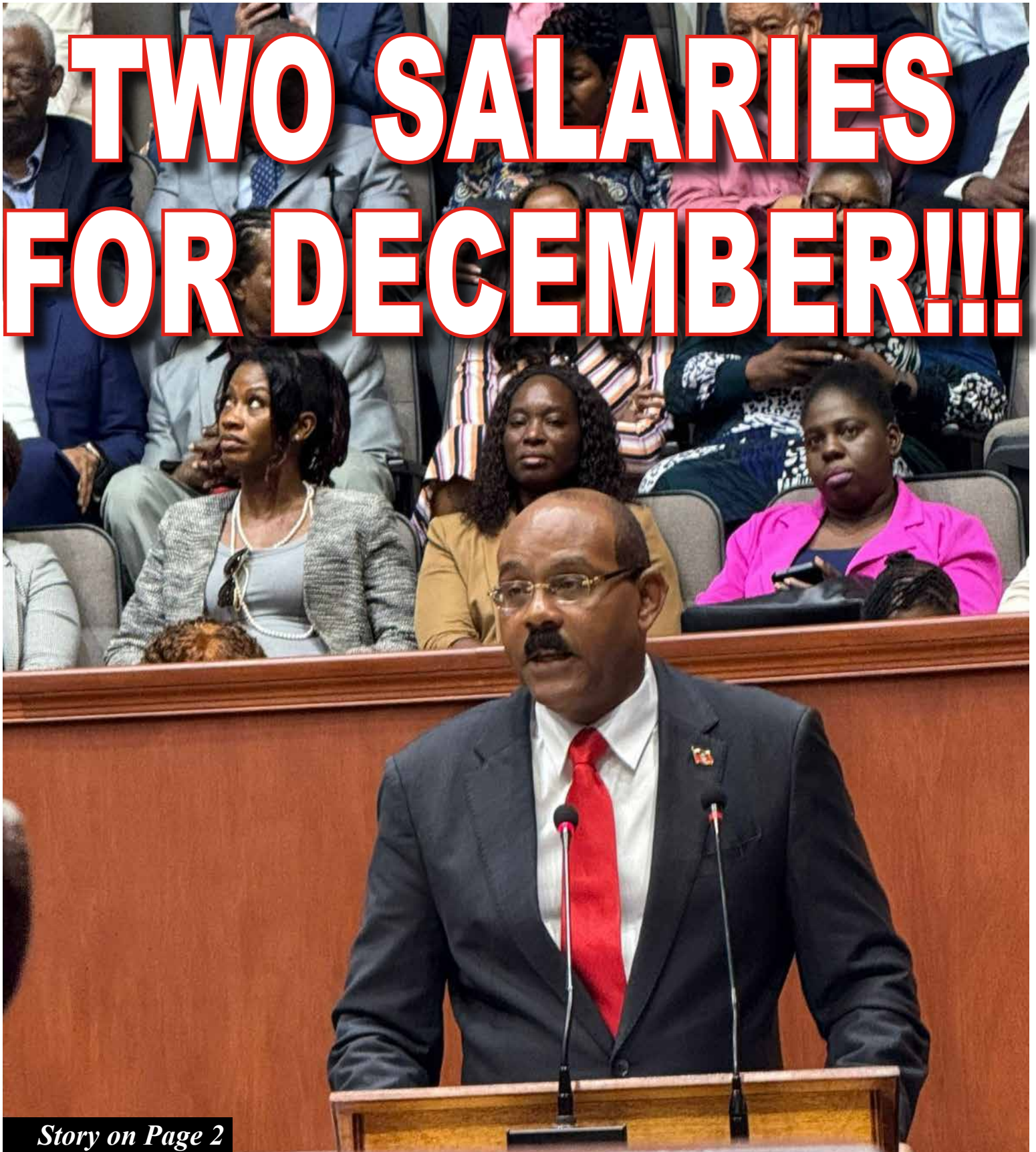


# TWO SALARIES FOR DECEMBER!!!



*Story on Page 2*



# Local News



## Two salaries for December!!!

It was perhaps the most anticipated news most persons were listening for during the presentation of the 2025 National Budget for Antigua and Barbuda; whether the government will pay the extra salary in December as has been hinted at in recent weeks.

Against this backdrop, it could be gainsaid that Prime Minister Gaston Browne waited until towards the end of the presentation to make the announcement; all government employees who are owed back-pay from the last salary increase will be paid an extra salary this month; their regular December salary as well as an extra month's salary representing a portion of the outstanding retroactive payments.

"In December 2022, a contribution to the eventual retroactive pay was made to eligible public servants.

"It is our intention to make a second contribution in the form of one month's gross basic pay before the end of December 2024," PM Browne reported.

According to the prime minister the intention is to pay the regular December salary by December 18 and the second amount before the end of the month.

The prime minister said the government wants to make regular payments on the outstanding payments so that they do not accumulate.

"Preliminary estimates of the retroactive pay based on the negotiated increase indicates the Government's obligation to the eligible categories of workers is about \$100 million.

"To avoid the accumulation of salary arrears in the future, we will engage in more timely negotiations with bargaining agents and implement the

agreements as a matter of priority," he stated.

The announcement was greeted with much applause within the parliament chamber and it has been warmly welcomed by many based on the positive responses in the social media postings.




Prime Minister Gaston Browne

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## Ain't no stoppin' us now!

Prime Minister Gaston Browne sang a line of the popular 1980's song, Ain't no stoppin' us now' during the 2025 Budget presentation on Thursday to emphasise the central theme of his message; Antigua and Barbuda is currently on a positive growth trajectory because of his government's sturdy leadership and management.

