

IT'S BUDGET DAY IN A&B

Story on Page 2



Local News



It's Budget Day in Antigua and Barbuda

Prime Minister Gaston Browne, who is also the minister responsible for Finance, Corporate Governance and Public Private Partnerships, will deliver the National Budget 2025 to a sitting of the House of Representatives today (Thursday).

PM Browne is expected to spend time highlighting the economic performances of the Antigua and Barbuda economy over the last twelve months, including growth in tourist arrivals by both air and sea, increased employment provided by that expansion and the growth in government's revenues over the period.

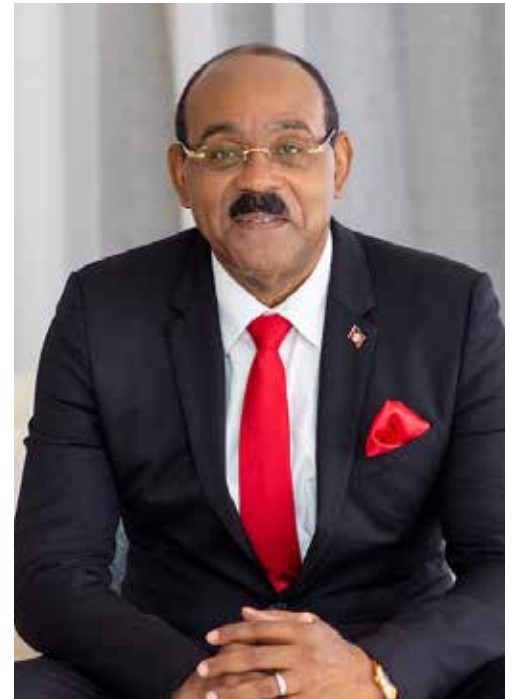
In particular, the prime minister will herald the growth in the size of the national economy which has expanded to over EC\$6 billion as of today; an increase of \$2 billion since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In his presentation, PM Browne will speak of the growth in employment as reflected by the Social Security figures. On the Browne and Browne show a few weeks ago, the prime minister indicated that the number of persons paying contributions to the scheme has increased by approximately two thousand persons.

Over the last several months, the nation's leader has been speaking to the issues most critical to resident; the ongoing challenges with water and the state of the nation's roadways.

The government has placed on order \$20 million worth of equipment to be utilized in the road rehabilitation project. This equipment is expected to arrive during the first quarter of 2025 to aggressively kick-start road repairs, including secondary roads.

With respect to the water, PM



Prime Minister Gaston Browne

Browne stated that based on the investments by the government in new reverse osmosis plants, the country should reach full production capacity by the second half of 2025. This is where daily production will match daily demand for water.

Perhaps, one of the announcements that both businesses and residents will listen for is whether or not the government will introduce any new tax measures. Despite the fact that Antigua and Barbuda has one of the lowest tax to GDP ratios in the OECS, PM Browne stated previously that there will be no new tax measures proposed in the 2025 budget.

The speech will introduce several new initiatives aimed at supporting young entrepreneurs, with a special emphasis on empowering women and single mothers. Additionally, increased resources will be allocated to enhance poverty alleviation efforts and strengthen social safety nets for vulnerable communities.

Today's Budget presentation will be the first with the new Speaker Osbert Frederick sitting in the chair.

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PM Browne reports to Cabinet on his appearance before the ICJ

Prime Minister, Gaston Browne, has been reporting to his Cabinet colleagues about details of his appearance before the International Court of Justice in The Hague, Netherlands this week.

The Prime Minister expounded on the matter of a request for the Court to provide an advisory opinion on the Obligations of States in respect of Climate Change on Small Island Developing States (SIDS); and the response to the vulnerability to the adverse effects of climate change due to their geographical circumstances and level of development.

Prime Minister Browne reminded the Cabinet that Antigua and Barbuda has taken global leadership on this matter and continues to be an advocate for climate justice, notwithstanding the enormity of the fight against large carbon emitters.

Antigua and Barbuda sees the advisory opinion as an opportunity for the ICJ to delineate the imperative for States to elevate their climate ambitions and intensify efforts in critical areas of mitigation, adaptation, finance, and technical support. The hearing comes against the backdrop of an accelerating climate crisis and lackluster outcomes from the recent COP 29 meeting in Azerbaijan.

“Antigua and Barbuda has worked tirelessly to address this crisis. At every

Conference of the Parties, from Paris to Baku, we have joined with other vulnerable nations to demand action—demand financing, demand justice”, Prime Minister Browne told the judges. He said that Antigua and Barbuda now turns to the Court “to clarify the obligations of

States under international law before the clock on our survival runs out”. “We believe in the power of international law to bring about change”.

The proceedings before the ICJ followed a campaign led by Vanuatu and championed by other small island States, including Antigua and

Barbuda.

Over the course of 2024, participating States have submitted two rounds of detailed written submissions, addressing the specific legal questions referred to the Court by the UN General Assembly. The Court’s opinion is expected in 2025.



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Local News



Ministries of Tourism and Health launch THIS

The ministries of health and tourism are combining efforts to launch a new initiative dubbed, Tourism Health Information System (THiS) that is expected to help protect the health and safety of visitors to the country as well as residents of Antigua and Barbuda.

The initiative was launched Wednesday night at a gathering held at Casa Palmadita where officials from both ministries addressed the gathering.

Speaking on behalf of the minister of health is who traveling, the Permanent Secretary, Stacy Gregg-Paige described the initia-



Tourism and Health officials at the launch of Tourism Health Information System on Wednesday said it will strengthen the ability to safeguard not only the health of travelers but to also enhance the healthcare infrastructure and protect the health of the general public.

cont'd on pg 5

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“As we all know, tourism is our main industry and one of the most dynamic sectors of our economy. It creates jobs, supports local businesses, and promotes cultural exchange.

“But as we welcome visitors from around the world, we also bear the responsibility of ensuring their safety and well-being during their stay in Antigua and Barbuda. This is where the Tourism Health Information System comes into play,” she noted.

According to the permanent secretary there has been increased growth in tourism globally and with this comes the increased risk of health-related challenges. “From infectious diseases to environmental factors, tourism can introduce both opportunities and risks. Our health systems must be agile, adaptable, and proactive in addressing the challenges that emerge from this dynamic environment. This is not only about responding to emergencies but also about anticipating potential health issues, ensuring that visitors receive timely and accurate medical information, and offering reassurance to both travelers and local communities,” Gregg-Paige stated.

