

# IMF REPORTS ON THE ECONOMY

*Story on Page 2*



Reigning Queen of Carnival 2023 Ischikelle Corbin (centre) along with delegates contesting the 2024 Carnival Queen crown, surround Sir Vivian Richards at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium, yesterday.

## IMF projects further economic growth for A&B, warns of high public debt

An International Monetary Fund (IMF) team has concluded its annual review of the Antigua and Barbuda economy and it has forecast expansion in the economy, but warns of ongoing challenges of the high public sector debt burden.

Led by David Moore, the team was in St. John's from June 17–21, 2024, and met with government officials and other stakeholders to discuss recent economic developments, the economic outlook, and policy priorities. At the conclusion of the vis-

it, Moore issued the following statement:

“Antigua and Barbuda’s economy continues to recover. Real GDP growth is estimated at 4.2 percent in 2023, returning the country to pre-pandemic real output levels on the back of strong construction activity and continued growth in tourist arrivals. In 2024, growth is projected to be temporarily higher. Growth in 2024 is expected to accelerate to 5.8 percent, boosted by Antigua’s hosting of the UN’s Small Island Developing

States Conference and co-hosting of the T20 Cricket World Cup. Inflation rose to 6.0 percent in April 2024, from 3.3 percent at end-2023.”

“The high public debt burden poses ongoing challenges. The public debt to GDP ratio has declined from its pandemic high, from around 100 percent in 2020 to an estimated 76 percent in 2023, reflecting the economic recovery and an upward revision to nominal GDP from a re-basing of the national accounts statistics. However, cash constraints continue to bind, and domestic and external arrears are substantial. Fiscal adjustment is needed to create space to clear arrears and prevent their re-emergence. The timely completion of the authorities’ validation of domestic arrears, development of a comprehensive arrears clearance strategy, and close engagement with creditors and domestic suppliers, will be essential for restoring debt sustainability.”

The 2024 budget represents important progress towards stronger fiscal buffers. Given Antigua and Barbuda’s high debt and financing needs, and susceptibility to external shocks, measures to improve the fiscal position are critical to help reduce vulnerabilities.

The 2024 budget includes a package of revenue measures - in particular, increasing the standard ABST rate and broadening its base, introducing excise taxes on alcohol, tobacco, and cannabis products, and raising property taxes for high-end properties - that is expected to improve the fiscal position by around ½ percent of GDP in 2024.

“Room remains to strengthen the fiscal position further, including through closer adherence to the cap

*cont'd on pg 3*



Foreign Affairs Minister E.P. Chet Greene welcomes new UK Resident High Commissioner Representative John Hamilton when they discussed a range of issues of mutual interest.

## Experts lining up to participate in first-ever AI Conference at UWI FIC

The organisers of the first-ever conference on Artificial Intelligence to take place within the University of the West Indies system, say the event slated for July 8 to 10 is attracting many positive responses from the academic communities locally, regionally and internationally.

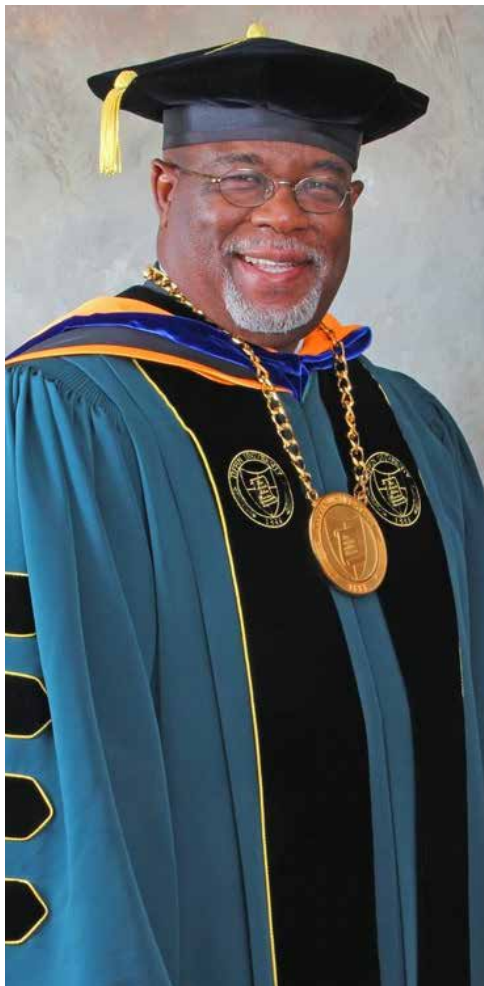
Dean of Academic Studies at UWI Five Island Campus, Dr Curtis Charles, is reporting that scores of experts in AI drawn from academic and from engineering will converge on Antigua and Barbuda for the conference.

“The responses have been outstanding,” he reported.

Appearing on the Browne and Browne show on Point FM on Saturday, Dr. Charles revealed that many of the experts who will attend are Caribbean nationals who live and work outside of the region.

“This would be the first AI Conference in the Caribbean here at UWI FIC; we are the smallest campus, we are a small country but as the Jamaican say, ‘we little but we tallawah’.

“So, when we started planning for this conference, I knew from my work in the United State, that there were a large number of Caribbean



Dr Curtis Charles

nationals working at high levels with several tech companies. So, the idea was, if we can get Caribbean nationals who are high in the technology sphere to come here and talk about

how do we go about re-imagining the digital transformation in the Caribbean in the age of AI and the 5th Industrial Revolution, then that would be remarkable,” he stated.

According to Dr. Charles, he started with a single Caribbean expert who works for IBM in AI and research, from that single person contacts were made with several other creating a domino effect where up to date more than eighty (80) (mostly from the Caribbean) such experts have signaled a desire to attend and even to present papers on the subject.

“In addition to that, we have accepted some forty academic research papers. These academic papers are from the US, Canada, the other UWI campuses and someone from as far as Saudi Arabia, who sit on one of the panels,” he revealed.

Dr. Charles also announced that as part of the conference, on Day One, the university is committed to train 150 teachers in a 5-hour workshop on the use of AI in the classroom as a teaching and learning tool.

Even with the conducting of the workshop, Dr. Charles, said someone has volunteered to assist the university in this regard.

### *cont'd from pg 2*

on discretionary tax exemptions, and continuing the recent efforts to enhance expenditure commitment controls.”

Credit market developments reflect the broader pickup in activity. Bank credit to the private sector rebounded by 7 percent in 2023, after contracting in the previous two years. Credit unions have ex-

panded rapidly over several years, with loan growth moderating to around 8 percent in the year through 2024Q1. Non-performing loans for both banks and credit unions, as a share of total loans, are modestly above the prudential level of 5 percent.

“Stronger oversight and regulation of credit unions, including through risk-based capital requirements,

would promote a level playing field across the financial sector and support asset quality.”