PM Browne noted that the Antigua and Barbuda economy has outperformed expectations surpassing forecasts even from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

"The IMF has projected robust economic performance for us, anticipating real GDP growth of 5.8 per cent in 2024 and 3.5 per cent in 2025.

"We have surpassed the 2024 projection and are confident that, with the continued support and contribution of every working person in our country, we will exceed the 3.5 per cent growth forecast for 2025. These figures are not mere statistics; they reflect the unwavering spirit of our people and the soundness of our economic strategies and policies," he noted.

One of the more tangible indication of the performance of the economy is reflected in the growth in employment over the past year. The prime minister quoted figures from the Social Security Scheme which reflected a growth in con-



tributors by approximately 2,000.

"Based on data from the Antigua Barbuda Social Security Board, the total number of active jobs is expected to increase from 47,996 in 2023 to 49,915 in 2024, with those workers earning \$1.8 billion. That's approximately 2,000 additional jobs in a single fiscal year.

"We anticipate a further 2,000 jobs will be created in 2025, due to the strong demand for tourism and the construction of several luxury properties," he revealed.

PM Browne makes the point that this remarkable employment growth highlights the dynamism and resilience of the local job market and translates to increased income for Social Security to deliver on its so-

cial mandate.

For the first half of 2024, Social Security collections exceeded benefit expenses by \$22 million, and with

the continued buoyancy in the economy, the institution anticipates inflows of \$227 million in 2024 compared to \$214 million in 2023.

### **NOTICE TO STAKEHOLDERS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC, OF THE PARTIAL CLOSURE OF SIR SYDNEY WALLING HIGHWAY (SSWH) AT THE CULVERT BETWEEN PARES VILLAGE AND COLLINS JUNCTION.**

Special Notice is given that there will be a **PARTIAL** closure of SSWH at the **BIG CULVERT** located between the Eastern end of Pares Village and the Collins Junction, commencing Saturday, 7<sup>th</sup> December, 2024.

Vehicular Traffic on SSWH (both Eastbound and Westbound) **MUST REDUCE SPEED** and divert on to the bypass road South of the existing culvert, which will be demolished and reconstructed.

**IT IS ANTICIPATED THAT THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NEW CULVERT WILL CONTINUE WELL INTO JANUARY 2025. THE BYPASS ROAD WILL CONTINUE TO BE USED DURING THIS TIME. MOTORISTS ARE ASKED TO EXERCISE DUE CAUTION AT ALL TIMES WHILE USING THE BYPASS ROAD.**

C O Williams sincerely regrets the inconvenience. The road work is a part of the Second Road Infrastructure Rehabilitation Project being carried out by the Government of Antigua and Barbuda.

**Stakeholders are asked to make adjustments to their travel plans to allow for delays.**

Telephone queries can be made by calling the C O Williams Project Office at 562-9573.

-ends-



# Local News



## Construction plays major role in country's economic growth

The country's construction industry has been identified as a major player in the country's economic growth, contributing a record \$900 million to the national economy in 2024.

This was outlined by Prime Minister Gaston Browne during his Budget Presentation, stating that

the performance was propelled by work on major private sector projects such as construction of Airbnb properties and the international franchise restaurant, The Hut, on Little Jumbay Bay.

He pointed out that several hotel properties were renovated including

the Hermitage Bay Resort, Carlisle Bay Resort, and the Royalton Chic Hotel was completed.

"The ongoing PLH project on Barbuda continues to play a pivotal role in this sector, creating employment and business opportunities for thousands of our citizens and resi-

dents. Additionally, data from the Development Control Authority for the period January to October 2024 signal an increase in residential and commercial property construction and renovations," Prime Minister Browne outlined.

It was also revealed that there was a 14 per cent increase in applications for residential and commercial construction valued at \$464 million.

The country's leader said that this means that not only will the State gain more revenues from property taxes to finance further development; it also means that the physical appearance and the wealth of the nation are greatly enhanced.

"Mr. Speaker, that is also an indication of the confidence our people, and the business community, have in our economy, and we shall continue to work hard to ensure that everyone benefits from this thriving economy in which we live. In short, Mr. Speaker, in the words of one of our slogans from a few years ago – "Ain't no stopping us now; we're on the move!," said the Prime Minister.

Prime Minister Browne concluded that the country is securely on the path to becoming an economic powerhouse.





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# Local News

## Three more receive GG's Faithful and Meritorious Service awards

Three more individuals have received the Governor General's Faithful and Meritorious Service awards for outstanding contributions in several areas of national life.

In the second presentation of awards this week, the Governor General Sir Rodney Williams presented the awards to the husband and wife team of Howard and Mitzi Allen as well as social activist, Mary John.

"We are pleased to confer awards upon three exceptional honourees.

"Howard Allen, an accomplished filmmaker and cultural pioneer, is receiving  
*cont'd on pg 7*



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*cont'd from pg 6*

ing the highest grade, The Cross, for his outstanding contributions to the arts and cultural development in Antigua and Barbuda. Mitzi Allen, whose tireless dedication to media and storytelling has elevated the voices and stories of our region, will be awarded the Gold Medal," Sir Rodney revealed.

He said Mary John is being rewarded for her dedication to improving the lives of others.

"By overcoming personal challenges, she has transformed her experiences into powerful lessons, using them to uplift and inspire those facing similar struggles, becoming a true beacon of hope and resilience in her community," he noted.

On Tuesday, the Governor General named six other persons who were recipients of the GG's Faithful and Meritorious Service Awards.

On Thursday, the Halo Foundation also presented its Humanitarian Award to John Swift.



The award was introduced in 2017 by the Founder and President of the Halo Foundation Inc. Sandra Lady Williams, to honour acts of extraordinary courage, kindness, and selflessness by young people.