The Key features and benefits of the THiS include:

Real-time Health Data: The system will collect and analyze data on health trends, including the prevalence of diseases and potential outbreaks within tourist destinations, providing au-

thorities with up-to-date information that can guide decision-making and response.

Travel Health Alerts and Advisories: Tourists and travel operators will have access to health-related advisories, including information on vaccination requirements, outbreak alerts, and safety precautions, ensuring

informed decisions are made before and during travel.

Enhanced Public Health Surveillance: The system will contribute to better surveillance of diseases that may be transmitted across borders, ensuring a rapid response to emerging health threats and minimizing their spread.

Supporting the Health and Well-being of Local Communities: By understanding health trends and the needs of tourists, we can better support local communities, improve healthcare access, and ensure that the infrastructure we build is capable of supporting both residents and visitors.



The UWI FIC strengthens its Seeds of Hope HMP programme

Fourteen inmates of His Majesty's Prison received Certificates of Proficiency, while two of their peers were awarded Honour Student prizes at the 2024 graduation ceremony of the Lifelong Learning Unit The University of the West Indies Five Islands Campus.

These achievements can be attributed to the Seeds of Hope programme which was established in 2022. Its primary goal is to grant incarcerated individuals opportunities to gain knowledge, enhance skills and earn credentials. Increasingly over the past two years, commendations have been received from the government of Antigua and Barbuda, residents, the Diaspora, and benefactors who have contributed technical resources and scholarships to support the continuous education programme.

While funding from diverse stakeholders is welcomed, as skillsets continue to evolve additional resources will be required to support inmates in their pursuit of lifelong learning. The UWI's digital platform has been recognized as a key enabler to the Seeds of Hope programme. It offers inmates opportunities to participate in multiple professional development courses, and interactively engage with tutors and students. Assuredly, this delivery modality supports established safety and security protocols. Individuals are not required to attend classes beyond the confines of the penal institution.

Meanwhile, studies have shown that Education is an effective remedy toward reducing recidivism. Having served prison terms, individuals experience numerous challenges when attempting to reintegrate into society. Their circumstances are further compounded by minimal support from family and friends due to the stigma associ-



ated with imprisonment. Arguably, few strategies engage families of former inmates as part of a comprehensive rehabilitative approach.

Equally concerning for former inmates are insufficient financial resources, lack of psychological support, limited access to food, and comfortable accommodation. Undeniably, the absence of sustainable support systems can cause individuals to reengage in criminal activities. Fortunately, these challenges can be mitigated by choosing to participate in continuous learning and skills training. Formerly incarcerated individuals can be better positioned academically and psychologically to reenter society, gain meaningful employment and provide for themselves and their families with dignity.

The Superintendent of Prisons in Antigua and Barbuda, Colonel Trevor Pennyfeather concurs with research that emphasizes the transformative benefits of education in prisons. He believes that The UWI FIC has provided invaluable partnership and support in advancing the rehabilitation initiatives

of HMP. A second chance complemented by new knowledge, enhanced skills and the willingness to contribute meaningfully to society, is a priceless gift that is being embraced by students of the Seeds of Hope programme.

The sentiments of the 2024 Lifelong Learning Unit The UWI FIC Top Student, Kenisha Whyte is testimony that Education is indeed a game-changer. "This achievement is unselfishly shared with my colleagues from His Majesty's Prison. The Lifelong Learning Unit courses have been a beacon of hope, a sanctuary of knowledge, and a place of redemption. We are embracing the challenges of continuous education, enduring the limited hours of studying, overcoming the moments of self-doubt, and triumphing in our successes. Not only have we grown academically - personally and psychologically, we are navigating the complexities of our current circumstances while striving for a brighter future".

Having achieved consistent positive results in Antigua and Barbuda, the

cont'd on pg 7

Four men charged for illegal possession of firearm, ammunition

Police arrested and jointly charged 52-year-old Hosenselo Hernandez of Cassada Gardens, 34-year-old Ricardo Howell of Bolans, along with 24-year-old Javonte Mander-ville and 34-year-old Daman Browne both of Pigotts with unlawful possession of one 9mm firearm and four 9mm rounds of ammunition.

The illegal weapon was found aboard a fishing vessel at Parham Fisheries, during a search on Tuesday. Police seized the vessel and the men were taken into custody and charged. They will be appearing in court on Thursday.

Meanwhile, three men are in police custody suspected of being involved in several reports of break-ins and larceny.

Around 10:30 am on Tuesday, December 3, the police intercepted a Toyota Vitz motor car with three men,

during a stop-and-search operation in Grays Farm. The vehicle was searched and two mobile phones and two VHF radios suspected to have been stolen were found. The men were taken into custody and

are being questioned in connection with the break-in at the St. Johns Pentecostal (SJPC) House of Restoration on November 24, and the break-in at the Ministry of Agriculture Building at

Queen Elizabeth Highway, on November 26.

The vehicle involved in the incident was also seized and taken to the police headquarters. Further investigations are ongoing.



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Seeds of Hope programme can serve as a practical and progressive model for regional prison authorities. Beyond reducing recidivism, robust rehabilitation programmes can contribute to safer prisons for inmates and staff. Moreover, it is conceivable that as incarcerated individuals engender a sense of purpose and hope for the future, the positive change could result in lower rates of violence and crime thereby improving public safety and security.

Local News



Halo continues school tours to boost mental health awareness

Over the past four weeks, the Halo Foundation conducted school tours across Antigua and Barbuda in collaboration with a team of mental health professionals. These tours were largely aimed at increasing mental health awareness while promoting overall wellness, and addressing issues related to youth violence.

The initiative marks the debut of “BLUE,” a branch of The Halo Foundation focused on human development through mental wellness.

The tours included visits to T.N Kirnon Primary School (Daryl George),

Five Islands Primary School (Harriel Warner), Villa Primary School (Dr. Koren Norton), Antigua Girls' High School (Jill Fuller) and Clare Hall Secondary School (Devra Thomas).

During each visit, the mental health professionals encouraged positive peer engagement and listening as strategies for managing social anxiety and stress. They also shared practical advice on time management and emotional balance, equipping students with essential skills to effectively navigate their preadolescent and adolescent years.

The primary school



sessions gave students an avenue to understand emotional intelligence and how to express themselves effectively. In contrast, the secondary school visits focused on managing stress during examinations and adapting to new environments.