Further work is needed to address persistent data gaps. The statistical authorities have made efforts to update the national accounts and improve data quality.

“Ensuring sufficient resources for completing the Population and Hous-

ing Census, the Producer Price Index and the 2023 Labour Force Survey, and reporting on the financial operations of state-owned enterprises, would facilitate evidence-based policy making and transparency.”

“The IMF team thanks the authorities and other counterparts for their collaboration and support, as well as for the valuable discussions.”

## PM reaches out to UWI FIC for help with the teaching of mathematics

Against the backdrop of next month's highly anticipated conference on Artificial Intelligence here in Antigua and Barbuda, and the role that AI can play in the classroom, Prime Minister Gaston Browne has reached out to the University of the West Indies Five Islands Campus for help in delivering mathematics education in the school system.

The appeal comes out of discussions last Saturday on the Browne and Browne radio programme where the prime minister welcomed, UWI FIC Dean of Academic Studies, Professor Curtis Charles, to discuss the

upcoming conference. Dr. Charles is the coordinator of the event.

During the programme, Dr. Charles revealed that as part of the conference, the UWI will train 150 local teachers on the use of AI in the classroom.

On hearing this, PM Browne appealed to the professor to expand the initiative and to design a programme utilizing AI that will be available to teach mathematics across the entire education system.

“One of the areas we would want you to target is, we have always had a shortage of math teachers, so we



Prime Minister Gaston Browne

can use AI to simultaneously teach different classes, to different schools. So, I don't know if you can help us to mobilise all of our math teachers to be involved in this programme so that we don't have the situation where some schools do not have enough contact time with math teachers.

“Generally speaking, we have not been doing well in math and I am of the view that having a more interactive methodology to teach math would prove a little more helpful and to help them improve their grades,” he remarked.

Dr. Charles said its an initiative which he would wish to pursue post-conference, when he said much of the work will take place.

He stated that Education Minister, Daryll Matthew is

down to chair a panel where the discussion will focus on the topic; ‘how do we re-imagine education in Antigua and Barbuda and the Caribbean utilizing AI’.

The professor noted that across the Caribbean the average passes for math is 40 percent of those who write the exam. This, he added, is not good enough.

“We can talk about artificial intelligence all we want, but unless we have students coming up from primary and secondary schools who have the capability (with mathematics), we would be stagnating,” he declared.

Additionally, he said one of the reasons for hosting the conference is to bring to Antigua and Barbuda persons who are able to teach AI remotely.



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T20 Cricket World Cup volunteer Keith Yearwood.

## Man pronounced dead at SLBMC after falling ill at Sir Viv Stadium

A T20 Cricket World Cup volunteer was pronounced dead at the hospital after feeling unwell at Sir Vivian Richards Stadium on Sunday afternoon.

He was rushed to the hospital by Emergency Medical Services and pronounced dead shortly after 6 PM. The cause of death is unknown.

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## VCBIA runway resurfacing to begin this year

The much-delayed re-surfacing of the runway at VC Bird International Airport is expected to start before the end of the year.

Prime Minister Gaston Browne announced that the government has acquired a loan through a consortium of banks led by CIBC Caribbean for US\$100 million. Some of the amount will go towards the Barbuda runway expansion.

Informed sources say the Antigua and Barbuda Airport Authority (ABAA) is currently working on the tender documents with the expectation that the project will go out for tender shortly.

The sources anticipate that selection of a contractor to undertake the work will be completed by September



to be followed by mobilization and the start of actual resurfacing taking place by November.

The sources revealed that the runway was last resurfaced back in 2008. The internationally recommended standard is for runways to be resurfaced every ten years. The sources say efforts were being made in

2018-19 to have the resurfacing done, but that there were some delays, followed by the COVID-19 pandemic which itself caused further delays to the project.

Earlier in the year, emergency repairs had to be done on the runway after parts of the asphalt eroded from the landings of a 777 aircraft. It forced a temporary closure

of the airport and for immediate remedial work to take place.

The VCBIA runway is about 3,038 metres or just over 9,000 feet in length.

According to the sources the resurfacing will be carried out at night when the airport is closed and the project is expected to run for approximately one year.

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## Countdown is on for opening of Barbuda new airport

The countdown is on leading to the formal opening of the new airport on Barbuda.

According to a timeframe announced by the Prime Minister, Gaston Browne, the new airport should become operational shortly. He said a team from the Eastern Caribbean Civil Aviation Authority (ECCAA) is expected to travel to Codrington this week to review the airport and all its facilities and to give the greenlight for opening sometime thereafter.

Meanwhile, the prime minister has announced further plans to extend the airport runway by a further 2,000 feet to allow it to accommodate the average size jet aircraft such as the Boeing 737, a popular aircraft used by many airlines.

PM Browne wants to open the new airport with much fanfare. Previously, he announced that several aircraft will travel to Barbuda for the opening including those belonging to the Antigua and Barbuda Defence Force as well as aircraft belonging to LIAT. He also said he plans to invite several of the high-net-worth investors with projects on the island to fly down on their private jets to participate in the opening exercises.

Invitations will be extended to ordinary Antiguanians to travel over to Barbuda as well as to encourage as many Barbudans as possible to participate in the



opening exercises.

“We want to open up Barbuda to trade and for increased tourism arrivals as this will lead to improvements in the living standard of the people on the island,” PM Browne remarked.

He said the current runway can accommodate private jets, but the planned expansion will allow it to accommodate the 737 jets and other similar aircraft thus opening Barbuda to direct flights out of cities such as Miami and New York. He said the planned expansion of the runway should be completed within another two years.

Meanwhile, funding for the expansion

has already been secured as this was included in a major loan that the government negotiated with a consortium of banks to finance the resurfacing of the runway at the VC Bird International Airport.

This move makes provision for the firm that is awarded the contract to undertake the VCBIA runway resurfacing, to be the same firm that will be awarded the contract to do the Barbuda runway extension.

The prime minister said this will save money as the company will only have to mobilise once.

In related developments, the prime minister revealed that he is currently in discussions with the Premier of Anguilla Ellis Lorenzo Webster, on doing regular flights between that island and Barbuda.

Based on current developments on Barbuda, PM Browne said several properties will have high-end rooms available by the second half of next year thereby resulting in increased air traffic into and out of the Barbuda airport.



## A&B, other CIP countries to implement MOA by July 1

Antigua and Barbuda and the other OECS countries that offer Citizenship By Investment Programmes are moving with alacrity to implement the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) in a move to enhance the integrity of these programmes and to place them on a sound footing.

The signatories of the MOA are Antigua and Barbuda, the Commonwealth of Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis and Saint Lucia.

