

BARBUDA IN FOCUS

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Right: Prime Minister Gaston Browne with Senator Knackcynta Nedd at one of the sites during the Barbuda visit. Left: Works Minister Maria Bird-Browne inspects a building in Barbuda.

Local News



The team members traversed the streets of Codrington

Barbuda in focus

The sister island, Barbuda, is in line for the start of infrastructural and other development works following a visit to the island last Friday by a high-level team led by Prime Minister Gaston Browne and the Works Minister, Maria Bird-Browne.

The team also included representatives from the ministry of works, the Development Control Authority and the Environment Division. It traveled to Barbuda at the invitation of the Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party's caretaker



The works ministry team members during visit to Barbuda for the island-constituency, Sen. Nedd said she issued the invitation to the Sen. Knacyntar Nedd.

Prime Minister and his party to visit the island to look at areas of immediate concern for the people of the sister island.

“I named it ‘the Barbuda Infrastructural and Compliance’ visit as I saw the need for the ministry of works to come over with all its agencies to address some of the pressing issues faced by residents of the island. For ex-

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ample, we are in desperate need to have government buildings on the island to house agencies such as the registry of births and deaths and even Medical Benefits Scheme and Social Security,” she explained.

The Barbuda caretaker noted that there are several government-owned buildings on the island that have not been in use for several years and which have fallen into states of disrepair. She wants an assessment done of these buildings to ascertain whether they are structurally sound enough to undergo repairs or whether they should be demolished to make way for new structures.

She identified two of these buildings as the former Principal’s House, where the principal for the Holy Trinity School lived in earlier times when a principal came over from Antigua, and a second building generally referred to as Government House.

In addition, the team visited the abandoned building that formerly housed the police station as well as the Justice Complex building, which remains uncompleted

for several years.

Sen. Nedd revealed that a decision was made to demolish the former police station building while an estimate has been submitted for the completion of the Justice Complex. Works Minister Bird-Browne indicated that she and her team will peruse the estimate carefully over the coming weeks before a final decision is made.

The team then visited the island’s main road, the River Road, to make an assessment of what would be the best way forward in upgrading the roadway. There are two options; to use asphalt or concrete. Both are still on the table.

The visit took the team to the site where a new primary school will be constructed on lands at Loui Hill, near the Sir McChesney George Secondary School. The prime minister and party also included a visit to the new airport as part of the Barbuda trip.

Sen. Nedd said the consultations with the ministry of works and the other agencies will continue over the coming weeks and she expects an announcement to be made shortly.



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Two polls will decide eventual All Saints West caretaker

The ruling Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party will go the route of conducting two separate polls to determine who will be its caretaker in the All Saints West constituency.

This after the senior executive of the party convened an official meeting at the party's headquarters, The People's Place, on Nugent Avenue on Friday night.

It was standing room only as members of the

party came out in their numbers to participate in a critical decision-making process.

General Secretary, Senator Mary Clare Hurst said the official executive meeting brought representatives from all the seventeen constituency branches of the party whose delegations included five persons as well as the candidates or caretakers for the constituencies.

In a roll-call to indicate

their positions on the proposal to conduct the polls, each branch reported voted in the affirmative to pursue that course of action.

According to Sen. Hurst...discussions were held with the candidates who polled the most votes in the primary held on March 15 where Lamin Newton secured 157 votes, 15 more than Regis Burton, whose final tally was 142 votes. The poll was determined to be less divi-

sive than going back to a primary in a run-off.

"The party leadership met with the candidates to discuss the matter in full indicating a preference to go the route of polling the relative popularity of the candidates in the constituency.

"That process will be open to all registered voters in constituency and would therefore reflect the support of the candidates throughout the entire constituency," she explained.

The poll will be conducted by well-known Barbadian pollster, Peter Wickham and Jamaican pollster, Don Anderson. While no date has been set for the conduct of the polls, Sen. Hurst suggested that it will likely take place before the Labour Week festivities this year.

Sen. Hurst further explained that the agreement signed by the three candidates who competed in the primary was brought before the full executive to be endorsed prior to the primary and while it remained an agreement between the three candidates, it ought to have had the approval of the party's executive.

The results of the polls are expected to be made available to the full party executive at their conclusion.

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Phase One work on new cemetery ‘making progress’

Work is progressing smoothly on Phase One of the preparatory work on the new public cemetery site being readied at Tomlinson’s.

A post on the Facebook page of the Works Minister, Maria Bird-Browne features a photograph of men at work installing the perimeter fence for the facility which is a joint undertaking of the ministries of health and works.

She reported that the perimeter hedge has been planted as the Ministry of Works begins the task of preparing the interior roadways for the laying of asphalt. The work on the cemetery is a seven-days-a-week undertaking as men were busily performing their task on Sunday in an ‘all hands-on desk’ effort to get the work completed as soon



Work on fencing of the new cemetery at Tomlinson’s, as possible.

“The work in preparing the new cemetery goes beyond the interior roads as we will also be preparing a space for interior parking as well as a manager’s office and a public bathroom facility as well,” Sen. Rawdon Turner, Executive Chairman of the National Housing and Urban Renewal and Development Company stated.

He explained that the idea is for someone to be appointed as manager of the facility who will have an office on site.

In addition, it was noted that a facility such as a new cemetery will not be complete without public bathrooms as this has been lacking in other

cemeteries in the country. As part of the plans for the new cemetery, a series of solar lights will be installed to ensure that it is well-lit around the clock using renewable energy sources. As the work continues apace, Sen. Rawdon declined to provide a timeline for completion of the cemetery. He would only state that the completion remains a top priority of the government and that much resources have been allocated to ensure its speedy completion.

The government wants to commission the new cemetery as soon as possible as the St. John’s cemetery is fast running out of burial spaces.



