts to broker a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas have been taking place in Cairo in recent days - although Qatari mediators said recent progress was «not very promising».

"The pattern in the last few days [is] not really very promising but, as I always repeat, we will always remain optimistic and will always remain pushing," said Sheik Mohammed, speaking at a meeting of world

*cont'd on pg 17*



## Donald Trump hit where it hurts most in New York fraud ruling

By **Nada Tawfik**

Donald Trump's latest legal loss hits him where it hurts most because it takes aim at his very identity.

For decades, he has marketed himself as a genius business mogul who made it big in one of the world's most cut-throat cities.

That image - forever tied to New York deal-making and reinforced by relentless self-promotion - catapulted him to international fame, allowing him to reinvent himself first as a reality TV star and then ultimately president of the United States.

But Judge Arthur Engoron's ruling in a civil fraud case - related to the inflation of property val-



Donald Trump reinvented himself as a reality TV star in the early 2000s - with New York at the centre.

ues and lying on financial statements to obtain better loan terms - undermines Mr Trump's entire narrative. It instead paints him as a fraud and inflicts a

massive blow to his business empire and wealth.

Donald Trump once remarked that the mind can overcome any obstacle. But what an obstacle this

is. The verdict significantly curtails the Trump Organization's ability to do business in New York.

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leaders at the Munich Security Conference on Saturday.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he sent negotiators following a request from US President Joe Biden, but added they did not return for further discussions because Hamas's demands were "delusional".

Hamas has blamed Israel for a lack of progress in achieving a ceasefire deal.

The group has laid out a series of conditions, including the exchange of hostages for Palestinian prisoners, full withdrawal of Israel's forces and an end to the war after a 135-day pause in fighting, broken into three phases.

Mr Netanyahu has also reiterated the Israeli government is continuing

to push its ground invasion of Gaza further south, taking in the area of Rafah, despite international pressure not to do so without first having a plan to evacuate Palestinian civilians who fled there during the early days of the war.

Some 1.5 million people are in Rafah, close to the border with Egypt, after being told by Israeli forces to seek safety there while Hamas targets were attacked in northern, then central, Gaza.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi on Saturday reiterated his opposition to any forced displacement of Palestinians into Egypt's Sinai desert.

In a phone call with French President Emmanuel Macron, both leaders agreed instead on the "necessity of the

swift advancement of a ceasefire", according to a summary.

Mr Sisi has long maintained that the only solution is an independent state for Palestinians.

However, on Sunday, Mr Netanyahu announced that his government had unanimously voted to formally oppose what it called the "unilateral recognition" of Palestinian statehood.

He said any such agreement must be reached through direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians.

"Israel rejects outright international dictates regarding a permanent accord with the Palestinians. An accord, should it be reached, will only come through direct negotiations between the sides, without preconditions," a government statement said.

*cont'd from pg 17*

He has personally been banned from holding any directorships for three years and his company cannot secure loans with financial institutions registered with the city during that time either.

He has been hit with an enormous financial penalty of \$355m (£282m; €329m) - which jumps to more than \$450m once interest is included - that far exceeds how much cash he has to hand.

His business will continue to be watched by an independent monitor, with a separate independent director of compliance also signing off on major business decisions.

In perhaps the only bright spot for the former president and Republican frontrunner, the Trump empire was spared from the equivalent of the corporate death penalty - the cancellation of its business licences.

Mr Trump has for decades seemed to rally and recover from scandals and legal challenges that could irreparably damage others, so much so that he has been referred to as Teflon Don, because nothing sticks.

The nickname previously belonged to the mob boss John Gotti after he won a series of high-profile acquittals in the 1980s. But today's verdict signals that Donald Trump's luck, like Gotti's, may be running out.

Judge Engoron noted Mr Trump and the other defendants' lack of remorse and history of repeated and persistent fraud.

In this case, he said the examples of fraud over more than a decade at the company "leap off the page and shock the conscience".

Yet the defendants were incapable of admitting the error of their ways, he said, writing: "Their complete lack of contrition and remorse borders on pathological."

Unsurprisingly, Mr Trump sees

things very differently.

He says he built a "perfect company" and rejects that he should be punished for fraud because banks were paid back in full.

He continues to repeat claims, without evidence, that his legal challenges are just a plot by elite Democrats to keep him out of the White House.

According to Mr Trump's estranged niece Mary Trump, the judge's ruling amounts to the end of the Trump family legacy.

"Today is an emotional day, but one thing is for certain: the Engoron decision is absolutely devastating for Donald," she wrote on social media.

As the son of a real estate developer whose projects included middle-class apartment buildings in the outer boroughs of Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island, Mr Trump always dreamed of making a name for himself among the skyscrapers of Manhattan.