Swift is said to have exemplified these qualities through his outstanding humanitarian contributions, touching lives and uplifting communities in Antigua and Barbuda.



John Swift



Mary John



Howard Allen



Mitzi Allen



# Local News



## Sagicor Inc Antigua makes a donation to RCA's Bed-at-Home Project

Sagicor Inc. Antigua has made a cash donation to the Rotary Club of Antigua which will further enhance one of the Club's signature outreach projects.

Assistant Vice President of Eastern Caribbean Operations and Branch Manager, Marisia James presented RCA's Service Projects Director, Past President, Paul Ryan with a cheque of four thousand and seventy-five dollars, which will be invested in ongoing Bed-at-Home project.

The initiative was first launched in May 2020, un-

der the leadership of then President of the Club, Dr. Vanetta Rodgers.

The overall goal of the programme, is to offer those persons who are medically confined to a bed and their caretakers, the flexibility of care in the form of a hospital type bed in the comfort of the home.

The beds are adjustable and portable and recipients are selected following a needs assessment or on the recommendation of a doctor.

The Rotary Club of Antigua is thankful to the financial institution for its generous support.



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# Local News



## Liberta woman charged for attempting to smuggle items into HMP

A Liberta woman is facing charges related to an alleged attempt to smuggling items into His Majesty's Prison.

The incident involving Kerissa Allen happened on

Wednesday. She appeared before Chief Magistrate Dexter Wason on Thursday and the case has been adjourned until January 13, 2025.

The charge did not in-

dicade the nature of the items Allen was allegedly attempting to smuggle into the prison. It only spoke of 'certain articles' she apparently wanted to get into the possession of an inmate of

the prison. This alleged act contravenes Section 24 of Chapter 341 of the Revised Edition 1992 of the laws of Antigua and Barbuda.

## Kenroy Telemaque charged with breaking into SJPC

Police arrested and jointly charged 41-year-old Kenroy Telemaque of John Hughes, along with 48-year-old Kanassa Robinson of Villa for breaking into the St. John's Pentecostal Church (SJPC) House of Restoration. The alleged incident occurred on November 24, at Lauchland Benjamin Drive.

Robinson was previously charged in connection with the said incident and taken before the court. He was remanded to His Majesty's Prison, where he is awaiting trial.

Telemaque was taken into custody by police on Tuesday, following a stop-and-search operation in Grays Farm.

He appeared before Chief Magistrate Dexter Wason on Thursday and was remanded to prison on the trial set for March 18, 2025.





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# Opinion



## High-Stakes Bid for OAS Secretary General post

By Sir Ronald Sanders

The election of a new Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), scheduled for March 10, 2025, represents a pivotal moment not only for the organization but also for the countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

For the first time, the 14 CARICOM member states are unified in their strategic support of a single candidate: Albert Ramdin, the Foreign Minister of Suriname. With this alignment, CARICOM has positioned itself as a strong bloc in an election fraught with geopolitical implications, gender equity debates, and regional rivalries.

### The Geopolitical Landscape

The collective endorsement of Ramdin's candidacy by CARICOM gives him 14 of the 18 votes required for victory. He has announced that he also has the committed support of Chile, Honduras, and Peru. Assuming these commitments hold, he is just one vote shy of clinching the position.

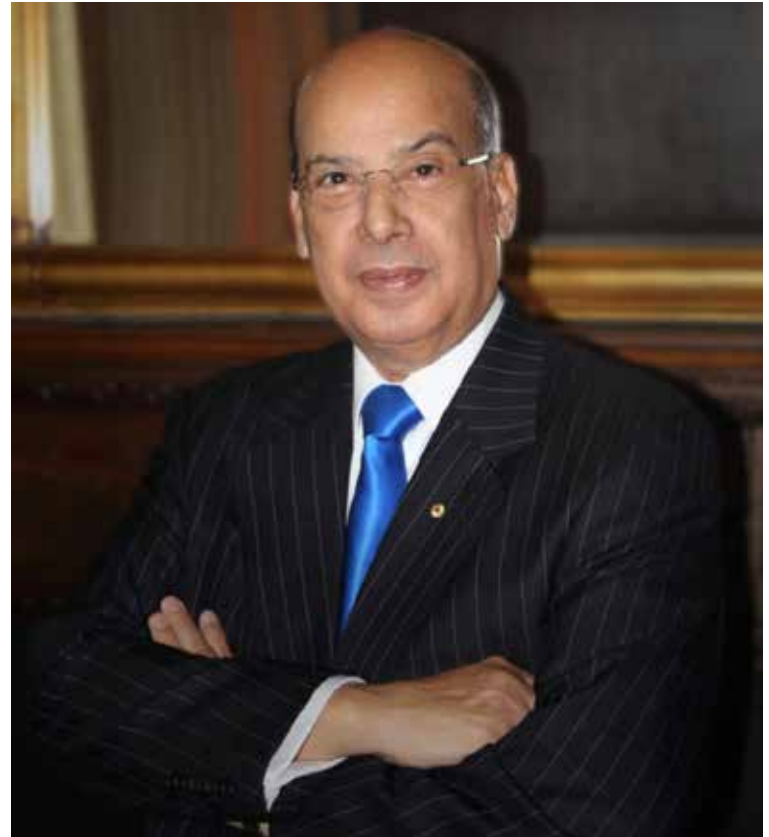
Meanwhile, Paraguay's Foreign Minister Rubén Ramírez has emerged as a contender. In a bold display to OAS member states, Ramírez prominently exhibited a photograph of himself with U.S. Presi-

dent-elect Donald Trump at the latter's Florida home, Mar-a-Lago, on November 25. He also made pointed references to conversations about the future direction of the OAS with Carlos Trujillo, a former U.S. Ambassador to the OAS under Trump's first presidency. While Ramírez's display appears calculated to imply tacit U.S. backing, it remains unclear whether such support will materialize or significantly influence the race.