Prime Minister Gaston Browne travelled to Montserrat on Saturday to attend the funeral of former calypsonian Hero.

Local News



UWI FIC to establish Academy of Sports from August this year

The University of the West Indies Five Islands Campus will be rolling out a number of new programmes for the upcoming academic year, including the establishment of an Academy of Sports with the hope that it will especially appeal to males in the society.

The announcement comes from Principal of the

UWI FIC, Professor C Justin Robinson as he addressed the Campus Council meeting last Thursday. He said the Academy of Sports will become a Centre of Excellence in sports for Antigua and Barbuda and the OECS, the primary market that the university serves.

“It will offer a suite of courses and I am heavily invested in this as I am

aware that across the UWI three-quarters of our students are females. While we are happy that our females are excelling in that way, it is critical that we offer programming that appeals to males. I see this as a critical element of our strategy as we seek to bring on a suite of programming in a non-traditional area that appeals to males,” Pro-



Professor C Justin Robinson
Professor Robinson noted.

The Academy of Sports will offer courses ranging from bachelor of science degrees to masters' degrees in several sports related subject areas. These include;

- BSc. in coaching
- BSc. in sports kinetics
- BSc. in sports leadership and management
- Sports marketing certificate
- MSc. sports and exercise medicine physiotherapy
- MSc. sports business management

UWI FIC will also introduce a number of Masters of Philosophy and Doctorate programmes beginning in August this year as well. In the School of Humanities and Education, these degrees will be in history and in education. In the School of Business and Management these higher degrees will be in economics, management, political science, psychology and sociology.

UWI FIC will also offer advanced degrees in collaboration with the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute for Social and Economic Studies in the areas of development studies, social policy, economic development policy and governance and public policy.

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Shooting incident near Public Market

One man was rushed to the Sir Lester Medical Medical Centre on Sunday afternoon following an alleged shooting incident near the Public Market in St. John's.

It has been alleged that two men were involved in an altercation of some kind, when one man reportedly went to his car to get a firearm wherefore, he proceeded to shoot the other in the

mouth. He then returned to his vehicle and drove over off.

A video has been making the rounds showing the man with blood gushing down from his mouth and being consoled by another individual. There's no word on his condition.

The police have not yet issued an official statement on the matter.

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Local NGO promotes conservation efforts at regional seminar

The United States Forest Service (USFS) through its Natural Infrastructure for Caribbean Resilience (NICaR) program recently concluded a five-day regional seminar on ecosystem restoration in Trinidad and Tobago. The event welcomed participants from environment protection institutions, community-based organizations, tertiary institutions, across five NICaR grantee countries.

The forum sought to promote best practices and practical solutions implemented by grantee organizations to foster resilience to climate change impacts in the Caribbean region. Participating countries included Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago as well as partner institutions in the United States. The five-day forum focused on restoration initiatives implemented by NICaR grantees to increase resilience to climate extremes and preserve biodiversity.



Minister of Planning and Development, Pernelle Beckles-Robinson, Refica Attwood Executive Director of Wallings Nature Reserve Inc and US Ambassador Candace Bond

Throughout the seminar, participants engaged in discussions, knowledge-sharing sessions as well as explored innovative solutions to enhance upland forest restoration, conservation, disaster risk reduction and urban resilience.



Executive Director of Wallings Nature Reserve Inc, Refica Attwood at a GAYAP community engagement

The Antiguan representation was in form of Wallings Nature Reserve Inc. through Executive Director, Refica Attwood. Wallings is the first community-managed National Park in Antigua and Barbuda. The NGO monitors, maintains, and provides insight into environmental management practices for areas around the island.

Through NICaR grant support, Wallings Nature Reserve has advanced their work in upland forest restoration. This includes the transformation of the Wallings Forest Area, through The Signal Hill Reforestation project. The reforestation of Signal Hill saw the introduction of a fire barrier, the planting of over 1500 trees and mobilizing of over 300 volunteers in the upland forest area. This was also the primary focus of the organization's intervention at the seminar.

In addition to the seminar component, the regional exchange saw visiting grantees participating in the annual Fondes Amandes Community Reforestation (FACRP) Gayap or community workday, led by grantee partner, FACRP. The three-day field activities featured cultural exchanges as well as support to community-led disaster risk reduction and fire prevention activities in the high-risk areas of Carenage and St. Ann's.

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Alma Mater Day...a successful event!

The Ministry of Education is hailing the observance of Alma Mater Day (Friday March 22) as another successful event it has organized to stimulate interests in the schools that adults attended in their youth.

One official of the ministry said several business places in St. John's reported that many staff members came to work wearing uniforms of the secondary schools they had attended.

"We were very pleased with the response from working adults and we hope that this revival of the schools' spirit will lead to many of these individuals deciding to become mentors for current students of their former schools," the official stated.

The official indicated that the ministry hopes to see this event con-



Office of the Prime Minister female staff members looking smart in their school uniforms continue in the years ahead with more and more working adults identifying in a positive way with their former educational institutions.

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Opinion



Politics or just politricks

Four surgeons sat around discussing their favourite patients. The first surgeon said, "I like operating on librarians. When you open them up, everything is in alphabetical order". The second surgeon disagreed, "I like operating on accountants. When you open them up, everything is in numerical order". The third surgeon claimed, "I like operating on electricians. When you open them up, everything is colour coded." The fourth surgeon insisted, "I like operating on politicians." The other three surgeons looked at each other in disbelief. The fourth surgeon continued, "Because they're heartless, gutless, spineless, and the ass and head are interchangeable."