President of the Halo Foundation, Lady Williams noted that the timely initiative has been in the making for some time now. She said, “In 2017, we became concerned with the nation’s incidences of teen suicide and that is now being addressed, as we seek to find ways to surmount challenges surrounding mental health



awareness and wellness.”

The Halo Foundation, which was launched in 2014, is an umbrella charity assisting 35 organizations under the patronage of Governor General of Antigua and Barbuda Sir Rodney Williams and Lady Williams.



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Local News



The UPP's dismissal of higher education: A threat to leadership and progress in Antigua and Barbuda

In the 21st century, leadership demands vision, knowledge, and the ability to navigate complex global and local challenges. Education, particularly higher education, has become an indispensable tool for cultivating these qualities. However, the United Progressive Party (UPP) appears intent on downplaying the critical importance of higher education in leadership and governance, while attempting to portray educated individuals as elitist.

This disturbing trend comes even as the Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party (ABLP) has made monumental strides in expanding access to tertiary education, most notably through the establishment of the University of the West Indies (UWI) Five Islands Campus in Antigua. This historic achievement has placed Antigua and Barbuda at the forefront of educational progress in the Eastern Caribbean, creating a pathway for thousands of citizens to achieve their full potential.

Leadership in today's world is deeply intertwined with education. The challenges of climate change, economic transformation, public health crises, and technological advancement require leaders who are informed, analytical, and forward-thinking. Higher education equips individuals with these skills, enabling them to craft policies and solutions that address the needs of a rapidly evolving world.

Yet, the UPP's narrative undermines this reality, casting educated individuals as detached or elitist. This divisive rhetoric does more than insult those who have dedicated themselves to personal and professional growth—it alienates the very citizens who benefit from progressive policies that emphasize education. It dismisses the achievements



Hon. Daryll S. Matthew

of teachers, students, and families who view education as a vital investment in their futures.

The establishment of the UWI Five Islands Campus is a bold statement of faith in the transformative power of education. It reflects a vision for Antigua and Barbuda, where opportunity is accessible to all and where higher education is no longer an aspiration limited to a privileged few. It also creates a dangerous dichotomy—one that pits “educated” against “uneducated,” sowing seeds of division and resentment within our society.

The ABLP's commitment to education extends beyond the establishment of UWI. It includes scholarships, grants, and investments in primary and secondary education along with technical and vocational training to ensure that no child is left behind. By contrast, the UPP's dismissive attitude toward these efforts raises serious questions about their vision for our nation's future.

Prime Minister Gaston Browne has once again demonstrated his unwavering commitment to education and national development by offering scholarships to members of the United Progressive Party (UPP). This generous gesture underscores his belief that access to higher

education should transcend political divides, fostering a culture of inclusivity and progress. By extending this opportunity, Prime Minister Browne highlights the ABLP's dedication to uplifting all Antiguan and Barbudans, even in the face of political opposition, reaffirming that education is a unifying force and a cornerstone of effective leadership. Whether they capitalize on the opportunity or not is left to be seen.

The fact is, higher education is not a luxury—it is a necessity in today's world. The UPP's attempt to downplay this reality is not just short-sighted; it is a disservice to the people of Antigua and Barbuda.

We must reject the UPP's outdated rhetoric and embrace the reality that education is not just a personal benefit—it is a national necessity. Leaders must be equipped to make informed decisions that affect the lives of citizens, and this requires a foundation of knowledge and understanding that only education can provide.

The ABLP has proven its commitment to creating a brighter future through education, and the UWI Five Islands Campus stands as a beacon of hope and progress. As a nation, we cannot afford to regress into an era where ignorance is celebrated, and intellectual achievement is vilified.

Antigua and Barbuda deserve leaders who recognize that higher education is not a luxury, but an essential pillar of effective leadership. It is time to move beyond the UPP's divisive and short-sighted rhetoric and continue building a future where education and leadership go hand in hand.

Hon. Daryll S. Matthew
Minister of Education, Sports and
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Commentary



The benefit of comparison: Antigua and Barbuda better under ABLP than UPP

By Hon. E. P Chet Greene

Antigua and Barbuda's political history has been marked by two dominant parties: the Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party (ABLP) and the PLM/UPM/UNDP/UPP (same actors). By analyzing their leadership, policies, and impact on national progress, I will make the irrefutable case that the ABLP has consistently demonstrated a superior ability to govern, with significant benefits for the country.

Sir V.C. Bird Snr., the "Father of the Nation," (1976-1994) laid the groundwork for Antigua and Barbuda's independence in 1981. His tenure was marked by a focus on labor rights, social infrastructure, and the establishment of essential industries. Bird's vision transformed the country into a beacon of economic potential and the envy of the Eastern Caribbean.

In contrast, Sir George Walter (1971-1976), identified for his leadership in the Antigua Trades and Labour Union (ATLU) and the formation of the Antigua and Barbuda Workers Union (ABWU, struggled during his term as premier. Walter's administration lacked the long-term planning and assertive policies that characterized Bird's tenure. While Walter was instrumental in agitating for workers'



E. P Chet Greene

rights, once elected his government faced challenges in sustaining economic growth and maintaining political stability.

Sir Lester Bird's (1994-2004) tenure as Prime Minister was a turning point for Antigua and Barbuda and was marked by economic modernization and infrastructural expansion, particularly in tourism. He spearheaded projects like Heritage Quay and Jolly Harbour, which remain pivotal to the nation's economic fabric. Bird also championed regional integration and won admiration and respect for Antigua and Barbuda on the international stage.

Baldwin Spencer's UPP administration (2004-2014), lacked focus and failed to deliver on his election platform of transparency and accountability and failed to manage the economy which careened Antigua and Barbuda into an IMF austerity program. The Global Financial Crisis

during his tenure strained resources and Spencer's policies lacked the dynamism required to revitalize growth. His administration's approach to local and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), tourism included, did not match the transformative impact of Bird's initiatives.

Gaston Browne's leadership (2014-present) represents a modern era of progress for Antigua and Barbuda. His administration has implemented forward-thinking policies, including attracting foreign direct investment, revitalizing the Citizenship by Investment Program (CIP), and prioritizing renewable energy projects. Browne has also focused on education and healthcare, introducing measures to make these sectors more accessible and equitable.

Additionally, Browne's government has navigated global challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic, with resilience, ensuring

that the economy remains stable while protecting vulnerable communities.

Under the ABLP, Antigua and Barbuda has maintained a strong international presence, advocating for climate justice, sustainable development, and the interests of small island developing states (SIDS). Leaders like Gaston Browne and Sir Lester Bird have positioned the country as a regional leader and a global voice on critical issues.