The election reflects broader tensions within the Americas. The OAS has long adhered to an informal rule that the Secretary General and Assistant Secretary General cannot hail from the same subregion. With Ramdin vying for the top post, CARICOM's ability to retain the Assistant Secretary General position—a role that CARICOM nationals have held for 40 of the past 45 years—is uncertain.

### The UN Factor

Beyond the OAS, the election has ramifications for global diplomacy. A successful bid by a CARICOM candidate for Secretary General of the OAS could effectively disqualify the region from fielding a candidate for the United Nations Secretary General position in 2026. It is widely believed that it is the



Sir Ronald Sanders

turn of the Latin American and Caribbean Group at the UN to assume the post of Secretary General. Latin American states may leverage Ramdin's OAS victory to block CARICOM nominees for the UN Secretary General post, arguing that the region cannot hold both roles.

This dynamic underscores the zero-sum nature of global and regional diplomacy, where gains in one arena can translate to losses in another.

### Gender and Regional Politics

Calls for a female Secretary General at both the OAS and the UN add another layer of complexity.

Although no women have officially entered the race for either position, the expectation for gender equity remains significant. Barbados' Prime Minister Mia Mottley has been informally touted, in international circles, as a potential candidate, though she has not expressed interest. Meanwhile, some Latin American women are actively seeking the UN Secretary General post and may yet emerge in the OAS race, complicating the dynamics further.

Additionally, after the inauguration of President Trump on January 20, 2025, the United States—

*cont'd on pg 13*



*cont'd from pg 12*

historically influential in OAS elections—may sponsor a Latin American candidate aligned with U.S. interests. Should this occur, considerable pressure will likely be applied to OAS member states to support the U.S.-favoured candidate. The betting within the OAS is that this scenario is a strong possibility, and it is being watched with considerable interest.

### **What's at Stake for CARICOM?**

CARICOM's collective backing of Ramdin marks a significant milestone in regional diplomacy, demonstrating a rare unity when a top international position is at stake—particularly in the face of potential influence or pressure from larger powers.

However, a loss in the Secretary General race could jeopardize CARICOM's ability to secure either of the OAS's top positions. With its focus

on the March 2025 Secretary General election, CARICOM would have limited time to campaign effectively for a candidate in the Assistant Secretary General election just two months later in May, should Ramdin's bid fall short.

With neither posts of Secretary General or the Assistant Secretary General, CARICOM will lose the prestige and recognition that occupation of the top positions bestow. However, the group's influence in the OAS will not necessarily diminish, provided its national delegations are firmly and positively engaged in its work.

### **Conclusion**

The outcome of the election for OAS Secretary General will profoundly shape the future role and direction of the Organization. One must hope that, in the end, the choice will be guided not by the nationality or

region of the candidate, nor by the desire of any nation to dominate the OAS, but by the candidate's vision for a strong Organization and its mission to integrate and strengthen The Americas on a basis of equity and rights.

CARICOM and its candidate, Albert Ramdin, must embrace and champion this principle, recognizing that the stakes extend far beyond personal or regional ambitions. Regardless of the outcome, CARICOM's unified stance in this election signals a growing maturity in its regional diplomacy—an approach that must continue to guide its engagement on the global stage.

*(The writer is Antigua and Barbuda's Ambassador to the US and the OAS. The views expressed are entirely his own. Responses and previous commentaries: [www.sirronald-sanders.com](http://www.sirronald-sanders.com))*



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# India's 'blockbuster' drugs to take on deadly superbugs

By Soutik Biswas

Antibiotics are hailed as medical saviours.

But they are increasingly facing a crafty adversary: bacteria that mutate and adapt and outwit the very drugs designed to defeat them and cure the infections they cause.

These antibiotic-resistant "superbugs" directly caused 1.14 million deaths worldwide in 2021, according to The Lancet, a medical journal. Antibiotics - which are considered to be the first line of defence against severe infections - did not work on most of these cases.

India is among the countries hardest hit by "antimicrobial resistance". In 2019 alone, antibiotic-resistant infections caused around 300,000 deaths. They alone are responsible for the deaths of nearly 60,000 newborns each year.

But some hope is on the horizon. A number of promising locally-developed new drugs show potential to combat antibiotic-resistant pathogens. They also offer a game-changing solution to preserve last-resort treatments.

Enmetazobactam, developed by Chennai-based Orchid Pharma, is the first antimicrobial invented in India to be approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). This injectable drug treats severe



Drug-resistant infections are most prevalent in critical care units.

conditions like urinary tract infections (UTIs), pneumonia and bloodstream infections by targeting bacteria's defence mechanisms rather than the bacteria itself.

Bacteria often produce enzymes, like beta-lactamase, to destroy antibiotics. Enmetazobactam binds tightly to those enzymes, neutralising them and allowing the antibiotic to kill the bacteria effectively.

To put it simply, the drug immobilises the bacteria's "weapon" without triggering resistance easily. This also preserves the effectiveness of other antibiotics, including carbapenems, which are the reliable "last line of defence" drugs.

Trials across 19 countries - the drug has been approved by global regulators - with more than 1,000 patients have shown its ef-

fectiveness. "The drug has shown remarkable potency against these bacteria that have evolved over the years. It is administered via intravenous [IV] infusion in hospitals, specifically for critically ill patients, and is not available over the counter," Dr Maneesh Paul, the lead co-inventor of the drug, told the BBC.

Mumbai-based Wockhardt is testing a new antibiotic, called Zaynich, for severe drug-resistant infections. Developed over 25 years, the drug is currently in Phase-3 trials and expected to launch next year.