The MOA which was published in March 2024 aims to ensure mutual cooperation, information sharing and adherence to common standards of best practice, and regulatory oversight.

According to a press statement from the OECS Secretariat...with effect from July 01, 2024, all countries have agreed that the minimum price for any CBI options shall be US\$200,000. This means the minimum sum that will be paid into any government fund, government project or private development project of, or in participating countries shall be US\$200,000.

“The signatories to the MOA make it abundantly clear that discounting of the agreed minimum price is illegal.

“Market actors, Marketing Agents, Local Agents and or Developers who have evidence of any attempt at,

or instances of discounting should report same promptly to the CBI Unit, Investment Migration Agency or Financial Intelligence Units of the participating countries,” according to the release.

Additionally, the release noted in respect of a regional regulatory body, participating Governments will soon appoint an Interim Regulatory Commission pending the enactment of enabling legislation for the regional regulator. The 7-member Interim Regulatory Commission will be drawn from each of the participating countries (5), the OECS Commission and the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank.

The functions of the re-

gional regulator will include to:

Develop, issue and enforce regional standards for CBI Programmes.

Monitor compliance of legislation, regulations and standards.

Monitor compliance with international agreements.

Investigate complaints.

Facilitate information sharing and engagements with regional and international stakeholders.

The media release stated that work streams have been developed and assigned for all articles of the MOA. The CBI countries will provide periodic updates on the implementation of the MOA.

## Cricket diplomacy

The resident Indian Honorary Consul, Vijay Tewani, used the backdrop of the cricket match between India and Bangladesh on Saturday at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium to conduct some ‘cricket diplomacy’.

Tewani, who like scores of Indians living in the country, was at the Sir Vivian Richards stadium for the cricket match, used the opportunity to present jerseys from the Indian cricket team to Prime Minister, Gaston Browne and Education and Sports Minister, Daryll Matthew.

“The bonds between our two countries have been strengthened by our common love for the game of cricket,” Tewani said in making the presentations to both the prime minister and the sports minister.



While at the game, the Honorary Consul also presented a gift to the captain of the Indian T20 team, Rohit Sharma, on behalf of the Indian community in Antigua and Barbuda.





## The UWI Five Islands sign MOU with Antigua and Barbuda Falcons

The UWI Five Islands Campus, Antigua and Barbuda, W.I. Friday June 21, 2024 - The University of the West Indies (UWI) Five Islands Campus and the Antigua and Barbuda Falcons have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which is aimed at fostering educational and sporting excellence. The signing ceremony which took place on Friday, June 21, 2024, was witnessed by several university officials as well as from the Ministry of Education and Sport.

The ceremony, which took place during The UWI FIC Annual Management Retreat, comes after negotiations between the institutions and marks the beginning of an exciting partnership that aims to integrate academic programmes with professional sports, providing students

with firsthand experience in the sporting world. This partnership will offer several benefits including internships for UWI students with the Falcons franchise, starting as early as July 2024.

Speaking at the ceremony, Campus Principal of The UWI Five Islands, Professor C. Justin Robinson, highlighted the importance of this partnership in balancing academic engagement in both traditional and non-traditional areas. “We believe the partnership will encourage a balance of enrolment at the institution, providing capacity for internships in sport around the Falcons franchise. It’s quite critical as we build out the Five Islands brand and the programming we are offering, programming that may appeal to the male audience.” He noted that the MOU comes at an oppor-

tune time as the UWI Five Islands launches its Academy of Sport and is set to offer several undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in the area.

Chief Executive Officer of the Antigua and Barbuda Falcons, Jefferson Miller, emphasized the mutual benefits of this partnership. “Falcons is not only a cricket enterprise, but we also wanted to give back something to Antigua. Cricket now is big business; It’s a multi-million-dollar industry, and we believe that having the opportunity for students from our University to partner or collaborate with the Falcons would be a win-win situation.” He emphasised that the franchise sees this as a long-term partnership aimed at benefitting Antigua & Barbuda and the region.

Minister of Education,



Sport and Creative Industries, Hon. Daryll Matthew, commended the initiative, noting its potential to yield significant benefits. “Great things happen when access and opportunity meet. I believe that this event here today and what will come out of this for our young people, our citizens, our residents, our stakeholders is really a great joining of access and opportunity that will create great things as a result.”

The signing ceremony was attended by members of the UWI Five Islands Management Team, and the Antigua and Barbuda Falcons Management Team. The partnership between the Antigua and Barbuda Falcons and The UWI Five Islands Campus represents a strategic endeavour by the two Antiguan & Barbudan headquartered institutions to integrate academic pursuits with professional sports, enhancing the educational experience while contributing to the development of sports and in particular, cricket, in the region.

### Antigua and Barbuda Festivals Commission relaxes qualification rules for 2024 Calypso Monarch Quarterfinals

*#CarnivalIsCalling.....Calling all Calypsonians to participate in Official Carnival Calypso Tents.*

The Antigua and Barbuda Festival Commission (ABFC) is committed to preserving the vibrant Calypso tradition. It actively supports this by creating platforms that offer Calypsonians opportunities to showcase their artistry. In line with this, the ABFC is now relaxing the rule, now allowing Calypsonians to give a minimum of one (1) performance in any approved

Calypso Tents for qualifications to the 2024 Calypso Monarch Quarterfinals.

ABFC encourages all Calypsonians to participate in the Calypso Tents on Fridays at Julees Kaiso Korner Calypso Tent and on Saturdays at Tent City at Rum Runners as we build the Carnival Spirit collaboratively.

#CarnivalIsCalling ALL Calypso Lovers to immerse themselves in the one-of-a-kind experience at Tent City. Discover why we say, ‘Ah, Love It Here!’

# Opinion



## Scope and hope of the Pope

By Tony Deyal

In 1967, Glenroy Joseph, the Trinidadian calypsonian known as 'The Mighty Cypher', came up with a calypso, 'If the priest could play who is we? He was referring to the annual carnival when, for the first time, a priest joined in the "wining" and "jumping-up". Now, many years later, I thought that if Cypher were around he would have been able to decipher, not just the priest, but the Pope who brought together more than 100 comedians to help him, and the rest of us, to "dream of a better world". In other words, the Pope feels that a little comic relief is good for the soul, if not ours, at least his own.

It reminds me of the calypso by the Mighty Sparrow who, in 1960, when the glamorous younger sister of Queen Elizabeth, the much-loved Princess Margaret, married debonair photographer Anthony Armstrong-Jones. Sparrow sang, "If I wasn't there in England/ And see with me eye/ And Lord Melody din' tell me,/ You know how Melo does lie./ If I wasn't there and see/ I still think they fooling me/ I can't understand/ How a princess could love a camera man." But, as a comedian and calypsonian of sorts myself, I sing along with the Pope that "Comedians are among the most well-loved and applauded entertainers because they have and cultivate the gift of

making people laugh", The Pope added, "With so much gloomy news in the midst of both public and personal crises, comedians are able to spread serenity and a smile, and are among the few who can speak to very different people of different generations and different cultural backgrounds."