In comparison, the UPP's international approach lacked the same level of assertiveness and innovation. While Baldwin Spencer sought to strengthen ties with key partners, his administration did not achieve the same international prominence as the ABLP.

The ABLP has consistently driven economic growth through diversified investments in tourism, infrastructure, and financial services. Gaston Browne's emphasis on public-private partnerships has unlocked significant development projects, including hotel expansions and technological advancements.

The UPP also failed to deliver on its governance reforms platform and struggled to maintain economic momentum during global downturns. Spencer's administration faced criticism

cont'd on pg 13

Commentary

cont'd from pg 12

for its handling of public debt and lack of substantial infrastructure development.

Under the ABLP, Antigua and Barbuda has seen substantial progress in education including the fourth landed campus of the University of the West Indies (UWI), healthcare to include modernization of the services at Sir Lester Bird Mount St. John Medical Centre, construction and the operationalization of two polyclinics and general upgrades to the national healthcare infrastructure, and affordable government housing projects which have uplifted countless citizens.

The UPP failed to address corruption and governance while in office. They also failed to achieve acceptable levels of socio-economic advancement. Their policies often lacked the scale and ambition of ABLP's transformative initiatives.

Tourism has always been the backbone of Antigua and Barbuda's economy, but the ABLP has consistently driven its growth to new heights. Under Lester Bird and Gaston Browne, the country has seen the development of luxury resorts, the expansion of cruise tourism, and increased airlift capacity. These efforts cemented Antigua and Barbuda's reputation as a premier destination globally.

While the UPP also invested in tourism, their policies were more reactive

than proactive. Their approach to tourism lacked the comprehensive vision and aggressive marketing strategies we see implemented by the ABLP.

The comparative analysis of leadership, policies, and outcomes under the ABLP and UPP (by whatever other name) demon-

strates that Antigua and Barbuda has experienced greater stability, growth, and development under the Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party. From Sir V.C. Bird Snr.'s foundational leadership to Gaston Browne's progressive governance, the ABLP has consistently delivered transformative pol-

icies that enhance the lives of citizens and solidify Antigua and Barbuda's standing on the global stage.

The benefits of comparison therefore favor the ABLP, highlighting its unparalleled contribution to the nation's progress and prosperity. This is a clear and undeniable truth.



Business



Guardian and Observer journalists go on strike

By Paul Glynn

Journalists at the Guardian and sister publication the Observer are holding a two-day strike in protest at the proposed sale of the Sunday newspaper to Tortoise Media.

The first strike at the Guardian in more than 50 years is taking place across Wednesday and Thursday (4 and 5 December).

Tortoise is run by former editor of the Times and ex-director of BBC News, James Harding.

A Guardian spokesperson said while they “recognise the strength of feeling” about the proposed sale and “appreciate that NUJ [National Union of Journalists] members wish to make their views heard”, they “do not believe a strike is the best course of action” at the present time.

“We have a plan in place to minimise the impact of strike action on staff, readers and subscribers and we will continue to publish online and produce the print edition as usual,” they continued.

UK readers may notice some differences to the Guardian’s daily website on Wednesday and Thursday, as a result of the strike, as well as in its print editions, the newspaper said.

NUJ members passed a motion last month stating that selling the Observer to Tortoise would be a “betrayal” of the commitment made by the Scott Trust, the Guardian Media Group (GMG)’s owners, to the world’s oldest Sunday newspaper.

If the sale goes ahead, Observer staff have been told they can take voluntary redundancy on enhanced terms or else transfer to Tortoise on the existing terms of their contracts.

In an email to staff, Anna Bateson, the managing director of GMG, con-



firmed “constructive talks [around the sale] will continue” in order “to protect Observer staff if this deal progresses”.

She added that freelance contracts would be extended until the end of September 2025 and then renegotiated.

Chair of the Scott Trust, Ole Jacob Sunde, reportedly told staff: “Throughout the process our goal has always been to do what is right for Guardian and Observer readers and staff so that both titles continue to promote liberal journalism and thrive long into the future.”

According to the Guardian, Sunde added that the Scott Trust would stay on as part-owner of the Observer in any such deal, and that the new owners would have to “embody the values of editorial independence, press freedom and liberal journalism”.

“I fully respect people’s rights to take industrial action,” Sunde continued.

NUJ general secretary-elect, Laura Davison, said the striking journalists “have the full backing” of the union as they “undertake this significant indus-

trial action”.

“The massive vote to take this step shows journalists’ desire to publicly highlight to readers and those in charge their collective concerns about the future of the title,” she added.

She noted how the 233-year-old Sunday newspaper “holds a unique and important place in public life and our members care about the next chapter in its history”.

Harding has said his company’s proposed takeover offers the chance to invest in the title and extend its legacy.

It was revealed in September that Tortoise had approached the Guardian Media Group with an offer to invest around £25m over the next five years on the “editorial and commercial renewal” of the Observer.

A GMG spokesperson said: “We respect the right of NUJ members to strike. We continue to publish online and in print and are working to minimise the impact on staff and readers. Our priority is to make sure the Observer’s journalism continues to have a leading role in the liberal media landscape.”

Telegram U-turns and joins child safety scheme

By Joe Tidy

After years of ignoring pleas to sign up to child protection schemes, the controversial messaging app Telegram has agreed to work with an internationally recognised body to stop the spread of child sexual abuse material (CSAM).

The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) is used by major online services to help them detect and remove CSAM, and prevent its spread.

Telegram had repeatedly refused to engage with it or any similar scheme.

But, four months after its founder Pavel Durov was arrested in Paris for Telegram's alleged failure to moderate extreme content, the platform has announced a U-turn.

The IWF has described Telegram's decision as "transformational" but warned it was the first step in a "much longer journey" for the app.

"By joining the IWF, Telegram can begin deploying our world-leading tools to help make sure this material cannot be shared on the service," said Derek Ray-Hill, Interim CEO at the IWF.

Telegram is used by around 950 million people worldwide and has previously positioned itself as an app focussed on its users' privacy rather than the



Telegram founder Pavel Durov, pictured in 2016.

policy norms prioritised by other global social media companies.

But reporting from the BBC and other news organisations highlighted criminals using the app to advertise drugs as well as offer cybercrime and fraud services and, most recently, CSAM.

It led one expert to brand it "the dark web in your pocket."

In August, its billionaire owner was detained at an airport north of Paris.

Mr Durov is accused of a failure to co-operate with law enforcement over drug trafficking, child sexual content and fraud.