Dr Habib Khorakiwala, founder chairman of Wockhardt, has described Zaynich as a "ground-breaking, one-of-its-kind new antibiotic designed to combat all major superbugs". It was administered on compassion-

ate grounds to 30 critically ill patients in India who were unresponsive to any other antibiotics. Remarkably, all survived. "This would make India proud," Dr Khorakiwala said.

Also in Phase-3 testing is Wockhardt's Nafithromycin, trademarked as MIQNAF, a three-day oral treatment for community-acquired bacterial pneumonia with a 97% success rate. Existing treatments to the disease have resistance as high as 60%. Its trials are set to conclude next year and once it's approved, the company says it could be launched commercially by late next year.

A 30-member Bengaluru-based biopharma firm Bugworks Research has partnered with Geneva-based non-profit Global Antibiotic Research and

*cont'd on pg 15*



*cont'd from pg 14*

Development Partnership, or GARDP, to develop a new class of antibiotics for treating serious drug-resistant infections. Currently in early Phase-1 trials, the drug is five-to-eight years from market readiness.

“Antibiotics are becoming less effective, but big money is in drugs for cancer, diabetes and other conditions, not antibiotics,” Anand Anandkumar, CEO of Bugworks, told the BBC. «There’s little innovation because antibiotics are kept as a last-resort option. Big pharma isn’t focusing on antibiotic resistance. We’ve been funded by different organisations, but less than 10% of our funding comes from India.”

But that needs to change. A 2023 drug resistance surveillance report by Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), which analysed nearly 100,000 bacterial cultures from 21 specialised care hospitals around India, highlighted worrying trends in antibiotic resistance.

*E.coli* (*Escherichia coli*), commonly found in the intestines of humans and animals after consumption of contaminated food, was the most frequently isolated pathogen.

This was followed by *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, which can cause pneumonia and also infect the blood, cuts in the skin and the lining of the brain to cause meningitis. Coming close was the rise of the multidrug-resistant pathogen called *Acinetobacter baumannii*, which attacks the lungs of patients on life support in critical care units.

The survey found antibiotic effectiveness against *E.coli* had consistently sharply declined while *Klebsiella pneumoniae* showed an alarming rise in drug resistance. Doctors found that some of the main antibiotics were less than 15% effective in treating infections caused by these pathogens. Most worrying was the rising resistance to



India's crowded hospitals are hotspots for infections.

carbapenems, a critical last-resort antibiotic.

“It’s like playing whack-a-mole with bacteria. They evolve at an incredibly fast pace, and we’re always playing catch-up. You get rid of one, another pops up. We need more innovation and to learn from past mistakes,” Dr Manica Balasegaram, executive director of GARDP, told the BBC.

Not surprisingly, GARDP is focusing on India. It’s collaborating with Hyderabad-based Aurigene Pharmaceutical Services to produce zoliflodacin, a novel oral antibiotic for gonorrhea, a sexually transmitted disease which is showing increasing resistance to antibiotics. GARDP has also partnered with Japan’s pharma company Shionogi to distribute cefiderocol - a breakthrough FDA-approved antibiotic for tough infections like UTIs and hospital-acquired pneumonia - in 135 countries, with plans for production in India.

But this is only one part of the story. Doctors say drug prescription practices in India urgently need reform. The widespread use of broad-spectrum antibiotics - they target many bacteria types but can kill good bacteria, cause side-effects and increase antibiotic resistance - fuels drug resistance by encouraging the emergence of drug-resistant

bacterial mutants.

Instead, say doctors, narrow-spectrum antibiotics should be prioritised. But hospitals often lack antibiograms - microbiology-based antibiotic guidelines - forcing doctors to prescribe “broadly and blindly”.

“I am definitely excited that we will have these new drugs. But what is also important is that we should create mechanisms that they should not be misused the way we have previously done with [what were once also] blockbuster drugs. Improper and irresponsible use will compromise the longevity of these new drugs,” warns Dr Kamini Walia, a scientist at ICMR.

The rapid mutation of bacteria, which can evolve in a matter of hours, underscores the urgency of a holistic approach. This includes reducing infections through better water, sanitation and hygiene, improving vaccine uptake, strengthening hospital infection control policies, educating physicians and deterring self-medication by patients. “Combating antimicrobial resistance is a complex, multi-faceted challenge tied to healthcare equity and systemic accountability,” says Dr Walia.

The message is clear: without urgent action, we risk a future where even relatively minor infections could become untreatable.



# Regional News



Dr Ralph Gonsalves, Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines

## Gonsalves stresses SVG stance against CBI while speaking in Dominica

Dr Ralph Gonsalves, Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, has reiterated his government's decision not to implement a Citizenship by Investment

(CBI) programme.

Speaking at the 14th annual Dame Mary Eugenia Charles Memorial Lecture this week, Gonsalves emphasized the government's principled stance against the sale of citizenship, stressing that it is a fundamental right rather than a commodity.

"The highest office in the land is that of citizen," Gonsalves declared. "It is higher than the office of president, governor general, or prime minister. From our perspective, citizenship is not something that can be sold. The passport, which is the outward sign of citizenship, is not a commodity like potatoes, yams, or cassava."

The Prime Minister's remarks focused on the moral and practical aspects of the issue, outlining two main reasons for the government's position.

The first, he explained, is a matter of principle: the concept of citizenship cannot be reduced to a saleable product.

"The second issue of practicality is with two dimensions how some programmes run and the fact that countries external to us which we engage in prac-

*cont'd on pg 17*

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## LIAT reschedules British Virgin Islands launch

LIAT 2020 has rescheduled the launch of its anticipated new route to Tortola, British Virgin Islands.

It is now set to commence on December 8, 2024, after the postponement of last week's original launch date.