The Pope reached my own heart, and those of many other writers, when he stressed what he considered the "miracle" of comedians and their ability to make people smile even when tackling serious issues. He told them, "You denounce the excesses of power, give voice to forgotten situations, highlight abuses, point out inappropriate behaviour ... but without spreading alarm and terror, anxiety or fear."

That sounded like the Pope could play but not the rest of us. Fortunately, the comedians go for the jugular and it does not matter whose – Trump, Biden or the Pope. As a Caribbean person who lived and worked in all the English-speaking countries of the region, I have to take the Pope and his people with much more than a pinch, or even a pound, of salt.

Right now, while 75 per cent of US Catholics see Pope Francis favourably, there is a growing rift between the conservative US Catholics and the Vatican which dumped two of the top US leaders for standing up against the Pope. To me, what the Vatican did was



Tony Deyal

take a personal matter and make it global. On that basis, I feel I must give you a taste of both heaven and hell, a two-sided sense of the way the Catholic Church is perceived, known, considered and seen by others.

My cousin Roy, who is better known as Monsignor Gregory Ramkissoon, in 1978 founded the Mustard Seed Communities, initially in Jamaica, and subsequently in Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, Zimbabwe and Malawi.

Last week I sent him my column about Father's Day and Roy wrote, "Thanks again man!! By the way ... did you hear why our first father ... Adam ... was created before Eve? Well the good Lord did not want any advice so he created Adam before Eve ... ." I was so overwhelmed that I replied, "I am glad you sent this to me because there is an article in which the Pope asked the comedians to write jokes in support of the Church. I had already planned to

do my version next week. Thanks for a start."

Having gone to a Catholic school with Irish priests, I went first to the "Great Catholic Jokes" which thought it was a good time to dust off the old joke books, tickle the funny bones and present the best Catholic jokes of all time like, "Why can't muggers catch Catholics during Lent?" They fast.

Then there is, "What did the taxidermist say in confession?" Bless me Father, for I have skinned! I end with the story of a town which decided to form a clergy group to have Catholics, Jews, Protestants and Muslims gather to talk about various issues facing their places of worship.

The Rabbi went first and said they were having a terrible issue with squirrels. He said they were hanging around outside of church and aggressively begging for food. He said they were scaring their kids. The pastor said they were having

*cont'd on pg 11*

# Opinion

*cont'd from pg 10*

the same issue, in fact, a few of the squirrels had actually gone inside of the church and had done some damage to the roof. The Imam agreed saying that in fact one of the squirrels had bitten a few people at the mosque. The Priest then spoke up and said they used to have the same issue, but had solved it. He said they took all of their squirrels, baptised them, confirmed them, and now they only come around at Christmas.”

Unfortunately, Christmas comes only once a year and all the rest of the time there are people against the Catholic Church and they go for more than the jugular, they go armed with anger and hate like, “A police officer pulls over two Catholic priests and says he’s looking for two child molesters.” The priests looked at each other and then replied, “We’ll do it!” Unfortunately,

it’s not only the jokes that are bad, but what some priests have been known to do. This is why some catholic priests are called “father”. Because “daddy” would be too suspicious. The worst is, “A catholic priest, a predator and a criminal walk into a bar. He ordered a beer.” These jokes make me realise that to understand the power of the priesthood, we must know its limitations. More to the point, the priests must always be ahead of us and not behind.

The person at the front of the new Catholicism, what we consider reimagining the Church and what it stands for, is Pope Francis. According to journalist John L. Allen Jr, Pope Francis is an “87-year-old man who’s been in and out of the hospital in recent months, who has chronic difficulty breathing and who can’t really move very far under his own power,

yet who somehow found the stamina to pull off a day that would put most people half his age into the ground.” While, he might not be around for long, whoever takes over should follow what Pope Francis believes is the way forward for the Church, “Agape, the love of each one of us for the other, from the closest to the furthest, is in fact the only way that Jesus has given us to find the way of salvation and of the Beatitudes.” I put it simply. If God didn’t exist we would have to invent him. More, all religions are like rivers that empty into the same sea and regardless of what the Catholics, Jews, Protestants, Muslims, Hindus and all the other groups call HIM/HER, there is only one God.

*Tony Deyal was last heard saying loudly, “Amen” because it is the only part of a prayer that he and everyone else knows.*

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KEEP IT REAL

## PAHO calls for action to reduce maternal mortality in the Caribbean

The Director of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) Dr Jarbas Barbosa has issued an urgent call to action to reduce maternal mortality in the Americas, including the Caribbean.

According to PAHO, in 2020, Latin America and the Caribbean experienced one maternal death every hour, reversing two decades of progress in maternal health indicators in the region.

“These figures not only indicate a worsening of outcomes but also a deepening of inequalities and depict unacceptable tragedies that in most cases could be preventable,” said Dr Barbosa in addressing a PAHO seminar on “Zero Preventable Maternal Deaths.”

“The number of deaths among pregnant women does not align with the level of development of this region,” he added, emphasizing the urgent need to tackle this discrepancy.

PAHO said the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerabilities of the region’s health infrastructures, exacerbating inequalities in access to health services, with a particular impact on women.

The maternal mortality ratio increased by 15 per cent between 2016 and 2020, PAHO said.

However, even before the pandemic, it said the



Director of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) Dr Jarbas Barbosa. Photo: PAHO

maternal mortality ratio in the Americas showed signs of stagnation, driving the region away from achieving set targets and commitments, such as the Sustainable Development Goals and the Sustainable Health Agenda for the Americas.

According to PAHO’s Basic Health Indicators, updated in 2023, over 90 per cent of women receive at least four prenatal visits; about 97 per cent of births take place in health facilities, and over 96 per cent are attended by qualified personnel.

Additionally, PAHO said coverage of sexual and reproductive health services exceeds 80 per cent.

“We need to examine why this investment does not translate into better outcomes,” said Dr Barbosa,

stating that multiple factors influence maternal mortality, including socioeconomic, cultural, educational and environmental aspects.

To address these challenges, Barbosa urged the implementation of strategies that include interventions to address situations of vulnerability and “gender norms and roles.”

“The health sector must be a transformative agent for change,” said Barbosa, highlighting that nine out of 10 maternal deaths could be avoided through universal access to quality maternal care and modern contraceptive methods, among other resources.

“Expanding health systems based on Primary Health Care to ensure universal health access and coverage could be the crit-

ical factor to reduce maternal mortality in the region,” he added.