French judges have barred the 40-year-old from leaving France pending further investigations.

The company maintains that his arrest is unfair, and

that he should not be held liable for what users do on the platform.

Nonetheless, Telegram has since announced a series of changes to the way it operates, including:

Announcing IP addresses and phone numbers of those who violate its rules will be handed over to police in response to valid legal requests

Disabling features like "people nearby" which it admitted had issues with bots and scammers

Publishing regular transparency reports about how much content is taken down – a standard industry practice it had previously refused to comply with

Mr Durov has also vowed to "turn moderation on Telegram from an area of criticism into one of praise".

The partnership with the IWF appears to be the latest step in that process.

The IWF is one of a few organisations in the world that is legally able to search for child sexual content to get it taken down.

Its ever-evolving list of known abuse content is used by websites to detect and block matches to stop it spreading.

Telegram says that before becoming a member of IWF it removed hundreds of thousands of pieces of abuse material each month using its own systems. The IWF membership will strengthen its mechanisms, the company said.

The app is marketed as a fully end-to-end encrypted messaging service - meaning only the sender and recipient of a message can read it - like WhatsApp and Signal.

But in fact the majority of communication is done with standard encryption, raising questions about how secure from hacking and interception it is.

Mr Durov, who was born in Russia and now lives in Dubai, has citizenship in Russia, France, the United Arab Emirates and the Caribbean island nation of St Kitts and Nevis.

Telegram is particularly popular in Russia, Ukraine and former Soviet Union states as well as Iran.

Regional News



Dominica: 22 college students receive education grants from China

The Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Dominica has presented scholarship grants to a number of students at the Dominica State College.

On Monday, the embassy presented cash grants of US\$1,000 each to twenty-two students from the college.

Minister of Finance and acting Prime Minister Dr Irving Mc Intyre implored recipients of the grant to stay committed to their educational journey.

He said the partnership between the embassy and college, now in its second year speaks to the value China places on the education and development of Dominica's people.

"China has continually demonstrated that true friendship is not just about words but about actions that uplift and empower.

"We cannot forget that China has for many years also provided opportunities for our young people to gain undergraduate and graduate degrees in China equipping them with cutting-edge skills and knowledge to return home and become productive members of our society."

Mc Intyre expressed the government's gratitude for China's support to Dominica in various investments including education and urged students pursue greater heights.

"You are being chosen because of



Minister for Finance, Dr Irving Mc Intyre your dedication, potential, and commitment to excellence. Let this opportunity motivate you to aim higher and work harder and to give back to our communities and country."

The Bahamas: Opposition MP throws mace out of window during Parliament

A protest unfolded in the Bahamas House of Parliament on Wednesday morning when a Member of Parliament (MP) threw the ceremonial Mace through a window, escalating tensions during a debate about corruption.

The incident occurred amid growing controversy following the recent arrest of several high-ranking Bahamian police officials in Florida as part of a cocaine sting operation.

This development has intensified public outrage and pressure on the government.

Prime Minister Phillip Davis confirmed the resignation of Commissioner of Police Clayton Leroy Fernander, which added to the



already charged atmosphere within the House of Assembly.

The debate became particularly heated as MPs exchanged sharp words with the Speaker of Parliament.

In an unexpected moment, an MP walked to the

Speaker's desk, grabbed the Mace — a symbol of parliamentary authority — and threw it out of a window, interrupting the session.

Police officers quickly intervened, arresting the MP responsible and two others involved in the disturbance.

Videos circulating online showed the MPs being escorted out of the building by law enforcement.

Meanwhile, outside the Parliament, opposition supporters, already gathered to protest the corruption allegations, grew more vocal as news of the events inside spread.

Prime Minister Davis, describing the incident as a "disgrace," left the Assembly shortly after the commotion began. The MPs arrested inside Parliament were later seen mingling with protesters outside, adding to the political tensions in the country.

The situation remains fluid, and further updates are expected as the story develops.

French government collapses in no-confidence vote

By Amy Walker

The French government has collapsed after Prime Minister Michel Barnier was ousted in a no-confidence vote.

MPs voted overwhelmingly in support of the motion against him - just three months after he was appointed by President Emmanuel Macron.

Opposition parties had tabled the motion after the former Brexit negotiator controversially used special powers to force through his budget without a vote.

It marks the first time the country's government has collapsed in a no-confidence vote since 1962.

His overthrowing will further France's current political instability, after snap elections in summer led to no single group having a majority in parliament.

MPs were required to either vote yes or abstain from Wednesday's vote, with 288 votes needed for the motion to pass. A total of 331 voted in support of the motion.

Barnier is now obliged to present the resignation of his government, and the budget which was the cause of his downfall is now defunct.

Both the far right and radical left had tabled motions of no-confidence after Barnier pushed through reforms to social security by



invoking presidential decree on Monday after failing to win enough support for the measures.

The left-wing alliance New Popular Front (NFP), which won the most seats in the parliamentary elections, had heavily criticised Macron's decision to appoint centrist Barnier over its own candidate.

Alongside the far-right National Rally (RN), it had deemed Barnier's budget - which included €60bn (£49bn) in deficit reduction - unacceptable.

Marine Le Pen, the RN leader, said the budget was "toxic for the French".

In an interview with French broadcaster TF1, Le Pen said there was "no other solution" than to remove Barnier.

Asked about the French president's prospects, she replied: "I am not asking for

the resignation of Emmanuel Macron."

However, Le Pen added that "if we do not respect the voice of voters and show respect for political forces and respect for elections", then pressure on the president will "obviously be stronger and stronger".

Macron, who has returned to France following a state visit to Saudi Arabia, is due to give a televised speech to the nation on Thursday evening.

He is not directly affected by the result of the vote, as France votes for its president separately from its government.

He has also previously said he would not resign whatever the outcome of Wednesday's vote.

Ahead of the vote, Barnier had told the National Assembly that voting him out of office would not

solve the country's financial problems.

"We have reached a moment of truth, of responsibility," he said, adding that "we need to look at the realities of our debt".

"It is not a pleasure that I propose difficult measures."

Barnier is likely to stay on as caretaker while Macron chooses a successor.

But he is expected to act fast to form a government to avoid the embarrassment of a non-existent government - not least because US President-elect Donald Trump is due in Paris this weekend for the reopening of the Notre-Dame cathedral.

No new parliamentary elections can be held until July, so the current deadlock in the Assembly - where no group can hope to have a working majority - is set to continue.