"We are excited to announce the launch of our

flights to the British Virgin Islands, marking a key milestone in delivering on our startup's core value proposition of enabling same-day travel from the northern to southern Caribbean," said CEO Hafsah Abdulsalam.

"This route launch brings our commitment to seamless regional connec-

tivity closer to reality, and we are proud to achieve this step in our mission to strengthen connections across the region."

The route will connect travellers to the Terrance B Lettsome International Airport, adding to LIAT's aggressive network expansion since its relaunch in August.

The airline has already established routes to key Caribbean destinations, including St Lucia, Barbados, Grenada, Dominica, St Vincent, St Maarten, and Guyana.

LIAT has scheduled additional route additions to Jamaica on December 20 and Trinidad on December 19.

*cont'd from pg 16*

tical terms are taking increasingly hostile positions and the impact that may have on those programmes and on persons who are issued passports under such programmes."

"I understand that some revenue is generated through these programmes," Gonsalves acknowledged. "And I know that lawyers, accountants, and middlemen benefit finan-

cially. However, these are sovereign decisions, and in St Vincent and the Grenadines, we have made our choice."

The issue of Citizenship by Investment has been a subject of debate in the country, with the opposition arguing in favour of such programmes as a means to generate revenue and attract foreign investment.

However, the Prime Minister's

remarks underscore the SVG government's commitment to preserving the integrity of citizenship, emphasizing that their decision is rooted in both principle and practicality.

Gonsalves concluded his address by reaffirming his government's stance: "That's in a nutshell our position. We believe that citizenship, and the passport that accompanies it, should not be for sale."



## Syrian rebels capture second major city after military withdraws

By David Gritten

Syrian rebels say they have taken full control of a second major city, after the military withdrew its troops from Hama in another setback for President Bashar al-Assad.

The leader of the Islamist militant group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), Abu Mohammed al-Jawlani, declared “victory” in Hama and vowed there would be “no revenge”.

Earlier, HTS fighters and their allies took over Hama central prison and released inmates amid fierce battles, while the military said it had redeployed troops outside the city.

Hama is home to one million people and 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 rebel commander told residents of Homs, which is the next city south on the highway from Aleppo to Damascus, that “your time has come”.

In the past, President Assad relied on Russia and Iran to crush his opponents.

But with both allies pre-occupied with their own affairs, it is unclear how - or if - he will be able to stop an advance that could threaten his government’s survival.

More than half a million people have been killed



Syrian rebels celebrated on the streets of Hama after the Syrian military pulled out.

since a civil war erupted in 2011 after Assad’s government cracked down violently on peaceful pro-democracy protests.

The rebels broke through the government’s defensive lines north of Hama following several days of heavy fighting.

The military had sent reinforcements to the city after the fall of Aleppo. But despite support from Russian air strikes and Iran-backed militia fighters, troops were unable to prevent Hama being overrun on Thursday.

Rebel commander Hassan Abdul Ghani said in the morning that its fighters were engaged in fierce battles in various districts.

In the early afternoon, he announced that hundreds of inmates from Hama’s central prison had been released.

Minutes later, the mil-

itary announced the redeployment of troops outside Hama “to preserve civilian lives and prevent urban combat”.

Photos and videos posted online and verified by the BBC showed fighters in several north-eastern neighbourhoods. The freed inmates were also filmed celebrating outside the central prison with a rebel and a reporter for a pro-opposition news outlet.

Abdul Ghani subsequently declared: “We’re pleased to tell you that Hama has been completely liberated after our forces have finished combing operations.”

He also said the rebels had cleared Hama military airport, in the city’s western outskirts, as well as Jabal Zain al-Abadin, a strategically important hill just to the north-east that over-

looks the Damascus-Aleppo highway.

In a video, Abu Mohammed al-Jawlani said his fighters had entered Hama to “cleanse the wound that has endured in Syria for 40 years”.

“I ask God almighty that it be a conquest with no revenge,” he added.

The HTS leader was referring to the killing of between 10,000 and 25,000 people in the city in 1982, when the late President Hafez al-Assad sent in tanks and artillery to crush an Islamist uprising.

Similar tactics have been employed across the country by his son, Bashar, over the past 13 years.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), a UK-based monitoring group, says more than 820 people - most of them com-

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batants, but also including 111 civilians - have been killed across the country since the start of the rebel offensive eight days ago.

The UN has said the fighting is also “worsening an already horrific situation for civilians in the north of the county”.

An estimated 280,000 people have been displaced, most of them women and children, and some civilians are trapped in front-line areas unable to reach safer locations.

In Aleppo, home to two million people, some public services and critical facilities - including hospitals, bakeries, power stations, water, internet and telecommunications - are meanwhile disrupted or non-functional because of shortages of supplies and personnel.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres urged “all those with influence to do their part” to end the civil war.

“We are seeing the bitter fruits of a chronic collective failure of previous de-escalation arrangements to produce a genuine nationwide ceasefire or a serious political process,” he added. “These must change.”

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



The rebels pushed into Hama from the north after capturing the second city of Aleppo.

intensified their strikes on rebel-held areas in recent days, Iran-backed militias have sent fighters to reinforce the government’s defensive lines, 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 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). Turkey, which has a large restive Kurdish minority, considers the Kurds in Syria as a threat.

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

HTS and its allies said on 27 November that they

had launched an offensive to “deter aggression”, accusing the government and allied Iran-backed militias of escalating attacks on civilians 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. Its new leader Naim Qassem said on Thursday that it would “be by Syria’s side in thwarting the goals of this aggression as much as we can”.

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.



## Disappearances double in Sinaloa amid Mexican cartel rift

By Vanessa Buschschlüter

The number of people who have been reported missing in the violence-racked Mexican state of Sinaloa has doubled since two rival factions of a drugs cartel started a bloody battle for control of their criminal organisation.