So much for politics, but what about politricks? The Trinidad Prime Minister, Dr the Honourable Keith Rowley (PM), announced a plan to declare crime in Trinidad and Tobago as a public health issue. The heads of government of the region agreed so that doctors, especially, are catching even more health than ever. According to the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO), "Trinidad and Tobago faces intricate challenges at the crossroads of politics and health. Striking a harmonious balance requires collaborative efforts, evidence-based policies, and a commitment to the well-being of citizens." In

other words, you don't push one inside the other.

One of my friends went through the gamut of blame by the PM: "First he blamed the Opposition. Then he blamed the women and followed by blaming all of us for not pulling our weight". Worse, the PM then said that "Crime will topple the government".

He called on churches (not the one popping flavours and selling Texas Chicken) to do their bit. Then he blamed the police and when that failed, he dropped it on us, the public, again with "Citizens turning blind eye to crime." This confirmed my belief that politicians and diapers have one thing in common: they should both be changed regularly and for the same reason. If politicians want crime with lots of murders to be considered a "health" issue it will be "pubic" instead of "public" and should really be with the new born babies. After all, politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it, misdiagnosing it, and then, as in this case, misapplying the wrong remedies.

What is worse is that T&T is facing a growing burden of non-communicable diseases such as heart problems, strokes, cancers, diabetes and chronic lung diseases. They account for over 62 per cent of death with three-quarters occurring in people under 70. To



Tony Deyal

Jamaica, add cardiovascular disease. And for Barbados, put in tobacco, overweight and obesity.

Given all that, you're adding crime? It is like when a surgeon, an engineer and a politician were discussing which of their professions was the oldest. The surgeon said, "Eve was created from Adam's rib – a long surgical procedure."

The engineer replied, "Before Adam and Eve, order was created out of chaos, and that was an engineering job." But the politician insisted, "Yes, but who do you suppose created the chaos?" That is T&T and some of the other Caribbean countries for you. They will never learn or change.

In the Caribbean if you stay in one place long enough you will either be stolen and dumped somewhere else, or you will keep on seeing the same thing coming at you over the years but getting worse all the time. In an article I post-

ed on December 4, 2002, 'Bad to the bones', I commented on the reopening of the Accident and Emergency Department of the Port of Spain General Hospital. It read, "Casualty back in operation with a skeleton staff." At first, I thought it was a hoax or an attempt to delude the public, or what Trinis call, "trying a skull". However, in reading further, I realised that the story was true and I was almost moved to write a letter of commendation to whoever had conceived such a brilliant idea.

Skeletons are ideal for such an operation. First of all, security would be boned up rather than beefed up. Normal human beings, as well as the people who frequent casualty departments, would not be able to breach the hospital's defences, or gain entry unlawfully, because only the people in charge would have skeleton keys. Make no bones about it, a skeleton staff guaran-

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tees transparency. Skeletons might be numbskulls, or boneheads, but they are too smart to steal food from the cafeteria or towels from the laundry. Additionally, you cannot pin anything on them for stealing and selling body parts to private institutions. Also, by using a skeleton staff the problem of the overcrowded mortuary will be ended. After all, skeletons are people with their outsides off and insides out.

While skeletons may have some difficulty in standing up for themselves, they don't bow to pressure or knuckle under despots, doctors or dictators. Even though some might be lazy bones, most of them work very hard.

On the down side, they might be messy. One of them went to the cafeteria and ordered a cup of coffee and a mop. Another refused to work at the hospital because its heart wasn't in it. One refused to attend the welcome party put on by the Ministry of Health because it had no body to dance with. And when one reached very late for work and tried to lie, explaining that it was chased by a dog, its supervisor said, "Don't try that. I can see right through you." Skeletons are easy and cheap to maintain. They don't use the cafeteria food because they have no stomach for it and nothing gets under their skins. They are very studious and are always boning up for exams. They don't get an-

gry and back down because they don't have the guts to fight. On Sundays they stay on the job instead of going to church. They have no organs. They don't take coffee breaks. They take coffin breaks.

There is no question that the use of the skeleton staff at the Accident and Emergency Department will reduce the present excessive demands on the limited resources of the Hospital. This way doctors will be in paradise.

They will have more time for their private practice and the Ministry of Health would have more

money to spend on the really important things such as attending international conferences. I would really like to see the idea of employing skeleton staff extend to other Ministries throughout the Caribbean.

Most Government Ministers already have the basic resources and need only the political will to implement the new strategy. They all have skeletons in their cupboards. Some even prefer mummies to skeletons because they like to keep everything under wraps.

In 2010, eight years after I wrote the column, a Chinese firm was hired to build

the new hospital block. Then, not too long ago, and after another ten years, the Chinese "shanghaied" the project and left.

Now, in 2024 the same project will be "on target" by March/April 2025. By that time, the criminals, instead of being police targets, would have targeted, with the help of the police, the doctors, hospitals, drugs and their own nurses.

Tony Deyal was last seen thinking about Doctor Bell who fell down the well and broke his collar bone. Doctors should attend the sick and leave the criminals alone.

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Sick people leaving workforce at record highs

By Faarea Masud

The number of people leaving the workforce due to long term sickness is at its highest since the 1990s, a report suggests.

Adults economically inactive due to ill-health rose from 2.1m in July 2019 to a peak of 2.8m in October 2023, said the Resolution Foundation.

It is the “longest sustained rise” since 1994-1998, when records began.

The government said its recent Budget measures are estimated to boost the labour force by 300,000 workers.

The Foundation’s report comes after the ONS said more than a fifth of UK adults were not looking for work.

People at either end of the age spectrum had the highest proportion of those out-of-work due to ongoing illness, the Foundation’s report said.

“Younger and older people together account for nine-tenths of the rise in overall economic inactivity, which could have serious effects both on individual’s living standards and career paths,” said Louise Murphy, senior economist at the Foundation.