PAHO said its Strategy to Accelerate the Reduction of Maternal Mortality provides an action framework to be adapted to each country and context, with complementary and integrated actions.

Barbosa called on countries to prioritize this issue and commit to implementing the strategy, focusing action at the local level, especially for women living in the most vulnerable conditions.

“Our countries must provide the necessary resources for action, mobilizing all sectors, including academia, civil society, and the most impacted communities,” the PAHO director added.



# PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE ATTENTION

## APUA Reintroduces Transparent Fuel Variation Charge for a Sustainable Future

**St. John's Antigua, June 11th, 2024 - The Antigua Public Utilities Authority (APUA) has announced the re-implementation of a fluctuating fuel variation charge on electricity bills, effective as of July 1st, 2024. This move is aligned with the authority's core operational function of providing and sustaining high-quality services while managing the ongoing volatility in fuel prices.**

During the recent pandemic, the Authority reduced the fuel variation by 10% and continued the early payment discount of an additional 10% to support our customers. However, post-pandemic, the deduction was not adjusted to the pre-pandemic rate, leading to significant over-subsidization of the continual increases in fuel charges, which has had a substantial impact on the overall operational costs of electricity.

The Electricity Business Unit Manager, Mr. Andre Matthias highlights the efforts of the Electricity Business Unit in implementing alternative power sources and transitioning to a cleaner energy mix in the network, along with cost-cutting initiatives to ensure the provision of reliable and affordable electricity to customers. "Antigua's current peak load is around 62 megawatts, with 11 megawatts of installed solar systems being a part of the generation mix, showcasing our commitment to adopting clean energy," Matthias said.

Mr. John Bradshaw, General Manager, emphasizes, "This initiative aims to ensure that billing transparently corresponds to actual fuel costs, offering customers a fair and accurate representation of the expenses associated with generating electricity."

Hon. Melford Nicholas, Minister of Public Utilities, reaffirms the Government of Antigua and Barbuda's commitment to cleaner energy and acknowledges the progress of the LNG Power Plant, set to be commissioned later this year on gas. "This plant is expected to benefit customers as a cleaner transitional fuel option. The state-of-the-art LNG terminal promises economic benefits, a reduction in fuel costs for the Authority – which will ultimately be passed on to customers – and a reduction in our carbon footprint," stated Nicholas.

Customers are reminded that their conservation efforts in electricity usage greatly impact cost and are encouraged to implement conservation practices in their daily lives. Electricity bills issued after July 1st, 2024, will reflect the changes and in the interest of transparency, a monthly summary detailing the calculated fuel variation costs will be circulated to the public on the APUA Social Media pages and website.

For further information, customers can contact the Customer Service Department at 480-7150 or via email at [customerservice@apua.ag](mailto:customerservice@apua.ag)

- END -

# Regional News



## Former BVI Ports Authority boss sentenced to nine years for drug scheme



The former managing director of the BVI Ports Authority, Oleanvine Pickering-Maynard. Photo:CMC

CMC - The former managing director of the BVI Ports Authority, Oleanvine Pickering-Maynard, was sentenced to nine years and four months in prison for her involvement in a drug trafficking scheme with convicted former Premier Andrew Fahie.

Oleanvine, her son Ka-deem Maynard, and Andrew were all arrested in April

2022 after months of plotting a scheme that aimed to bring shipments of up to 3,000 kg of cocaine at a time into the port of Tortola.

They believed they were communicating with a member of Mexico's notorious Sinaloa Cartel, who offered them half a million dollars and 12 percent of the profits in exchange for using the port to legitimize the shipments before continuing to the United States.

However, the individual turned out to be an informant for the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, who met Maynard and later introduced them to Fahie.

Oleanvine agreed to plead guilty and to testify against the former premier in exchange for a reduced sentence.

In addition to her prison term, Oleanvine, who is 62 years old, will also serve five years of supervised release.

The sentencing took place in a Miami courtroom earlier this week, presided over by United States District Judge Kathleen Williams.

The accused admitted in court that she helped Andrew orchestrate a Hol-

*cont'd on pg 15*

  
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# Two rescued after small plane crash lands near Turks and Caicos Islands

Search and rescue efforts were successful off the Turks and Caicos for two occupants of an aircraft which crash landed in nearby waters on Saturday.

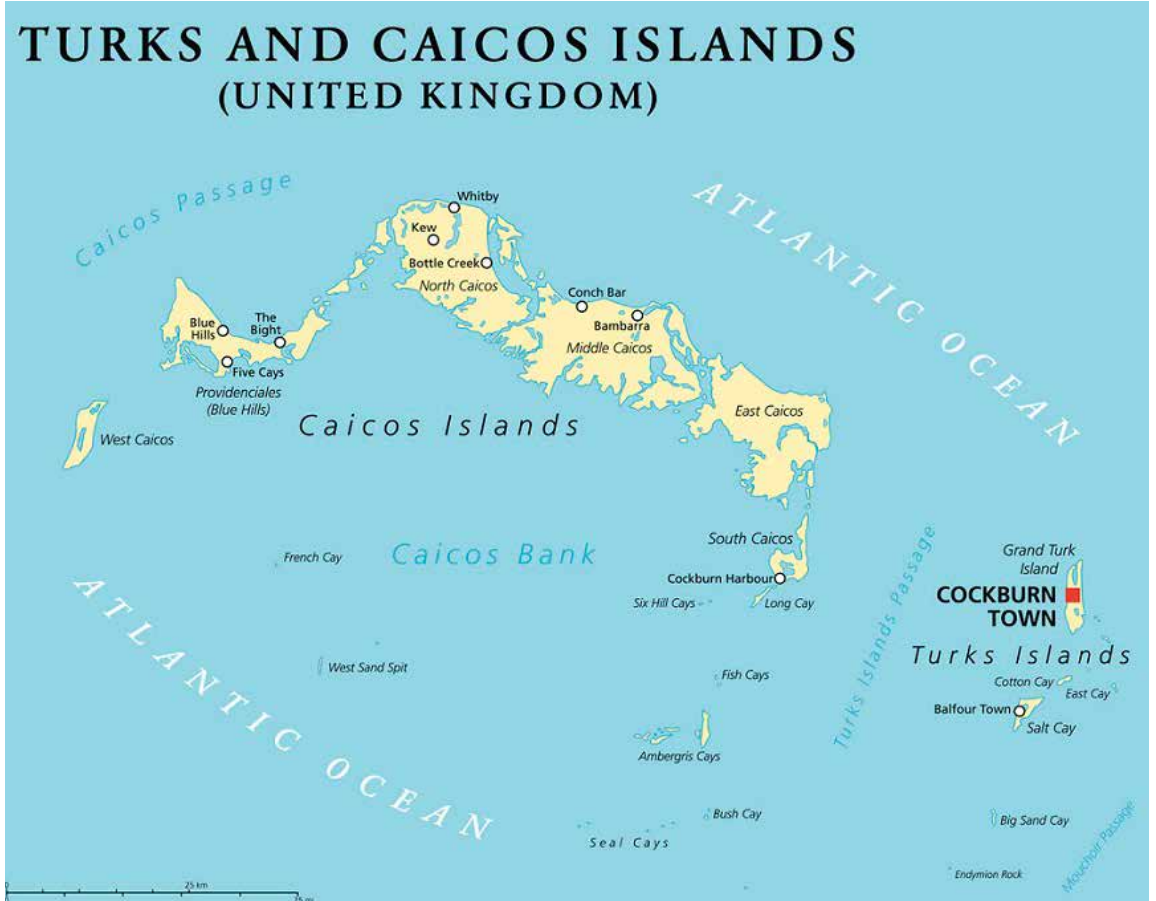
The Royal Turks and Islands Police Force in an update said the two occupants of an aircraft were rescued yesterday around 3:28 pm following an intensive sea search around Providenciales.