According to official figures, more than 200 people have disappeared since the two factions of the Sinaloa cartel declared war on each other almost three months ago.

The feud broke out after the arrest in the US of Ismael “El Mayo” Zambada.

His followers, known as “Los Mayos” or “La Mayiza”, say he was betrayed by the son of the infamous founder of the Sinaloa cartel, Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, and have turned on members of his faction, known as “Los Chapitos”.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum has despatched her security chief, Omar García Harfuch, to Sinaloa state to quell the violence.

The spike in murders and disappearances in Sinaloa has overshadowed Sheinbaum’s first months in office.

She was sworn in as Mexico’s first female head of state on 1 October after a campaign in which she had promised to maintain the approach taken by her predecessor in office, who



The security forces scored a victory with a huge fentanyl bust in Sinaloa but disappearances have doubled in the state.

avoided direct confrontations with the cartels.

“There will be no return to the irresponsible drug war,” she had said in her inaugural speech, ruling out a more militaristic approach.

But faced with growing criticism in her own country and pressure from US President-elect Donald Trump, who wants Mexico to do more to curb the trafficking to the US of the synthetic opioid fentanyl, Sheinbaum on Wednesday appeared to make tackling the violence in Sinaloa her priority.

In a news conference, she said her Administration would take a “zero tolerance” approach.

She also praised the

security forces for making Mexico’s biggest fentanyl bust to date.

“This is an investigation that has been going on for a long time and yesterday, it gave these results. It is the largest seizure of fentanyl pills ever made,” she said.

Earlier, Mexico’s top security official, Omar García Harfuch, had announced on X, formerly known as Twitter, that the fentanyl pills seized at two properties in Sinaloa were worth \$394m (£309m) and weighed more than a tonne.

“These actions will continue until the violence diminishes in the state of Sinaloa,” he said in the post [in Spanish].

News of the massive

fentanyl bust came just over a week after Trump threatened to impose 25% tariffs on goods coming from Mexico and Canada on day one of his presidency.

He said the tariffs would remain in place until “until such time as drugs, in particular fentanyl, and all illegal aliens stop this invasion of our country”.

Mexican officials also announced on Wednesday that they had detained more than 5,200 migrants across the country the previous day, in what appeared to be a response to President Sheinbaum’s promise to Trump to stop a migrant caravan moving north through Mexico from reaching the US border.



## Victoria through to Global Super League final

Victoria became the first team to advance to the final of the inaugural staging of the Global Super League, thanks to a 75-run win over the Hampshire Hawks at Providence in Guyana on Thursday.

Sanjay Krishnamurthi and Blake Macdonald starred to lead the Australian side to 170 for four from their 20 overs after being put in to bat by Hawks skipper Chris Wood.

Krishnamurthi led the way with 77 off 49 balls, including seven fours and four sixes, while opening partner Macdonald made 59 off 43 balls, including five fours and two sixes, as the pair put on

137 in 15 overs for the first wicket.

Pacer Sonny Baker took two for 29 from his four overs, while the other two wickets were taken by Benny Howell and Liam Dawson.

In reply, the Hampshire Hawks were skittled out for just 95 in 12.1 overs as Calum Stow ripped through the batting line-up with his left-arm wrist spin on the way to grabbing four wickets for 17 runs in 3.1 overs.

Jackson Smith supported with two wickets for 28 runs in three overs.

Six Hampshire batsmen reached double figures, but none were able to carry on to a big score, the highest being



Victoria's Sanjay Krishnamurthi plays an attacking shot during his knock of 77n against the Hampshire Hawks in their Global Super League match at the National Stadium in Providence, Guyana, on Thursday, December 5, 2024.

Joe Weatherley's 18.

(today).

After three wins out of their four games, Victoria will now have the chance to be the first champions of the Global Super League when they play the final on Friday

Their opponent in the final either be the Lahore Qalandars or the Rangpur Riders, who met in the final preliminary round match on Thursday night.

## Teams confirmed for Youth Soccerama



Seven-year-old Young Warriors' player, Nazario DeCastro, center, is flanked by the club's Youth Soccerama organizer Colin James, left, and host of ABS TV's GMAB Tania Forde, after an appearance on the show. (Photo courtesy Young Warriors).

Several clubs and teams have confirmed their participation in the Young Warriors Football Club's second annual Youth Soccerama, which will take place on the V.C. Bird Day public holiday on Monday, December 9.

The event will be held at the Buckley's Primary School's playing field from 10 am to 4 pm. Players representing sides from All Saints, Gray's Green, Freeman's Village, Earthquake of Fort Road, Buckley's, and John Hughes have confirmed their participation.

They will be competing for top honours in Under-7, Under-9, Under-11, and Under-13 age categories.

However, organizers say they are awaiting confirmation from a few more clubs and teams and have indicated that they will add another two age categories, the Under-15 and Under-17, based

on interest shown by some teams.

The top three teams in each age category will receive trophies, while the top goal-scorer and best player in each division will receive the Golden Boot and Golden Ball awards, respectively.

The event is being held as part of a fundraising breakfast soup and barbeque to assist with the development of the game at the grassroots level.

The Breakfast Soups and Barbeque fundraiser will serve up local specials to satisfy the taste buds of all and sundry, including vegetarian patrons.

There will also be a bar featuring local drinks and other beverages, plus a pop-up shop selling items for gifts and Christmas decorating.

Special attractions will comprise live entertainment, a bounce castle, fun games, and a lucky dip.





The University of the West Indies Five Islands Campus volleyball team. (ABAVA)

## UWI wins last match in debut campaign in Business Volleyball League

Newcomers, the University of the West Indies (UWI) wrapped up their debut campaign on a winning note in the Antigua and Barbuda Amateur Volleyball Association's (ABAVA) Business League Championship on Wednesday evening.