The rise in long-term sickness leaves the UK as the only G7 economy not to have returned to its pre-pandemic employment rate, ac-



ording to the Foundation.

However, it did add that inactivity figures fell slightly to 2.7 million in December 2023.

It said the upward trend in long-term sickness actually started before the pandemic in the summer of 2019, and has lasted for 54 months.

The longest previous period of increasing economic inactivity due to ill-health was for 55 months, between 1994 and 1998, it added.

As well as looking at ONS figures, the Foundation pointed to Department of Work and Pension (DWP) figures showing claims for disability benefits. It said the rise in claims for PIP, the non-means tested benefit for those with health issues, were “most striking”, with claims rising 68% from 2020 to 2024.

In the 16-17 age range, new PIP claims had increased by 138%.

The Foundation said it would lead to “wider strains on the NHS and welfare spending if we fail to improve the nation’s health and reduce economic inactivity”.

It also examined the DWP’s data on medical conditions recorded on Work Capability Assessments and highlighted the fact that many benefit claimants cited mental health problems and musculoskeletal problems.

It said 69% claimed for mental health disorders, and 48% had problems with connective or musculoskeletal pain.

A spokesperson for the DWP said: “Our plan for the economy is working. Inflation [the rate at which prices

rise] is down to 3.4%, employment is up, the number of people on payrolls is at a record high, and inactivity is falling.

“We’ve reduced the number of workless households by one million since 2010. Our £2.5 billion Back to Work plan will help break down barriers to work for over a million more people and our recent Budget measures are estimated to boost the labour force by an extra 300,000 workers.”

In order to deal with long-term economic inactivity, Chancellor Jeremy Hunt said in November that reforms including stricter fit-to-work tests and jobseeker support would get 200,000 more people into work. Under those plans, the government also wants to scrap the controversial

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Two Guyanese police officers face charges for extortion plot

Guyana's Special Organised Crime Unit (SOCU) charged a police sergeant and constable in connection with an extortion scheme.

Police Sergeant Imman Wilson and Detective Police Constable Akeimo Simon, who are both attached to the Brickdam Police Station, were charged for demanding money by menace with intent to steal and conspiracy to commit a felony.

In a statement, the Guyana Police Force (GPF) said the charges were filed after a civil engineer, employed by the Ministry of Public Works, complained to the Head of SOCU Assistant Commissioner Fazil Karimbaksh, that one of his ranks demanded money from him for an ongoing investigation.

"The Head of SOCU then secured CCTV footage which supported the allegation but did not implicate any officers from



Constable Akeimo Simon (left) and Sergeant Imman Wilson.

SOCU. An investigation was then ordered by Karimbaksh," GPF alleged.

"During the course of the investigation it was revealed that the two persons posing to be officers from SOCU, whom the Engineer was referring to, were the said Police Sergeant Imman Wilson and Police Constable Akeimo Simon from Brickdam Police Station."

GPF continued: "Further investigations re-

vealed that on 9th March, 2024 at about 7pm Constable Simon secured the assistance of Sergeant Wilson's mobile patrol in a marked Police car and went to the Engineer's residence at Industry, East Coast Demerara, enquiring about his whereabouts.

"Constable Simon and Sergeant Wilson made contact with him and indicated that they were officers from the Special Organised Crime Unit. He

further told the Engineer that SOCU was conducting a Money Laundering investigation against him. At the time Constable Simon was carrying what appeared to be a police crime file bearing the official Police Crest and the word SOCU written on the front of the file cover. Simon told the Engineer that he was needed at 'SOCU' for further investigation."

GPF alleged the officers demanded GYD\$1 million engineer.

The engineer allegedly paid GYD\$100,000 to Simon.

The cops appeared at the Georgetown Magistrate's Court before Magistrate Faith Mc Gusty to answer their respective charges.

They both pleaded not guilty and were granted \$75,000 bail each.

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Work Capability Assessment.

"We will reform the work capability assessment to reflect greater flexibility and availability of home working after the pandemic," Mr Hunt said in November. "And we will spend £1.3bn over the next five years to help nearly 700,000 people with health conditions find jobs."

The Foundation's latest report comes after it said in February that people in their early 20s are more likely to be not working

due to ill health than those in their early 40s.

Responding to the report, Shazia Ejaz at the Recruitment and Employment Federation (REC), which represents the recruitment industry, said long NHS waiting lists "are a big factor for why not enough people are well enough to work".

She added: "Better infrastructure around transport, childcare and social care will all help tackle the inactivity challenge the UK faces".

UWI Vice Chancellor to address UN General Assembly

CMC - The Vice-Chancellor of The University of the West Indies (The UWI), Professor Sir Hilary Beckles, will address the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on Monday as part of a global programme to commemorate the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

The UWI said that the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade is observed annually on March 25, since 2007.

It is dedicated to hon-

ouring and remembering the victims of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, which enslaved over 13 million Africans for more than 400 years. The day also aims to raise awareness about the dangers of racism and prejudice.

Beckles is a renowned public activist in social justice and minority empowerment.

He is also the chairman of the Caribbean Community [CARICOM] Commission on Reparation and Social Justice and a United Nations committee official.

“His life’s work has been dedicated to the repa-



Sir Hilary Beckles.

ratory justice conversation. In 2013, he coordinated the policy positions of Caribbean governments on reparatory justice, established The UWI’s Centre for Reparation Research, served as an associate member of the University College London’s Legacies of British Slave-ownership research project, and the University of Hull’s Wilberforce Institute for the study of Slavery and Emancipation,” the UWI said.

He also led the Caribbean’s non-government organisation delegation at the 2001 World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa.

He is the author of Britain’s Black Debt, which is the first scholarly work that looks comprehensively at the reparations discussion in the Caribbean.