The occupants –two males- were taken for medical attention.

The Royal Turks and Caicos Islands Police Force confirmed that shortly after midday, the Air Tower received a report regarding an aircraft landing on water (ditching) approximately 11 miles from Northwest Point, Providenciales.

The aircraft had departed from the United States and experienced engine failure.

A Strategic Coordinating Group with representation from the RT&CIPF, the TCI Civil Aviation Authority, the Airport Authority, the Department of Disaster Management and Emergencies,



and the Ministry of Health was activated to coordinate the search and rescue.

The group worked closely with partners from OpBat and received confirmation that a United States Coast Guard helicopter had successfully rescued the two persons after three hours.

The victims were brought ashore.

Acting Assistant Commissioner of Police Mat Newton said: “I wish to express my profound gratitude and acknowledge the invaluable support of our national and international partners.

“This successful rescue operation is a testament to our collective strength and coordination. With the full support from our US partners

and the local marine community, I extend my heartfelt thanks to our OpBat partners and the crew of the US Coast-guard helicopter, as well as the Marine Branch of the RT&CIPF, the staff of the Department of Environment and Coastal Resources (DECR), the Department of Fisheries and Resources Management, Caribbean Cruisin, and vessels from the TCI Search and Rescue Association.

“We are now in the process of initiating an investigation into the accident in close liaison with the Civil Aviation Authority.”

*cont'd from pg 14*

lywood-style drug and money laundering conspiracy to smuggle thousands of kilograms of cocaine through the territory's waters and conceal the proceeds.

Judge Williams imposed a sentence lower than the recommended range of 11 years and three months to 14 years.

Kadeem, received a 57-month sentence in November 2023. The former premier has not yet been sentenced and is scheduled to appear in court on August 5, 2024.



The oil pipeline between Niger and Benin was formally launched in November.

## Niger confirms anti-junta rebels behind oil attack

Niger's junta has confirmed that rebels damaged an oil pipeline carrying crude oil to neighbouring Benin.

The Patriotic Liberation Front, which is fighting for the release of former president Mohamed Bazoum, who was overthrown in a coup last July, said it was behind the attack earlier this week.

It has threatened to target oil installations and called on the Chinese companies that run the pipeline to end their support for the military regime.

It is the latest setback to hit the newly opened 2,000km (1,243-mile) pipeline as relations between Niger and Benin continue to sour.

State media said the "malicious individuals" who had sabotaged part of the pipeline would be apprehended and prosecuted.

"We know which group is the au-

thor of the act [and which also] claimed [it]," public prosecutor Ousmane Baydo is quoted by the AFP news agency as saying.

Footage aired on state-run broadcaster Tele Sahel on Friday evening showed the damage in Niger's southern Zinder region, with an oil spill stretching out into the bush.

The pipeline was formally launched at the end of last year and links Niger's Agadem oilfield to Benin's coast - and is set to be vital to both economies.

But its future has been in jeopardy following last year's coup, when regional sanctions were imposed on Niger.

In February, the regional bloc Ecowas agreed to lift them and borders were allowed to be reopened.

Benin's economy had also been hit

by trade block and was anxious for imports and exports to resume.

But Niger decided to keep its borders closed to goods from Benin, alleging its neighbour was hosting French forces that were training others to destabilise Niger.

The junta in Niger views France with suspicion and has established closer ties with Russia since coming to power. It kicked out French troops who had been in the West African state to fight militant Islamists threatening stability across the region.

France maintains it has no bases in Benin and such allegations are part of disinformation campaigns against the former colonial power.

Nonetheless the refusal to reopen the land border, usually busy with lorries driving back and forth, prompted Benin to block Niger's inaugural oil

*cont'd on pg 17*



## India exam chief sacked after outcry over marks

The head of India's National Testing Agency (NTA) has been dismissed following accusations of irregularities in recent exams for higher education.

The government has also appointed a committee to recommend reforms in the fiercely competitive process.

There have been calls to rerun a medical entrance test after thousands of candidates secured unusually high marks, prompting protests over alleged cheating.

The National Eligibility Cum Entrance Test (NEET) is the gateway to studying medicine in India.

Millions of students sit the exam every year, but only a small percentage get good enough marks to secure a placement.

The results announced on 4 June meant that even high-scorers found it difficult to do so.

Since then, the exam has come under scrutiny for reasons ranging from errors in the question paper to unwarranted grace marks (compensatory marks) and



The chaos over the exams has sparked protests across India. fraud.

At least two students received exam scores so high, they were statistically impossible, local media reported. The Supreme Court is set to hear a case challenging the grace marks.

Earlier this month federal Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan admitted that "some irregularities" had come to light.

NTA chief Subodh Kumar Singh has come under intense criticism and on

Saturday he was dismissed.

A qualifying exam for PhD fellowships was also cancelled after the question paper was leaked on the dark web.

The entrance test for post-graduate degrees in medicine, which was due to be sat on Sunday, has also been postponed just 12 hours before it was due to begin. More than 200,000 people had been registered to sit the exam.

Opposition parties and

student groups have been holding protests across the country against the lapses, putting pressure on the recently re-elected government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Despite the scorching heat, many students have taken part in the widespread demonstrations.

Rahul Gandhi, leader of the opposition Congress Party, said Mr Modi's government had "ruined" the country's education system.

"There is huge pressure on our students. There's largescale unemployment in the country," he said.

"The youngsters in India have no way through. The youth of India have nowhere to go. It's a profound national crisis."

*cont'd from pg 16*  
exports.

China stepped into ease tensions - and Niger did manage to join the world of oil exporters, its first batch of crude leaving Benin at the end of May.

But the spat between Benin and Niger has continued.