Syrian government forces and rebels battle outside key city of Hama

By David Gritten

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's forces are reportedly engaged in fierce battles with rebels on the outskirts of the major city of Hama.

A monitoring group said on Tuesday evening that the Islamist militant group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and its allies were "at the gates of Hama", but on Wednesday it said the military had retaken several villages in a counter-attack backed by intense air strikes.

Syrian state media also said troops had pushed back the rebels north of the city, but the rebels denied losing any ground there.

Hama is 110km (70 miles) south of Aleppo, which the rebels captured last week after launching a surprise offensive from their stronghold in the north-west.

The state-run Sana news agency and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), a UK-based monitoring group, both reported intense fighting on Wednesday morning around Jabal Zain al-Abadin, a hill about 5km (3 miles) north-east of Hama.

The SOHR said the clashes came after government forces launched a counter-attack, during which they were able to push the rebels back almost 10km from the city and recapture two villages near



Rebels posed for photos on the highway north of Hama, home to about 1 million people. the hill.

A spokesman for the rebel's "Military Operations Division" accused the military of spreading rumours to raise the morale of its troops and insisted rebels were still in control of all locations they had recently taken.

An affiliated news channel meanwhile said that five more villages east of Hama had been captured, as well as a base of the 25th Special Mission Forces Division.

On Tuesday, the SOHR reported that there had been "major displacement" from Hama, which is home to about 1 million people, after the rebels reached the city's outskirts and several civilians were injured by their shellfire.

Wassim, a delivery driver who lives in the city, told AFP news agency: "The sounds were really terrifying, and the continuous

bombing could be clearly heard".

But he added: "I'll stay home because I have nowhere else to flee to."

The SOHR has said that more than 600 people have been killed, including 107 civilians, and tens of thousands have been displaced since the start of the rebel offensive last Wednesday.

The United Nations has expressed alarm at the sudden escalation of Syria's devastating, 13-year civil war and warned that the situation is "extremely fluid and dangerous".

"If we do not see de-escalation and a rapid move to a serious political process, involving the Syrian parties and the key international players, then I fear we will see a deepening of the crisis," special envoy Geir Pedersen told the UN Security Council on Tuesday.

"Syria will be in grave danger of further division, deterioration, and destruction."

President Assad has vowed to "crush" the rebels and accused Western powers of trying to redraw the map of the region, while his key allies Russia and Iran have offered their "unconditional support".

Russian warplanes have intensified their strikes on rebel-held areas in recent days, Iran-backed militias have sent fighters to reinforce the government's defensive lines around Hama, and Iran has said it is ready to send additional forces to Syria if asked.

Turkey, which supports the Syrian opposition but has denied reports that it is involved in the HTS-led offensive, has urged Assad to engage in a political process

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with the opposition to bring an end to Syria's 13-year civil war.

Turkish-backed rebel factions have meanwhile capitalised on the government's retreat in the north by launching a separate offensive on a pocket of territory near Aleppo that was controlled by a Kurdish-led militia alliance, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

More than half a million people have been killed since the civil war erupted in 2011 after Assad's government cracked down violently on peaceful pro-democracy protests.

Before the start of the rebel offensive, the government had regained control



Smoke rises from the town of Suran, between Aleppo and Hama, on Tuesday.

of Syria's main cities with the help of Russia, Iran and Iran-backed militias. However, large parts of the country remained out of its control.

The rebels' last stronghold was in Aleppo and Idlib provinces, which border Turkey and where more than four million people were living, many of them

displaced from government-held areas.

The enclave was dominated by HTS, which is designated as a terrorist organization. *cont'd on pg 20*



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Sports News



Alan Henry of PMS

PMS closes gap with leaders in Under-14 Boys school league

Defending champions Princess Margaret School (PMS) closed the gap on leaders Clare Hall Secondary and the Antigua Grammar School in the Under-14 Boys Division in the Ministry of Sports, Cool and Smooth, and Joma Patrick C. Whyte Cup football league on Tuesday.

Princess Margaret joined the leaders at the top of the standings with 19 points apiece after recording their sixth win in eight matches with a 6-3 victory against St. Anthony's Secondary School in a rescheduled encounter at the Clare Hall playing field.

Alan Henry and Jaheedi Charles both struck hat tricks to evenly share the goals for Princess Margaret School.

Chance De Gannes scored twice, and Elijah Cenac converted once for St. Anthony's Secondary School, which will remain on 12 points after suffering their fourth defeat in eight matches.

The match between Clare Hall Secondary School and Sir Novelle Richards Academy, which was

slated to take place at the same venue, was postponed until the following day.

It means that Clare Hall Secondary is still leading the Under-14 Boys Division via a superior goal difference and has a game in hand.

Princess Margaret School moved into second place on goal difference ahead of the Antigua Grammar School, with both teams having played eight of their quota of nine matches.

The school that finishes at the top of the standings at the end of the nine-match round-robin, 10-team competition will be crowned the Under-14 Boys Division champions.

The title winners will be decided at the Antigua Recreation Grounds (ARG) on Wednesday, December 11, when the top three teams will play their final matches. Princess Margaret School will clash with Clare Hall Secondary at 2:15 pm, and the Antigua Grammar School will take on St. Joseph's Academy at 3:15 pm.

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organisation by the UN, US, Turkey and other countries because it was al-Qaeda's affiliate in Syria until it formally broke ties in 2016.

A number of allied rebel factions and jihadist groups were also based there, along with Turkish-backed SNA factions and Turkish forces.

In 2020, Turkey and Russia brokered a ceasefire

to halt a push by the government to retake the region.

That led to an extended lull in violence, but sporadic clashes, air strikes and shelling continued.

HTS and its allies said last Wednesday that they had launched an offensive to "deter aggression", accusing the government and allied Iran-backed militias of escalating attacks on ci-

vilians in the north-west.

But it came at a time when the government's allies were preoccupied with other conflicts.

The Iran-backed Lebanese group Hezbollah, which was crucial in helping push back rebels in the early years of the war, has suffered recently from Israel's offensive in Lebanon.

Israeli strikes have also

eliminated Iranian military commanders in Syria and degraded supply lines to pro-government militias there. Russia has also been also distracted by the war in Ukraine.

Mr Pedersen estimated that the rebels now had de facto control over territory containing an estimated 7 million people, including 2 million in Aleppo city.

Shamsi spins Qalandars to 10-run victory over Victoria

In a gripping encounter at Providence Stadium, Lahore Qalandars edged Victoria by 10 runs in the ExxonMobil Guyana Global Super League (GSL) on Tuesday night.