A seven-year spree of construction from 1976-1983, including the eponymous Trump Tower, solidified his reputation as a real estate giant in New York. "Not many sons have been able to escape their fathers," he told the New York Times in 1983 - the implication being that at 37, he already had.

And it's true that the 1980s era of greed and excess was a prosperous time for a young developer with his ambition.

Trump Tower, with its prime location on 5th Avenue, put Donald Trump on the map. Once his reputation was established, he subsequently put his name on every project he did.

By the early 1990's though, Donald Trump filed for several corporate bankruptcies and nearly lost it all.

It was during this time that Rich Herschlag, the chief engineer in the Manhattan Borough President's of-

fice, worked with Mr Trump and his organization on the Riverside South project, a redevelopment in a former rail yard on the Upper West Side.

He says it meant "everything or darn close to everything" for Donald Trump to be seen as a successful real estate developer - and in particular build an empire from his father's legacy.

"To watch it [potentially] gutted and decimated, I can't image that's anything less than an emotional horror," he told the BBC.

It is not yet clear how Mr Trump will pay the nearly half a billion dollars that he is liable for and if that will involve selling any assets or businesses to raise the cash.

His sprawling real estate empire in New York is valued by Forbes at \$490m but there are many other properties around the country, including hotels, golf courses, condominiums and even a winery.

He will appeal against the penalty, which would put the decision on hold until a higher court reviews the case.

But if he wants to avoid paying the fine or having his personal assets seized while the appeal process plays out, he still has to deposit the full amount within 30 days or secure a costly bond.

Selling any of his prime Manhattan real estate would be an indignity for the former president - and a decision he would not take lightly.

Whether or not Donald Trump is able to recover from this financial shock, the outcome looks sure to significantly dent his fortune.

The ruling in the city where he rose to the top - while always remaining something of an outsider - is undoubtedly a big loss.

And for more than six decades in New York real estate, there's no figure Mr Trump has derided more than the "loser".

## English Harbour stay third in Second Division

English Harbour prevailed 2-0 against TAMO FC at the Golden Grove playing field to remain in third place in the Antigua and Barbuda Football Association's (ABFA) Second Division.

Oshane Blackwood had a conversion in the 41st minute, and Kofi Adams scored in the second minute of added time (90+2 minutes) to give English Harbour their sixth win in 10 matches.

The result ensures that English Harbour remains in third place by advancing to 21 points. TAMO FC will remain on 10 points after suffering their fourth loss in eight matches.

Klyster Rowe scored twice to lead Sea View Farm to a 6-1 drubbing of Bethesda at the ABFA Technical Center.

Rowe had conversions



Players of the English Harbour football team. (File photo)

in the 44th and 61st minutes after Devonte Ralph scored Sea View Farms opening goal in the 12th minute.

Sea View Farm will advance to fifth place with 19 points after recording their sixth win in nine match-

es. Bethesda will remain in second place with 22 points after suffering their second loss in 10 matches.

However, two other Second Division matches were not played.

The encounter at Buck-

leys was not played because West Ham could not field a team against the Young Warriors.

The encounter at Freemans Village between Soccer Academy and Freemans Ville was postponed.

## Wins for Dredgers and Bullets in T10 Mixed Softball Competition

Dredgers and Bryson's Shipping and Insurance Bullets recorded wins in the latest round of matches in the Antigua & Barbuda Softball Cricket Association's (ABSCA) T10 Mixed (male and female) Competition.

Dredgers Mixed defeated Sisserou Mixed by 74 runs at the Dredgers playing field in St. John's.

Dredgers Mixed won the toss and batted, scoring 133 for one from 10 overs. Mervin Higgins slammed 95,

including 10 sixes and five fours, and Sacha Michael hit 15 not out.

In reply, Sisserou Mixed were restricted to 59 for two from 10 overs. Isaiah Viville struck 36 not out, while Sherilyn Watkins picked up a wicket for four runs.

Bryson's Shipping and Insurance Bullets Mixed beat PMS Mixed by 89 runs at the Powells playing field. \

Bullets made 154 for two from 10 overs.

Deran Benta hammered 79 with 10 sixes and two fours, and Essan Warner cracked 51, which included eight sixes.

PMS Mixed were then restricted to 65 for four off their allotted 10 overs. Eusi Kingston hit an unbeaten 19, and Kushana David was not out on 13.

Deran Benta had one wicket for one run, and Yolanda Celestine took one wicket for six runs.

## Cornwall helps Hurricanes to 273-run victory against Harpy Eagles

The Leeward Islands Hurricanes' captain Rahkeem Cornwall spun a web around Guyana Harpy Eagles batsmen, as he snared six for 61 to lead his team to a handsome 273-run win over the defending champions in their second round West Indies Championship four-day match at Warner Park in St. Kitts on Saturday.