Earlier this month five Niger nation-

als were arrested at an oil port in Benin on impersonation charges - and a loading of second crude shipment was reportedly aborted.

Three of the Nigeriens were given 18 months suspended sentences - and all of them, who worked for the Chinese oil firm running the pipeline, were expelled and flown to Niamey on Friday.

## Afghanistan stun Australia to keep T20 World Cup dream alive

KINGSTOWN, St. Vincent (AP) — Afghanistan kept their Twenty20 World Cup semifinal hopes alive by stunning previously unbeaten Australia by 21 runs in a thrilling encounter in St. Vincent on Saturday night.

Despite a second successive hat-trick by Australian bowler Pat Cummins, Afghanistan posted 148 for six after being asked to bat first on a tricky pitch at the Arnos Vale Ground.

Afghanistan pair Rahmanullah Gurbaz and Ibrahim Zadran put on 118 for the highest opening partnership against Australia in a T20 match before Australia's bowlers rallied late, including Cummins' second career hat-trick — just two days after his first.

Australia then stumbled with the bat and were all out for 127 in 19.2 overs, with only Glenn Maxwell (59 off 41 balls) coming to grips with the superb Afghanistan bowling attack and the turning wicket.

Man of the match Guldabin Naib took four wickets in an inspired spell in the middle overs to stall Australia's chase before Azmatullah Omarzai had final wicket Adam Zampa caught in the deep in the final over to complete a stunning win amid jubilant celebrations among the Afghan players and team management.



Afghanistan's captain Rashid Khan, centre, celebrates the wicket of Australia's Matthew Wade during the men's T20 World Cup cricket match between Afghanistan and Australia at Arnos Vale Ground, Kingstown, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Saturday, June 22, 2024. (AP)

"It's a massive win for us as a team and as a nation in the World Cup beating (the) champions," captain Rashid Khan said.

"It's so important for us back home for everyone all around the world where Afghanistan people, the Afghans are there, you know, they are badly missing this win and I'm sure they would have been so proud of and they would have enjoyed the game and I think it's just the beginning now for us," he added.

The victory moves Afghanistan to two points in Group 1 and level with Australia, but behind on net run rate. India lead the group on four points. Bangladesh are

bottom after two losses but still have a chance of qualifying for the semifinals.

The final group standings will be decided on Monday (today) when Afghanistan play against Bangladesh in St. Vincent and Australia play against India in St. Lucia.

Earlier, Gurbaz scored 60 off 49 balls, while Zadran made a steady 51 off 48 balls as they laid a solid platform for Afghanistan — helped by some uncharacteristically poor fielding by Australia.

Marcus Stoinis eventually made the breakthrough in the 16th over, dismissing Gurbaz, which led to a flurry of wickets as the momen-

tum shifted. Adam Zampa (2-28) took two wickets in the next over, including Zadran's, before Pat Cummins claimed his hat-trick to finish with three for 28.

Australia stumbled early in the chase as it lost Travis Head bowled by Naveen-ul-Haq for no score with the third ball of the innings.

Captain Mitchell Marsh (12) played two big shots before he was Naveen's second wicket and when David Warner (three) was out to spinner Mohammad Nabi's first ball the Aussies were in trouble at 32 for three in the sixth over.

Stoinis and Maxwell steadied the Australian in-

*cont'd on pg 19*

## Mexico beat Jamaica 1-0 in Copa America opener

HOUSTON (AP) - Gerardo Arteaga scored from the edge of the penalty area in the 69th minute and Mexico beat Jamaica 1-0 on Saturday night in their Copa America opener.

Competing as a guest in South America's championship for the 11th time, Mexico dominated the match and scored with their 17th shot.

Joel Latibeaudiere's weak headed clearance went to Luis Romo, who controlled the ball off a thigh and passed to Arteaga. His left-foot shot beat goalkeeper Jahmali Waite and went inside the far post for his second goal in 25 international appearances.

"The idea was to empower some players who were called before but didn't have the minutes to shine," Mexico coach Jaime Lozano said through an interpreter.

"Today was Arteaga's turn, but we have a set of other players who are adding minutes at the top level. That's what we had in mind when we made the roster."

Michail Antonio ap-



Mexico's Gerardo Arteaga jumps as he celebrates scoring his side's opening goal against Jamaica during a Copa America Group B soccer match in Houston, Texas, USA, Saturday, June 22, 2024. (AP)

peared to put Jamaica ahead with a short-range header in the 50th minute but the goal was disallowed for offside following a video review.

"A fraction offside," Jamaica coach Heimur Hallgrímsson said. "I've seen it again, and it was correct."

Mexico captain Edson Álvarez left in the 30th minute following a left hamstring injury and was re-

placed by Romo.

"Regarding Edson, we are going to wait," Lozano said. "He's going to see what he has and take some images. We don't want to risk it. He felt something in his leg."

Lozano said it was going to be a couple days before they would know the severity of the injury.

"I think it has been our

motto for this summer – together and unity," Lozano said. "It's not easy to overcome your captain being removed from the field, but I felt they responded fast. We suffered a bit more than we needed to suffer."

Lozano said the turf did not play a factor in the game.

Venezuela beat Ecuador 2-1 in the other Group B match. Mexico plays Venezuela at Inglewood, California, on Wednesday, when Jamaica faces Ecuador at Las Vegas.

The group finishes on June 30, when Mexico plays Ecuador at Glendale, Arizona, and Jamaica faces Venezuela at Austin, Texas.

### cont'd from pg 18

nings as they reached 70 for three at the halfway stage. Gulbadin (4-20) was the eighth bowler used by Afghanistan inside the first 11 overs and it paid a near instant dividend as Stoinis could only sky a pull shot, which was caught by Gurbaz.

Gulbadin then removed David (two)

and when the all-rounder had Maxwell spectacularly caught by Noor Ahmad an upset victory appeared likely.

Australia's lower order batters couldn't find the big hits that the moment demanded and when Zampa was last out for nine, Afghanistan's deserved victory was confirmed.

# India beat Bangladesh by 50 runs in ICC T20 World Cup match in Antigua

Hardik Pandya blasted a 27-ball half-century and Kuldeep Yadav's three wickets finished off India's 50-run win against Bangladesh in their ICC Men's T20 World Cup Super Eight match at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in Antigua on Saturday.

Pandya struck four boundaries and three sixes in an unbeaten 50 to lead India to 196 for five off their 20 overs. Yadav then took three for 19 in four overs to limit Bangladesh to 146 for eight off their 20 overs.

India moved to the top of Group 1 in the Super Eight with two wins from two matches. Afghanistan moved to two points after they beat Australia by 21 runs on Saturday, but stayed behind Australia in third place on net run rate. Bangladesh remained winless.