On Monday, The UWI Vice-Chancellor will speak on the theme “Creating Global Freedom: Counter-

ing Racism with Justice in Societies and Among Nations” and according to the university, he will set out the narrative that captures the rise of reparations from a network of spontaneous local moments to a highly organised global movement.

The UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, as well as the President of the UN General Assembly Dennis Francis, who is also the Trinidad and Tobago Ambassador to the UN, as well as Yolanda Renee King, author and granddaughter of Dr Martin Luther King, Jr will address the UNGA.

“It is always an honour to address the UN General Assembly. I wish to thank Secretary-General Guterres for this recognition. But to speak with the President of the Assembly Ambassador Francis in the chair, a UWI alumnus, is special and priceless,” said Beckles.



Alaskan Airlines flight 1282: FBI probes mid-air blowout on January flight

By Nadine Yousif

The FBI is investigating a January Alaska Airlines flight, where a door plug on the aircraft, a Boeing 737 Max 9, blew out mid-air.

A criminal probe was confirmed by the FBI in a letter sent to those aboard the plane, identifying them as “victims”.

None of the 177 passengers and crew were killed, but some were injured.

A group has since sued Alaska Airlines for “serious emotional distress, fear and anxiety”.

The FBI letters, sent to passengers on 19 March by a victim specialist within the FBI’s Seattle Division, said that the criminal investigation may be “lengthy”.

They added that updates on the probe’s progress could not be shared at this time.

The letters confirm early media reports that the Department of Justice (DOJ) had launched a criminal investigation into the Boeing jetliner blowout, which occurred on a 5 January flight from Portland, Oregon to Ontario, California.

Sources familiar with the investigation told the BBC’s US news partner CBS in early March that the probe will look into whether Boeing violated



Agents from the National Transportation Safety Board have recovered the plane’s door plug.

an agreement it entered with the Justice Department in 2021, following two crashes involving its 737 Max aircraft.

More than 300 people died in the two crashes of Boeing’s Max planes in 2018 and 2019.

Boeing has not commented on the ongoing criminal probe.

In a statement shared with media after news of the DOJ investigation emerged, Alaska Airlines said a federal probe is normal “in an event like this”.

“We are fully cooperating and do not believe we are a target of the investigation,” said the airline.

The Alaska Airlines flight had to make an emergency landing in Portland after an outer section of the plane fell off shortly after take-off.

The loss of that section

caused an uncontrolled decompression inside the aircraft, where passengers say they had to “hold on for dear life”.

One passenger, Cuong Tran, told the BBC that his seat belt saved him as his phone, socks and shoes were ripped off 16,000ft above ground.

Mr Tran, who was sitting next to his friend one row behind the section which blew out, said he suffered injuries including a laceration to his leg.

Images shared online - and later by the US National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) - showed a wide hole in the side of the Boeing 737-9 Max aircraft, with oxygen masks dangling from the ceiling.

The missing section of the plane was later found in the back garden of a Portland school teacher’s

home.

In a preliminary investigation US regulators found four critical bolts - meant to hold the so-called door plug in place - were missing from the flight.

Shortly after the incident, officials from the NTSB said that Boeing had also placed restrictions on the plane involved in the incident days before it took off. The jet had been prevented from making long-haul flights over water, said NTSB chief Jennifer Homendy, after pilots reported pressurisation warning lights on three previous flights made on that specific plane.

The decision to restrict lengthy flights over water was so that the plane “could return very quickly to an airport” in the event the warnings happened again, she said.

Nigerian pupils taken in mass abduction freed

By Yusuf Akinpelú

Nigerian pupils taken by gunmen in a mass abduction in the north-western town of Kuriga earlier this month have been freed “unharméd”, officials say.

Kaduna state governor Uba Sani said they had been rescued thanks to the courage of the security forces.

The school authorities had said more than 280 children were taken, but the army said 137 hostages had been freed.

It said the operation took place in the early hours of Sunday morning, days before a ransom deadline.

Officials have not yet commented on the discrepancy in numbers.

In previous cases, hostages have been able to flee from their captors as they trek for days to forest hideouts.

A top government official, who asked not to be named, has told BBC Hausa that one of the teachers taken from Kuriga died in captivity. The group was held for 17 days in total.

Kidnap gangs, known as bandits, have seized thousands of people in recent years, especially in the north-west.

Six mass abductions this month have rocked parts of northern Nigeria,



The pupils, some seen here after being freed, were in a school compound assembly ground when the gunmen rode in.

despite an overall fall in the number of such attacks over the past year.

Those kidnapped are usually freed after a ransom is paid.

The kidnappers had demanded \$690,000 (£548,000) for the release of the Kuriga children aged between eight and 15. The government had said it would not pay any ransom.

“This is indeed a day of joy,” Governor Sani said in a statement in which he praised Nigeria’s President Bola Tinubu for ensuring that the abducted schoolchildren had been “released unharmed”.

The president, who welcomed the news in a tweet, said it showed the importance of the government and state authorities

collaborating “especially on matters of security”.

Military spokesman Maj Gen Edward Buba said 76 girls and 61 boys had been rescued from Zamfara state, which borders Kaduna to the north-west.

A security source told Reuters news agency the students had been freed in a forest and were being taken to Kaduna for medical tests before being allowed to see their families.

The mass abduction occurred on the morning of 7 March during assembly in a compound housing a junior and senior school.

According to witnesses, the pupils were in the assembly ground around 08:30 (07:30 GMT) when dozens of gunmen on mo-

torcycles rode in, eventually taking away 187 students from a secondary school and 125 from the local primary school. It is not clear how many teachers were abducted. Twenty-five students later returned.