Along with Cornwall's bowling masterclass, the Hurricanes' victory was large in part due to opening batsman Mikyle Louis, who achieved the rare feat of scoring a century in both innings to put the game beyond the reach of the Harpy Eagles batsmen, who struggled throughout.

Louis, a St. Kitts and Nevis native, scored 113 and 130, which propelled the Hurricanes to 352 and 295 respectively, after which Cornwall combined with Daniel Doram and Jeremiah Louis, to restrict the Harpy Eagles to 188 and 186. The burly Cornwall ended with match figures of seven for 89, after taking one for 28 in the first innings, while Doram, who had four for 40 in the first innings, took two for 48 in the second to end with match figures of six for 88.

Leewards pacer Jeremiah Louis had match figures of four for 80, after taking three for 42 and one for 38 across both innings.



Rahkeem Cornwall

Set a daunting 460 to win, Harpy Eagles resumed the final day from an overnight score of 67 for one, with Raymond Perez and Tagenarine Chanderpaul seeking to push on in their 55-run second wicket stand.

However, Chanderpaul only added seven to his overnight score of 40, while Perez added only three runs to his 20.

Though Kevlon Anderson (26), Kevin Sinclair (23) and Kemol Savory (24), offered little resistance, they found Cornwall and Doram too hot to handle.

Veerasammy Permaul

tried to counterattack with a 29-ball 30, including two sixes, but he eventually went caught behind off Jeremiah Louis, before Cornwall and Doram wrapped things up with the wickets of Anthony Adams and Neiland Cadogan, both without scoring.

Scores: LEEWARD ISLANDS HURRICANES 352 (Mikyle Louis 113, Jahmar Hamilton 77, Rahkeem Cornwall 54, Terrence Warde 23, Hayden Walsh Jr. 20 not out; Ronaldo Alimohamed 5-69) and 295 (Mikyle Louis 130, Keacy Carty 34, Colin Archibald

31; Kevlon Anderson 5-57, Ronaldo Alimohamed 2-66) vs GUYANA HARPY EAGLES 188 (Ronaldo Alimohamed 41, Veerasammy Permaul 34, Kevin Sinclair 29; Daniel Doram 4-40, Jeremiah Louis 3-42) and 186 (Tagenarine Chanderpaul 47, Veerasammy Permaul 30; Rahkeem Cornwall 6-61, Daniel Doram 2-48).

The 2016 Under-19 World Cup-winning pair of pacers Shamar Springer and Ryan John shared seven wickets to set up the Windward Islands Volcanoes for a nine-wicket win against Barbados Pride in their top-of-the-table match at Kensington Park in Kingston, Jamaica.

Scores: BARBADOS PRIDE 214 (Kevin Wickham 74, Shane Dowrich 37; Ryan John 4-47, Darel Cyrus 2-41) and 126 (Roshon Primus 25, Jonathan Drakes 20; Shamar Springer 4-44, Ryan John 3-28) vs WINDWARD ISLANDS VOLCANOES 325 (Jeremy Solozano 86, Sunil Ambris 72, Kimani Melius 53, Johann Jeremiah 32, Shamar Springer 29, Kavem Hodge 26; Jomel Warrican 5-59, Chemar Holder 2-60) and 18 for one.

Discarded West Indies pacer Anderson Phillip and off-spinner Bryan Charles shared eight wickets, and the Trinidad and Tobago Red Force made up for time

*cont'd on pg 21*

## Success for Jennings United, Lion Hill and Bolans in First Division

Jennings United, Lion Hill, and Bolans recorded wins in the latest round of matches in the Antigua and Barbuda Football Association's (ABFA) First Division League.

Following a goalless first half, Jennings United struck twice late in the second half to snatch a two-nil victory against Fort Road at the Jennings playing field.

Their latest win allows Jennings United to overtake Police and move into fourth place on goal difference by advancing to 20 points, the same as Attacking Saints, who are in third place with a game in hand.

Fort Road remains in ninth place on nine points after crashing to their eighth loss in 11 matches.

Lion Hill remained in sixth place by snatching a 2-1 victory against the Liberta Blackhawks in the first game of a double header at the ABFA Technical Center.

Shermarah Andrew

scored both goals for Lion Hill with conversions in the 27th and 74th minutes. Courtney Lopez scored the lone goal for the Blackhawks in the 72nd minute.

Their fourth win in 10 matches carries Lion Hill to 15 points, while the Liberta Blackhawks remained second from the bottom with six points after suffering their eighth loss in 10 games.

Taiem Tonge scored twice to lead Bolans to a 3-1 victory against the Police in the second game at the ABFA Technical Center. Tonge scored in the 7th and 83rd minutes, and Omarrie Forde had a 36th-minute conversion for Bolans.

Kedar Clarke scored the lone goal for Police in the 61st minute of the game, and both teams finished with 10 men after a player from each team was expelled in the first half.