The result, driven by a masterful performance from Tabraiz Shamsi, leaves the race for a spot in the final finely poised.

Victoria, riding high after dominant wins in their first two matches, looked set to continue their streak but found themselves undone by the Qalandars' all-around effort.

After being sent in to bat by Victoria's captain Corey Anderson, the Qalandars built their innings around opener Mirza Baig's composed knock of 39 off 36 balls.

Despite Baig's stability, the Qalandars struggled for fluency, with contributions from Mohammad Faizan (25 off 21), Tom Abell (17), and Mohammad Akhlaq (26) keeping the scoreboard ticking but failing to provide the acceleration needed for a commanding total.

Victoria's bowlers, led by Dominic Drakes and Jackson Smith, ensured that the Qalandars couldn't break free. Drakes was especially effective, taking three for 22 off his four overs, which included 14 dot balls.



Tabraiz Shamsi, center, celebrates with his Lahore Qalandars teammates after capturing a wicket against Victoria in the Guyana Global Super League at the National Stadium in Providence, Guyana, on Tuesday, December 3, 2024.

Smith, meanwhile, struck a critical blow by clean bowling Qalandars skipper Carlos Brathwaite for a golden duck, finishing with figures of three for 29.

The Qalandars were bowled out for 139, leaving Victoria a seemingly attainable target of 140.

Victoria started strongly in their chase, with openers Blake Macdonald and Joe Clarke putting on 67 runs for the first wicket. However, the momentum shifted dramatically when Tabraiz Shamsi was introduced into the attack.

Shamsi produced a

mesmerizing spell of slow left-arm wrist spin, claiming three for 11 off his four overs, including an incredible 16 dot balls. His control and variations stifled Victoria's progress, and crucially, not a single boundary was scored off his bowling.

Shamsi's scalps included Macdonald and Clarke, breaking the back of Victoria's batting order and earning him the well-deserved Player of the Match accolade.

Despite Shamsi's heroics, Victoria found hope in Antiguan Karima Gore, who fought valiantly with

25 off 22 balls. However, his dismissal at the start of the 19th over left Victoria needing 12 runs with just one wicket remaining.

Faheem Ashraf held his nerve in the final over, clean-bowling Jackson Smith with his third delivery to secure a dramatic 10-run victory for the Qalandars.

The win propels Lahore Qalandars into a three-way tie at the top of the GSL table alongside Victoria and Guyana Amazon Warriors, with all three teams sitting on four points after two wins and a loss each.

Sports News



Empire return to winning form in First Division League

Empire FC returned to winning ways in the Antigua and Barbuda Football Association's (ABFA) First Division league on Tuesday.

After crashing to their second defeat, a surprising one-nil loss to Bendals FC in their previous outing, Empire rebounded spectacularly to claim their fifth win in seven matches with a 4-0 drubbing of SAP FC at the Keithley Sheppard Recreational Park.

Twadadre Jacobs scored twice with conversions in the 23rd and 63rd minutes, Ackeem George had a 16th-minute conversion, and Adonia Lee Francis scored in the 56th minute.

The result allows Empire to advance to 15 points from seven encounters, and SAP FC will remain on 13 points after suffering their second defeat in seven matches.

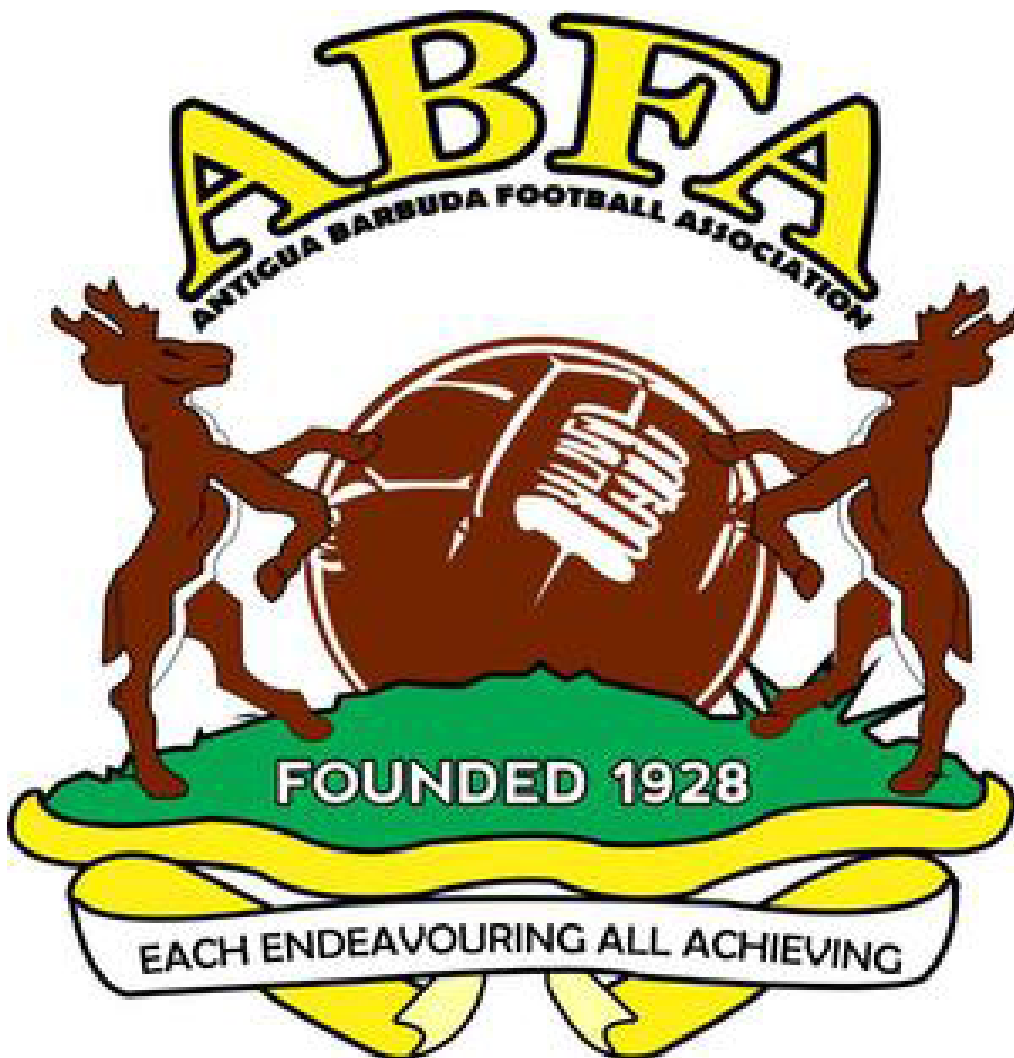
Swetes FC claimed their fourth win in six matches with a 4-1 victory against Bendals FC at the Bendals playing field.