One pupil, believed to be 14-years-old, died after being shot by the gunmen.

Most of the kidnaps in north-west Nigeria are believed to be the work of criminal gangs trying to make money from ransoms.

In an attempt to curb Nigeria’s spiralling and lucrative kidnapping industry, a controversial law that made it a crime to make ransom payments was passed in 2022. It car-

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Sports News



Old Road drop points in race for Premier Division title

Old Road dropped points in their quest to challenge leaders and defending champions Sandals and Inet Jennings Grenades for the title in the Antigua and Barbuda Football Association's (ABFA) Premier Division on Saturday night.

Old Road suffered their third loss in 14 matches to remain in third place on goal difference with 31 points, losing one-nil against Garden Stars in the first game of a triple header at the ABFA Technical Center.

Wilden Cornwall Jr. scored the only goal in the 9th minute of the match, in which two Garden Stars players and a player from Old Road were expelled after receiving red cards from the referee.

Courtney Clarke of Garden Stars and Kayon London of Old Road were sent off in the 28th minute for displaying violent conduct.

The Garden Stars were

reduced to nine men in the 35th minute when Gerique George was dismissed for denying an obvious goal-scoring opportunity.

Their seventh win in 13 matches allows the Garden Stars to advance to fourth place on goal difference with 24 points, the same as the Greenbay Hoppers.

Villa Lions also lost ground on the front-runners, slipping to a narrow one-nil defeat against SAP in the final game on Saturday night.

Following a goalless first half, Aquan Singh snatched victory for SAP with a 65th-minute conversion.

It was only the third win in 13 matches for SAP to advance to 13 points and remain in 11th place, while Villa Lions slipped to sixth place with 23 points after suffering their fourth defeat in 13 games.

Kenja Benjamin scored twice, including a penalty conversion near the end of added time, for Parham to

salvage a 3-3 draw with the Pigotts Bullets in the second game on Saturday.

Benjamin scored in the 28th minute and converted the penalty kick in the fifth minute of added time (90+5 minutes), and Jahquan Davis scored in the 47th minute for Parham.

Tyrique Thwaites scored in the 29th minute, Seigel Rodney had a 74th-minute conversion, and Akeem Isaac, who missed a penalty in the 56th minute, made amends by scoring the third goal for the Pigotts Bullets in the 81st minute.

Their fourth draw in 13 matches allows the Pigotts Bullets to move into seventh place on goal difference with 16 points, the same as John Hughes.

Parham remains in 13th place and moved up to seven points after drawing for the fourth time in 13 matches.

Meanwhile, the Potters Tigers, in second place, moved within a point of

the leaders, Five Islands, in the ABFA's First Division League on Friday.

The Potters Tigers beat the Attacking Saints 3-0 in the second game of a double header at the ABFA Technical Center. Goals by Brian Davis in the 15th minute and Javorn Benjamin in the 35th minute gave the Potters Tigers a two-nil lead at halftime.

Keon Greene added a third in the 58th minute to secure the Tigers' 10th win in 13 matches. It allows the Potters Tigers to advance to 33 points, one adrift of Five Islands.

It was the third defeat in 13 matches for the Attacking Saints, who slipped to fourth place on goal difference with 24 points, the same as Police and Jennings United.

Police move above Jennings United and Attacking Saints into third place on goal difference by snatching a one-nil win against the bottom team, the Young Lions of Old Road, in the first game on Friday.

Renato Archibald scored the lone goal of the match in the 40th minute to give the Police their seventh win in 13 matches. The Young Lions remain in the cellar with six points after suffering their 12th defeat in 14 matches.

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ries a jail sentence of at least 15 years, however no-one has ever been arrested.

Earlier this year, the family of a group of sisters kidnapped in the capital, Abuja, denied a police statement that the security forces had rescued the girls, saying that they had no choice but to pay the ransom.

There was global outrage when Is-

lamist militants from the Boko Haram group seized nearly 300 girls in Nigeria's north-eastern town of Chibok in 2014.

Most of the victims have either been freed or escaped since then, but dozens remain unaccounted for.

On Saturday, the army said it had rescued 17 students and a woman kidnapped just days after the Kuriga attack from a school in Sokoto, also in the north-west.

LI Hurricanes blow away Jamaica Scorpions

A well-played 94 not out by West Indies all-rounder Justin Greaves propelled Leeward Islands Hurricanes to a seven-wicket win over Jamaica Scorpions in their fifth round West Indies Four-Day Championship encounter at Sabina Park on Saturday.

The Hurricanes, who have enjoyed decent form since the start of the four-day tournament, assumed control of this encounter from day one, and expectedly completed victory courtesy of Greaves' unbeaten knock.

Resuming the final day on 145 for three, with only 42 runs to get, the Hurricanes easily got to their target without any further loss of wickets. The right-handed Greaves, who resumed on 62, added 32 to his overnight score to end on 94 off 183 balls, including five boundaries.

Greaves, who achieved his second half century of the match, received support from wicketkeeper/batsman Jahmar Hamilton, who finished unbeaten on 21 off 55 balls as the pair shared an unbroken 74-run fourth-wicket stand.

With the win, their fourth of the season, the LI Hurricanes assumed pole position on the standing by advancing to 80.6 points, while the Scorpions, who suffered their third defeat, slipped to fifth place with 53.4 points.

Scores: Jamaica Scorpi-

ons 221 (Carlos Brown 68, Romaine Morris 42, Derval Green 20 not out; Jeremiah Louis 3-34, Rahkeem Cornwall 3-69, Colin Archibald 2-23, Daniel Doram 2-27) and 196 (Abhijai Mansingh 52, Kirk McKenzie 33, Rameal Lewis 30, Peat Salmon 22; Jeremiah Louis 3-24, Rahkeem Cornwall 3-56, Oshane Thomas 2-48).