Dimitri Scotland of Police was given a red card



Three players of the Bolans team enjoy their success against Police in their First Division encounter at the ABFA Technical Center on Friday, February 16, 2024. (ABFA)

after he was booked for a second time in the match, and Bolans' Steffon Benjamin received a red card for committing serious foul play.

Their fourth win in 10

matches allows Bolans to remain in seventh place by advancing to 13 points. It was only the second loss in 10 matches for the Police, who slipped to fifth place by remaining on 18 points.

### cont'd from pg 20

lost in their washed-out first-round match, completing a six-wicket win against the Cricket West Indies Academy at Conaree Cricket Centre in Basseterre, St. Kitts.

Scores: CWI ACADEMY 163 (Teddy Bishop 65, Joshua Bishop 32, Johann Layne 27; Jayden Seales 3-26, Anderson Phillip 3-63) and 224 (Carlton Bowen-Tuckett 46, Mbeki Joseph 34, Ackeem Auguste 34, Joshua Bishop 29, Joshua James 21; Anderson Phillip 4-33, Bryan Charles 4-57,

Khary Pierre 2-42) vs RED FORCE 329 (Jyd Goolie 113, Vikash Mohan 54, Amir Jango 40, Cephas Cooper 28, Bryan Charles 25, Terrance Hinds 22; Ashmead Nedd 6-78, Joshua Bishop 3-116) and 60 for four (Joshua Bishop 3-28).

A destructive spell from teen-aged leg-spinner Zishan Motara was overshadowed by a batting collapse from his Combined Campuses & Colleges Marooners that sparked a morale-boosting, 10-wicket win for hosts Jamaica Scorpions at Sabina Park in

Kingston, Jamaica.

Scores: CCC MAROONERS 307 (Jonathan Carter 135, Shamarh Brooks 36, Sion Hackett 30, Zishan Motara 28; Gordon Bryan 3-66, Ojay Shields 3-78, Abhijai Mansingh 2-37) and 87 (Kirstan Kallicharan 29; Peat Salmon 4-12, Gordon Bryan 3-19, Abhijai Mansingh 2-35) vs JAMAICA SCORPIONS 331 (Chadwick Walton 163, Carlos Brown 48, Peat Salmon 45; Zishan Motara 7-108) and 69 without loss (Chadwick Walton 46 not out).

## Grenades stay atop of Premier League

Defending champions Sandals and Inet Jennings Grenades remained on course for a successful title defense when they extended their perfect run with a 3-1 victory against All Saints United in a top-of-the-table clash in the Antigua and Barbuda Football Association's (ABFA) Premier Division on Saturday night.

All Saints greatly contributed to their own demise by scoring two own goals for the Grenades to claim their 11th win in as many games during the second encounter of a Premier Division triple header at the ABFA Technical Center.

Shamari Dyer scored United's first own goal in the first minute of added time in the first half to give Jennings Grenades a two-nil lead at halftime following Eugene Kirwan's opening goal six minutes earlier.

Jayden Martin scored his team's second own goal of the match in the 75th minute to seal victory for the Grenades after forward Nazir McBurnette converted a penalty kick in the 63rd minute to reduce the deficit for All Saints United.

Both teams entered the match as the only unbeaten teams in the competition, with Grenades boasting 10 wins from as many games to top the Premier League with 30 points, five ahead of second-placed All Saints United, who have a game in hand.

But the cup-holders easily pre-



Quinton Griffith, left, leads the players of Jennings Grenades off the field following their victory against All Saints United at the ABFA Technical Center on Saturday, February 17, 2024. (Photo courtesy of Grenades FC)

vailed against All Saints United, which finished as runners-up behind the champions last season and the team that most football pundits believe poses the biggest threat to Grenades from retaining their Premier League title.

The result meant that the Grenades remain the only unbeaten side in the 15-team round-robin competition as they extended their lead and opened up an eight-point gap at the top by advancing to 33 points from 11 matches.

It was the first loss in 10 matches for All Saints United, who remained in second place on 25 points but can be overtaken by Old Road by the end of this weekend's round of fixtures.

Jahred Williams scored twice as the Garden Stars claimed their fifth win in 10 matches with a four-nil

drubbing of John Hughes in Saturday's opening encounter.

The result allows the Garden Stars to move into fifth place on goal difference, overtaking John Hughes and the Villa Lions by advancing to 17 points.

Villa Lions also have 17 points, but an inferior goal difference to Garden Stars. John Hughes slipped from sixth to seventh place by remaining on 16 points after suffering their sixth loss in 12 matches.

Green City jumped from 12th to ninth place by snatching a one-nil victory against the Ottos Rangers in the last match on Saturday.

Ottos Rangers slipped from 11th to 12th place by remaining on eight points after suffering their seventh loss in 11 matches.