Put into bat, India started quick as captain Rohit Sharma scored 23 off 11 balls. Virat Kohli added 37 off 28, hitting three sixes. The duo put on 39 off 22 balls for India's best opening stand in the tournament.

Sharma was caught in the fourth over off Shakib al Hasan, while Kohli put on another 32 off 27 balls



India's Hardik Pandya, left, received his Player-of-the-Match award from Sir Andy Roberts at the end of India's ICC Men's T20 World Cup Super Eight match against Bangladesh at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in Antigua on Saturday, June 22, 2024. (ICC/Getty Images)

with Rishabh Pant for the second wicket.

Tanzim Hasan Sakib struck twice in the ninth over, getting Kohli and Suryakumar Yadav for six as India slumped to 77 for three.

But Rishabh Pant anchored one end with 36 off 24, including four fours and two sixes, putting on 31 off 19 balls with Shivam Dube.

Despite Pant's dismissal in the 12th over, Dube's prowess against spin came in handy — he hit three sixes, scoring 34 off 24 balls.

But it was Pandya who took charge in the death

overs. India scored 62 runs in the last five overs. Pandya was named player of the match.

“We have played some really good cricket (to win five straight games),” he said.

“We have executed our plans well, but as a group we can still improve. We sometimes lose wickets in a bunch, but apart from that things are looking good.”

Bangladesh's reply made a steady start. Openers Litton Das (13) and Tanzid Hasan (29) added 35 off 27 until Pandya got the breakthrough in the

fifth over.

The Tigers were at 66 for two in the 10th over and scoring slower.

The chase unravelled when Yadav came on to bowl. He trapped Hasan lbw, and dismissed Towhid Hridoy for four, and claimed the big wicket of Shakib for 11.

Bangladesh lost three wickets for 32 runs across 24 balls and didn't recover. Pace bowlers Jasprit Bumrah (2-13) and Arshdeep Singh (2-30) helped to seal India's fifth win over Bangladesh in the T20 World Cup.

## England book spot in ICC T20 World Cup semifinals

England booked their place in the Men's ICC T20 World Cup semi-finals after romping to a 10-wicket win against the United States of America (USA) in the Super Eight phase at the Kensington Oval in Barbados on Sunday.

Chris Jordan, who replaced pacer Mark Wood, grabbed four wickets in his last over to help dismiss the United States of America for 115 runs in 18.5 overs and become the first Englishman to claim a hat-trick in T20 internationals.

Jordan excelled at the end of the USA's innings, taking a hat-trick to finish with remarkable figures of four wickets for 10 runs, while captain Jos Buttler plundered 83 off 38 balls to see England to victory at 117 without the loss of a wicket in 9.4 overs.

Pacer Reece Topley, who failed to take a single wicket in the defeat to South Africa, set the tone for England early on as he snared American opener Andries Gous for eight in the first over.



England's captain Jos Buttler, left, and batting partner Phil Salt celebrate scoring runs during the ICC Men's T20 World Cup cricket match between the United States and England at Kensington Oval in Bridgetown, Barbados, Sunday, June 23, 2024. (AP)

Though Nitish Kumar (30) and Corey Anderson (29) looked to be finding a rhythm for the tournament co-hosts, it did not last long, with Jordan entering the fray to get four wickets in five balls.

England's openers got all the work done themselves as Phil Salt scored

25, while Buttler did all the heavy lifting in his knock, smashing six fours and seven sixes, one of which hit the stadium roof.

Matthew Mott's side are the first team through to the last four, thanks to their significant net run-rate advantage over West Indies and South Africa.

### cont'd from pg 22

the runner-up spot in the Female Division 1 league. The Paragons romped to a decisive 3-0 victory against Starz 1 Seniors in their final game of the league.

Their 25-18, 25-19, and 25-17 victory in an hour and 13 minutes allows the Paragons to clinch the runner-up spot ahead of Starz 1 Seniors, who ended their league campaign in disappointing fashion by slumping to defeats in their last three matches.

Paragons wrapped up

their league campaign with 29 points, two more than Starz 1 Seniors, after both teams finished their quota of 10 matches with identical records of six wins and four losses.

High Flyerz 1 beat Print Express Renegades 3-0 to clinch fourth place in the men's Division 1 league and claimed the last qualifying spot for the President's Cup.

The High Flyerz 1 prevailed 25-10, 25-16, and 25-15 in 53 minutes to wrap up their campaign in the men's

league with a record of nine wins and seven losses, the same as the Renegades.

However, High Flyerz 1 clinched fourth place by virtue of winning more sets to finish with 51 points, seven more than the Renegades, who finished in fifth place.

The Top Ranking Storming Lions, who finished third in the men's league, will join Stoneville, Pytonz, and High Flyerz 1 in the President's Cup, which will serve off with a double header at the YMCA

Sports Complex on Monday (today).

Women's top-seed CIA Da Squad will face fourth-seed Jets in the opening encounter at 6:30 pm, and men's top-seed Stoneville will face fourth-seed High Flyerz 1 in the second game at 7:30 pm.

On Tuesday, second-seed Paragons will take on third-seed Starz 1 Seniors in the female division, and second-seed Pytonz will face third-seed Storming Lions in the men's division of the President's Cup.

## Stoneville and Da Squad retain volleyball league titles

Stoneville snatched their third successive and seventh overall Antigua and Barbuda Amateur Volleyball Association's (ABAVA) Men's Division 1 league title on Saturday night.

Stoneville retained their title after beating Pytonz 3-0 in a top-of-the-table clash in the final game of the nine-team, round-robin men's division 1 league at the indoor stadium at the YMCA Sports Complex.

Their 25-21, 25-13, and 25-12 victory in an hour and four minutes not only avenged their first round loss to their opponents but also allowed Stoneville to

snatch their title by advancing to 72 points, three more than the Pytonz, after both teams finished the men's round-robin league with identical records of 15 wins and one defeat from their quota of 16 matches.

Caribbean Alliance Insurance (CAI) Da Squad, which had already secured their third successive Women's Division 1 round-robin league title, wrapped up their unbeaten campaign with a 3-0 win against the Jets in Saturday's opening encounter.

Their 25-10, 25-12, and 25-15 victory in an hour and 10 minutes allows Da



Stoneville men's volleyball team Squad to finish at the top of the women's league with a perfect record of 10 wins in

as many games and a total of 47 points.

Despite suffering their fifth loss in 10 games, the Jets finished fourth in the six-team league competition and snatched the last qualifying spot into the President's Cup.

The top four teams in both divisions will advance to battle for the President's Cup titles. Former champions Paragons, which finished second, and third-place finishers Starz 1 Seniors will join Da Squad and Jets in the female division of the President's Cup.

Paragons won their third successive match to clinch



Caribbean Alliance Insurance Da Squad female volleyball team.

*cont'd on pg 21*