Leeward Islands Hurricanes 231 (Justin Greaves 62, Keacy Carty 53, Kieran Powell 41, Jewel Andrew 32; Peat Salmon 5-20, Rameal Lewis 4-80) and 189-3 (Justin Greaves 94 not out, Mikyle Louis 57; Peat Salmon 2-69).

Meanwhile, the Barbados Pride and the Guyana Harpy Eagles secured dominant wins in their respective fifth-round West Indies four-day fixtures against the Trinidad & Tobago Red Force and the Windward Islands Hurricanes on Friday.

At the Queen's Park Oval in Trinidad, the Red Force started day three on 100 for three off 36 overs, trailing the Pride by seven runs.

The home side suffered a massive collapse early in the day's proceedings, losing their final seven wickets for just 24 runs in 18.5 overs, leaving the Pride needing only 18 runs for victory.

Jomel Warrican did the bulk of the damage for the Pride by grabbing six for 31 from 17 overs, while Jason Holder ended with four for



All-rounder Justin Greaves

23 off 12.1 overs. The Pride then reached 20 for two off 7.1 overs to secure the win.

Scores: Trinidad & Tobago Red Force 172 off 53.5 overs (Amir Jangoo 93 not out; Jason Holder 4-47, Chemar Holder 3-28, Shaquille Cumberbatch 3-50) & 124 all out off 53.5 overs (Kjorn Ottley 39, Amir Jangoo 30, Jomel Warrican 6-31, Jason Holder 4-23).

Barbados Pride 279 all out off 87.3 overs (Jonathan Drakes 72, Zachary McCaskie 46, Shane Dowrich 40, Jason Holder 34, Kevin Wickham 34, Kraigg Brathwaite 30; Khary Pierre 3-54, Jayden Seales 2-33,

Bryan Charles 2-57) and 20-2 off 7.1 overs (Khary Pierre 2-10).

At Coolidge Cricket Ground in Antigua, the Guyana Harpy Eagles started day-three in a dominant position, 168 for one off 57 overs, leading the Windward Islands Volcanoes by 363 runs.

The Harpy Eagles declared their second innings at 224 for two, setting the Volcanoes a target of 419 runs to win.

Tevin Imlach and Tegenarine Chanderpaul, who entered the day on 88 not out and 78 not out, respectively,

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Sports News



Players of the Sea View Farm football team. (File photo)

Freeman's Ville and Sea View Farm hold on to top spots in Second Division

Freeman's Village and Sea View Farm maintained the top two spots, but English Harbour lost ground on the front-runners after the latest round of matches in the Antigua and Barbuda Football Association's (ABFA) Second Division League.

Freeman's Village remained the leaders of the Second Division, two points ahead of Sea View Farm in second place after both sides recorded wins.

Freeman's Village over-

came Lingies CPTSA Wings 3-1 at the Freeman's Village playing field. Roy Gregory scored in the 14th minute, Andre Kellman had a 36th-minute conversion, and Adrian Benjamin scored in the 59th minute to give Freeman's Village a three-nil lead.

Travis Austin scored a consolation goal in the 64th minute for the CPTSA Wings, who remain in 11th place with 20 points after suffering their fifth loss in 13 matches.

Their 12th win in 14 matches carries Freeman's Village to 36 points, two ahead of Sea View Farm, who recorded their 11th win in 14 matches with a 4-0 drubbing of Glanvilles at the ABFA Technical Center.

Rhezal Gomes and Klyster Rowe each scored twice for Sea View Farm. Gomes had conversions in the 9th and 52nd minutes, and Rowe scored in the 34th and 45th minutes.

Glanvilles remain in 16th

place with seven points after crashing to their 11th defeat in 14 matches.

English Harbour remain in third place on goal difference ahead of Bethesda after dropping points, losing 2-1 to Soccer Academy at the ABFA Technical Center.

Keyondre Hewlett and Imani Joyce each converted once for Soccer Academy, and Clarence Marsh scored for English Harbour, who remain on 30 points with Bethesda after losing for the third time in 15 matches.

The result allows Soccer Academy to leapfrog Belmont FC from 10th to ninth place. Their seventh win in 11 matches carries Soccer Academy to 24 points, one ahead of Belmont FC, who have played 15 matches.

The Second Division encounter at Golden Grove between TAMO FC and Earthquakes was postponed.

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both brought up well played hundreds. Imlach eventually made 107 off 243 balls, including nine fours, while Chanderpaul hit an unbeaten 101 off 248 balls.

The Windwards were then bowled out for 165 in 56.2 overs. Shamar Springer led the way with 69, and Ryan John hit 41. Nial Smith took five for 29 from 11 overs, and Veerasammy Permaul captured five for 47 off 24.2 overs.

Scores: Guyana Harpy Eagles 308 off

80.5 overs (Kevin Sinclair 74, Kevlon Anderson 48, Gudakesh Motie 46, Veerasammy Permaul 30; Darel Cyrus 5-67) & 224-2 off 87 overs (Tevin Imlach 107, Tagenarine Chanderpaul 101 not out).

Windward Islands Volcanoes 113 all out off 31.5 overs (Tevyn Walcott 41; Isai Thorne 4-38, Ronaldo Alimohamed 3-30, Gudakesh Motie 2-12) & 165 all out off 56.2 overs (Shamar Springer 69, Ryan John 41; Nial Smith 5-29, Veerasammy Permaul 5-47).

Flyers stay unbeaten in ABBA's First Division League

The EZ Fit Flyers extended their perfect run to remain the only unbeaten team in the Antigua and Barbuda Basketball Association's (ABBA) Division I League on Saturday night.