The UWI was awarded a 2-0 victory by default against the Police, which failed to show up for their final encounter in Group B of the round-robin preliminary stage of the competition at the indoor stadium at the YMCA Sports Complex.

The UWI were awarded the walk-over victory with scores of 25-0, 25-0. It allows the UWI to finish in fourth place in the seven-team Group B with an identical record as the Media, which clinched third place.

The UWI and the Media finished with records of three wins and three

losses from their six round-robin matches.

The Police also ended their campaign in the cellar with a record of one win and five losses in their six matches.

Another newcomer, the EZ Fit Flyers, recorded their first win in the competition with a 2-0 victory against the Antigua and Barbuda International Institute of Technology (ABIIT) on Wednesday.

The Flyers took 51 minutes to prevail 25-23, 26-24 against ABIIT in the keenly contested Group B affair. The Flyers will remain second from the bottom of Group B with a record of one win and four losses from five matches.

The ABIIT wrapped up their campaign by finishing fourth in Group B with a record of two wins and four losses from their six matches.

The preliminary stage of the business volleyball league concluded with the last two matches on Thursday (yesterday).

The top two teams in each group at the end of the preliminary stage will qualify for the knockout semi-final stage of the competition, which will take place at the YMCA Sports Complex on Saturday.

Group A winners Nate's Photography and defending back-to-back champions APUA Inet have already qualified for the semi-finals along with ICONS and the Eastern Caribbean Amalgamated Bank (ECAB) from Group B.

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.





The CPTSA Wings football team.

## CPTSA Wings beat Young Warriors in Second Division League

The CPTSA Wings recorded their second win in the Antigua and Barbuda Football Association's (ABFA) Second Division on Wednesday.

The CPTSA Wings won for the second time in six matches with a 5-0 drubbing of the Young Warriors FC at the St. Johnstone's Village Stadium.

Joshua Lake had a double conversion with strikes in the seventh and 59th minutes.

Dow Southwell converted a penalty kick in the 76th minute, and the other goals were scored by Kian-dre Christopher in the 19th minute and Damorni Powell in the 66th minute.

The CPTSA Wings will

move on to eight points from six encounters, while the Young Warriors will remain on three points after crashing to their fifth defeat in six matches.

The ABFA's Second Division league will resume with four matches on Friday (today) at 4:20 pm.

Herberts FC will meet National Parks English

Harbour at the Pigotts playing field, and Cedar Grove Blue Jays will tackle Golden Grove in Cedar Grove.

Sea View Farm FC will host Bethesda in Sea View Farm, and Guydalli FC will take on the Young Lions of Old Road at the St. Johnstone's Village Stadium.

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da Institute of Continuing Education (ABICE) finished in third place, and All Saints Secondary came in fourth at the end of the preliminary round of matches.

The top four finishers have qualified for the knockout semi-final stage of the competition, which is slated to take place at the Antigua Recreation Ground (ARG) next week.

Clare Hall Secondary opened up a three-point gap at the top of the Under-14 Boys Division after winning by

default against the Sir Novelle Richards Academy, which failed to show up for their encounter.

The result allows Clare Hall Secondary to record their seventh win in eight matches to advance to 22 points, three ahead of defending champions Princess Margaret School and Antigua Grammar School.

Sir Novell Richards Academy will remain second from the bottom of the standings on three points after losing for the seventh time in eight 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.



## PMS remain in hunt for Under-16 Boys Division title

Defending champions Princess Margaret School (PMS) continues to challenge leaders Ottos Comprehensive School (OCS) for this year's title in the Under-16 Boys Division of the Ministry of Sports, Cool and Smooth, and Joma Patrick C. Whyte Cup competition.

Princess Margaret School moved within two points of Ottos Comprehensive School at the top of the standings by recording their seventh win in eight matches with a 4-0 victory against Clare Hall Secondary School at the PMS playing field on Wednesday.

Jahmarie George scored twice, and Shumba Thomas and Hakeem Musah each converted once for Princess Margaret School, which consolidated their position in second place.

The result ensured that Clare Hall Secondary School remains on 12 points after suffering their fourth defeat in eight matches.

Princess Margaret School advanced to 22 points, two adrift of leaders Ottos Comprehensive School.

Princess Margaret School and Ottos Compre-



Jahmarie George of Princess Margaret School scored twice against Clare Hall Secondary on Wednesday.

hensive School remain the only unbeaten teams in the round-robin competition.

Both teams will clash in their final outing, which will determine the champions, in the last match of the competition at the Antigua Recreation Ground (ARG) on Thursday, December 12.

The Antigua Grammar School and St. Joseph's

Academy fought to a 1-1 draw in another Under-16 Boys Division encounter at the PMS playing field on Wednesday.

The result allows St. Joseph's Academy to remain in third place by advancing to 17 points after securing their second draw in eight matches.

The Antigua Grammar

School will remain in eighth place by advancing to seven points after claiming their first draw in seven matches.

Two other matches, which were slated to take place at the Keithley Sheppard Recreational Park on Wednesday, were not played.

Defending champions, the Antigua State College, were awarded victory by default against Irene B. Williams Secondary, which failed to show up for their final match in the preliminary round of the Under-20 Boys Division competition.

The result ensured that Irene B. Williams finished in the cellar of the 10-team round-robin competition without any points after losing all nine matches in the preliminary stage.

The result also allows Antigua State College to finish in second place behind preliminary round winners Princess Margaret School.

Antigua State College, which won seven encounters, finished with 22 points, two adrift of Princess Margaret School, from their quota of nine matches.

The Antigua and Barbuda  
*cont'd on pg 23*