Shalon Knight scored twice with conversions in the 12th and 40th minutes, Joel Jacobs had a 13th-minute conversion, and Juwan Roberts scored the other goal for Swetes FC in the fourth minute of added time (90+4 minutes).

David Fallen scored a consolation goal in the 35th minute for Bendals FC, which will remain on four points after tumbling to their fourth defeat in six matches. The result allows Swetes FC to advance to 13 points from six encounters. After losing all previous six matches, the Liberta Blackhawks claimed their first win to jump out of the cellar of the First Division by snatching a 1-0 victory against Urlings FC at the Golden Grove playing field.

Following a goalless first half, Marquis Simpson scored the only goal of the match in the 50th minute.

The result allows the Liberta Black-



hawks to claim their first three points from seven matches, and Urlings FC will drop into the cellar.

Urlings FC will remain on one point from seven matches after losing five matches and having their opening encounter with Bolans FC end prematurely.

Meanwhile, Blackburn Palace recorded their third win in five matches in the Antigua and Barbuda Football Association's (ABFA) Second Division League on Tuesday.

Goals by Jamal Tavenier in the 15th minute and Diondre Harrigan in the 40th minute gave Blackburn Palace a 2-1 victory against Glanvilles FC at the Glanvilles playing field.

Amadil Prince scored in the 48th minute for Glanvilles, which will remain on one point after suffering their fourth defeat in five matches.

The result allows Blackburn Palace FC to advance to nine points from five matches.

The ABFA's First Division league will resume with four matches on Thursday (today) at 4:30 pm.

Tryum FC will tackle Bolans FC in Cashew Hill; the Ottos Rangers will meet Lion Hill FC in Golden Grove; Police will take on Freeman's Village Scorpions at the St. Johnstone's Village Stadium; and FC Master Ballerz will clash with Jennings United at the Radio Range playing field in Ottos.



West Indies pacer Jayden Seales, celebrates after dismissing Bangladesh batsman Nahid Rana, right, on the second day of the second cricket Test at Sabina Park in Jamaica on Sunday, December 1, 2024. (Getty Images)

Seales and Sinclair fined for breaching ICC Code of Conduct

West Indies bowlers Jayden Seales and Kevin Sinclair have been found guilty of breaching the ICC Code of Conduct in their recently concluded second Test match against Bangladesh at Sabina Park in Jamaica.

Seales has been fined 25 per cent of his match fee after being found to have breached article 2.20 of the ICC Code of Conduct, which relates to “conduct that is contrary to the spirit of the game.”

In addition to this, one demerit point has been added to Seales’ disciplinary record, for whom it was the first offence in a 24-month period. The incident occurred in the first over of Bangladesh’s second innings when Seales made an inappropriate and overly aggressive gesture towards the opposition’s dressing room after taking a wicket.

Sinclair has been fined 15 per cent

of his match fee after he was found to have breached Article 2.4 of the Code of Conduct, which relates to “disobeying an umpire’s instruction during an international match.”

In addition to his fine, one demerit point has been added to Sinclair’s disciplinary record, for whom it was the first offence in a 24-month period.

The incident took place when Sinclair ignored the instructions of the on-field umpires to stop using language deemed aggressive and harsh towards the Bangladesh batters.

Seales and Sinclair admitted their respective offences and accepted the sanctions proposed by Jeff Crowe of the Emirates ICC Elite Panel of Match Referees, and, as such, there was no need for a formal hearing.

On-field umpires Asif Yaqoob and

Kumar Dharmasena, third umpire Nitin Menon, and fourth umpire Zahid Bassarath levelled the charges.

Level 1 breaches carry a minimum penalty of an official reprimand, a maximum penalty of 50 per cent of a player’s match fee, and one or two demerit points. When a player reaches four or more demerit points within a 24-month period, they are converted into suspension points, and a player is banned.

In addition to that, two suspension points equate to a ban from one Test or two ODIs or two T20Is, whatever comes first for the player.

Finally, demerit points are to remain on a player or player support personnel’s disciplinary record for a period of twenty-four (24) months from their imposition, following which, they will be expunged.

Rare losses for APUA Inet and ECAB in business volleyball league

Last year's champions, APUA Inet, and runners-up, the Eastern Caribbean Amalgamated Bank (ECAB), had their unbeaten runs ended in their last encounters in the preliminary stage of the Antigua and Barbuda Amateur Volleyball Association's (ABAVA) Business League Championship on Tuesday evening.

APUA Inet lost 2-1 against last year's third place finishers, Nate's Photography, in their top-of-the-table Group A clash at the indoor stadium at the YMCA Sports Complex.

Nate's Photography took the opening set 25-19, and APUA Inet drew level by winning the second set 25-15 to extend the match into a decisive third set.

Nate's Photography regained their composure and showed great resilience to claim the third set 15-12 and secured victory in an hour and seven minutes.

The result meant that Nate's Photography played unbeaten, winning all five matches to finish as Group A winners, while APUA Inet claimed second place with a record of four wins and a loss in their five encounters.

Both teams will advance as the two



ICONS volleyball team

qualifiers into the semi-finals by virtue of finishing as the top two teams in Group A. The ICONS ended ECAB's perfect run by prevailing 2-0 when both teams met in their top-of-the-table Group B clash.

The ICONS took just 47 minutes to beat ECAB 25-23, 25-18, and extended their unbeaten run by claiming their fifth

win in as many games.

The result meant that it was the first loss in six matches in the preliminary stage for ECAB.

Both teams have already qualified for the semi-finals as the top two teams in Group B. But the ICONS can finish as Group B winners by beating newcomers EZ Fit Flyers on Thursday (today) at 7 pm in their last encounter in the preliminary stage.

Sandals and 77 Bus will also clash in the final match in the preliminary stage of the competition on Thursday at 8 pm.

The two semi-finals will take place at the indoor stadium at the YMCA Sports Complex on Saturday.

The winners of the semi-finals will advance to the finals, which will be a best-of-three series, from which the 2024 champions of the business volleyball league will be crowned.



Nate's Photography volleyball team