The Flyers recorded their seventh win in as many games with a 97-49 victory against Kennedy's Club Ottos Full Throttle at the JSC Sports Complex.

Donte Trimmingham sank 25 points and claimed eight rebounds; Selassie Brathwaite scored 19 points with five steals; David Fernandez had 13 points, eight assists, and seven rebounds; Xavier Meade produced nine points and six rebounds; and Adonis Humphreys chipped in with eight points and 14 rebounds for the Flyers.

Shaquille Kelly converted 14 points and grabbed 14 rebounds; Nkenge Drew sank nine points and snatched 22 rebounds; and Warren Bogle scored nine points for the Ottos Full Throttle, which lost for the

fifth time in seven games.

Adonis Humphreys produced a triple-double as the Flyers recorded their sixth win in as many games with a 100-48 drubbing of the New Generation All Saints Slam in their previous encounter.

Humphreys had 29 points, 21 rebounds, and 10 steals; Javonte Daley contributed 18 points, six steals, and five rebounds; Kwame Brathwaite scored 12 points; Delonte Phillip sank 10 points and claimed 10 rebounds; and Xavier Meade chipped in with nine points and seven rebounds for the EZ Fit Flyers.

Kim Casey sank 10 points, Pilsmon Nelson had nine points, and Javid Joseph scored eight points for the New Generation All Saints Slam.

Northside Stingerz secured their fifth win in seven games by romping to an 83-61 victory against the New Generation All Saints Slam on Saturday.

Joshua Minner produced



a game-high 30 points, six rebounds, and five steals; Jayzee Saltibus sank 10 points and grabbed 15 rebounds; Keroi Lee converted 10 points and snatched nine rebounds; and Kareem Edwards scored eight points and claimed 12 rebounds for the Stingerz.

Sergio Symister converted 25 points and grabbed eight rebounds; Keaddy Martin converted 12 points and claimed eight

rebounds; and Judah Ferris scored 10 points for the All Saints Slam, which lost for the seventh time in eight games.

The Potters Steelers recorded their fifth win in seven games by coasting to an 87-58 victory against Kennedy's Club Limited Ottos Full Throttle.

Cohen Desouza produced 16 points, 13 rebounds, and seven assists; Devorn Benjamin sank 15 points; Humroy Wright converted 11 points; and Ammiel Williams contributed nine points for the Potters Steelers.

Akeem Davis converted 16 points and snatched 13 rebounds; Kwame Payne had 15 points and five assists; and Warren Bogle scored 10 points for the Ottos Full Throttle.

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field.

The regional tournament will bowl off with the first round of matches, due to start at 9:30 am on Tuesday, March 26.

The Leewards will open their campaign against Jamaica at Coolidge Cricket Ground. Barbados will take on Guyana at Ball Beef in Liberta, and defending champions Trinidad and Tobago will begin their title defense against the Windward Islands

in Bethesda.

Leeward Islands 14-member squad: J'Quan Athanaze (captain), Lawshorn Bergan (vice-captain), Kesim Challenger, Clayvaunte Powell (wicketkeeper), Karese Farrell, Jaeden Bramble, Aeden Williams, Kerique Mentore, De Marae Prentice, Shawn Harris, Tayari Tonge, Hose Roberts, Rondre Daniel, and Jathan Edward. Reserves: Devante Walters, Ondre Peters, William Pitman, and Kyan Maccow.

Leewards name squad for Rising Stars Under-15 contest

All-rounder J'Quan Athanaze will lead the Leeward Islands for the Cricket West Indies (CWI) Rising Stars Under-15 Super50 Tournament, which is being hosted here in Antigua and Barbuda from March 24 to April 4.

Athanaze, the son of former senior Leeward Islands all-rounder Justin Athanaze, will take over from fellow Antiguan all-rounder Matthew Miller, who captained the Leewards during the past two regional rising stars under-15 tournaments.

The attacking right-handed batsman, a student at Princess Margaret School, has been among the dominant players in this year's secondary schools' cricket competitions.

He has the highest aggregate in the under-19 competition, scoring 413 runs at an average of 68.8 in seven innings, including a century and two half centuries. Athanaze is also the second-leading wicket-taker with 19 scalps.

Athanaze also represented Mahico in the Antigua Commercial Bank Caribbean Parish League competition and Combined Schools in the Antigua and Barbuda



President of the Leeward Islands Cricket Board Enoch Lewis, (foreground) meet coach Ajarni Frederick, left, and Leeward Islands under-15 players during a practice session at the Pigotts playing field last week. (LICB)

Cricket Association (ABCA) domestic two-day championship, in which he scored 189 runs and captured 16 wickets in six matches.

Athanaze is one of four players who have been retained from last year's team. The other returning players are vice-captain Lawshorn Bergan, Jathan Edwards, and Rondre Daniel.

Four other Antiguan players have also been included in the squad. They are Athanaze's Princess Margaret School teammate Kerique Metore, Shawn Harris of Sir Novel- le Richards Academy, Tayari

Tonge of Pares Secondary, and Hose Roberts of Antigua Grammar School.

Fellow Antiguan players Ondre Peters of Princess Margaret School and William Pitman of Pares Secondary were named as reserves.

The Leeward Islands 14-member squad and four reserves were selected following three practice matches against the Windward Islands at the Pigotts playing field during the course of last week.

Both teams were using the practice matches to finalize their preparations for

the 2024 Cricket West Indies Rising Stars Under-15 Super50 Tournament, which was also hosted here in Antigua last year.

The six regional teams, including defending champions Trinidad and Tobago, will be participating in the limited-overs tournament, in which matches will be played across three venues here in Antigua.

The five rounds of matches will be played at Ball Beef in Liberta, the Coolidge Cricket Ground, and the Bethesda playing

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