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Licence fee increase not 'etched in stone', says PM Browne



Local News



Licence fee increase not 'etched in stone', says PM Browne



Prime Minister Gaston Browne has declared that the proposed 40 percent increase in vehicle licence fee is not 'etched in stone' and that his government is willing to make some adjustment on how the increase is applied.

Speaking on Point FM radio on Saturday, PM Browne said he is willing to accept a compromise position where motor cars are placed in one category and that Sports Utility Vehicles (SUV's) pay another amount, or even to consider charging the increase based on the CC rating of a vehicle.

This comes as the prime minister was responding to a 'push-back' from members of the public who complained that the 40 percent hike across the board was unreasonable.

The prime minister reported that the proposed increase will be going to parliament on Thursday in the form of a resolution so that the elected members of the House can express their views on the matter. Only then, will the increase be final.

One proposal that the prime minister is open to is for motor cars (sedans and compacts) to pay \$100.00 across the board while the owners of SUV's pay the 40 percent increase. Here, this may be based on the CC rating of the vehicle. "There will be a 'carve out' for public service vehicles such as

buses and taxis because the last thing that we want is for there to be an increase in their fees to customers. However, we feel that heavy-duty equipment and commercial vehicles along with SUV's ought to pay the 40 percent increase," he stated.

PM Browne disclosed that there will be further discussions with the technicians of the Antigua and Barbuda Transport Board to help the government fine tune the pending increase in licence fees ahead of the parliamentary debate.

Earlier this month, the prime minister revealed that the government had entered into negotiations with a consortium of local banks to raise an estimated \$100 million dollars to undertake much needed road construction and repairs for the country's road network, much of which had fallen into serious disrepair over the past several years.

He said there was tentative agreement from the banks to provide the funding and that the pending increase would be a dedicated fund to payback the loan. Additionally, the banks had agreed to provide their own engineers to monitor the disbursement and spending of the money to ensure that all goes to roadworks as has been committed.

On the issue of consultation, the prime minister described his appearance on the Saturday programme where he fields questions from the public on a range of issues, include the increase in the licence fee, as a form of consultation.

He noted too that the licence fees have not increased in over thirty years and that even without the need to raise funds for repaying the loan, there is justification for raising licence fees at this time.



Local News

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A call for banks, hotels to invest more in their employees

There's a clarion call for local banks to invest in their local staff by providing scholarships to those who exhibit qualities for future advancements to meet the need for senior management personnel now and in the future.

The call comes from Prime Minister Gaston Browne who noted that there is a trend emerging where banks are importing talent from outside the country and hiring talent from other islands to take up senior positions in these institutions.

The prime minister revealed that the government had offered through the Prime Minister's Scholarship Programme to partially fund study programmes for young bankers with the expectation that the financial institutions would cover the remainder. However, according to the prime minister there have been no 'takers' of the offer.

"We want to see a stronger programme of succession/management planning within various organisations in this country; to have something other than having to import foreign or regional labour. While we are part of the OECS and CARICOM, certainly, we should be developing a culture to develop and to promote local leadership," he declared.

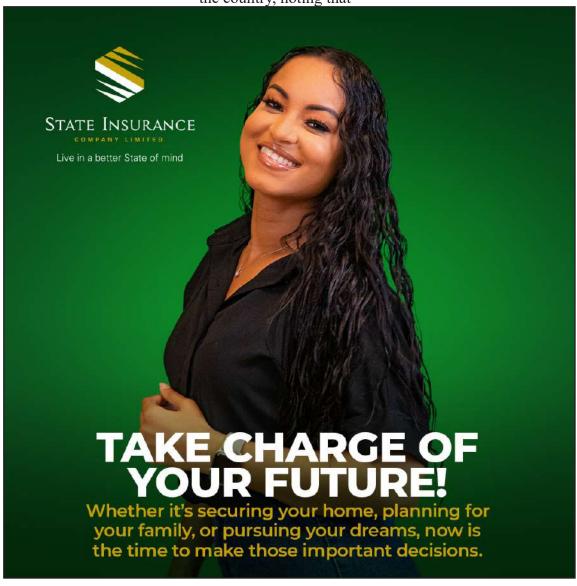
PM Browne used his own experiences of being a young man some thirty odd years ago when he was spotted by the then Swiss American Bank as someone who displayed much talent, in whom the bank invested, not just for a first degree, but also for a Master's Degree.

According to the prime minister it is unimaginable that thirty years later, top banks in the country have to resort to importing talent from abroad and not promoting from within their organisations.

"I think that this is an indictment of local banks that have gone down this path of hiring from abroad. You are telling me that an all-local board of directors of one such bank, cannot find a few local Antigua and Barbuda nationals who they can promote within the bank?" he queried.

PM Browne said the same principle applies to the operators of the hotels in the country, noting that after decades of operating a vibrant tourism industry, this is not reflected in the senior management of most hotels. Yes, he added, many nationals populate the middle management levels, but the senior management positions appear to have eluded them.

He noted that this has been a longstanding concern of several governments and yet there seemingly has been little or no movement in that regard.



Local News



'A once in a lifetime achievement'



Hugh and Jane Campbell

The Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority and the Hawksbill hotel left no stones unturned as they expressed profound delight with a British couple who have visited Antigua and Barbuda and stayed at the hotel for an amazing 100 times.

Tourism Minister, Charles Max Fernandez, ABTA CEO, Colin C. James, Resident Manager at Hawksbill Hotel, Mario Thomas and included Clarence 'Sir Oungku' Edwards and other officials were on hand on Friday to express the nation's and the hotel's pleasure in welcoming Hugh and Jane Campbell to Antigua and Barbuda and to Hawksbill hotel in particular, their 'homeaway-from-home'.

Minister Fernandez, in brief remarks, thanked the couple for choosing to visit Antigua and Barbuda on so many occasions and he had a special word for the hotel's staff, whose service he suggested had a role to play in the Campbell's decision to return to the hotel time, and time again.

"Hawksbill Hotel is such a beautiful property that I can understand that people would want to come back. However, we brag so much of having 365 beaches that it has to be something more than the beautiful beaches and ocean that make you want to come back and that has to do with you the people at Hawksbill who are here day in and day out...who provide exceptional service. That is why too, that

we make the case that the most important asset at any hotel property is its staff. We say often that you, the staff, are what really makes Antigua and Barbuda stand out. You are the best in the Caribbean, if not the world, and I am proud to say that," he remarked.

ABTA CEO James also spoke to the 'intangibles' that make visitors such as the Campbell's making a decision to return to Antigua and Barbuda and Hawksbill hotel repeatedly. "We must be doing something right," he noted. "If there were frequent flyer miles for staying at the hotel, you would be citizens of Antigua and Barbuda," he remarked humourously.

Speaking on behalf of management and staff of

the hotel, Resident Manager Thomas described the celebration as a 'truly remarkable milestone'. "Today, management and staff at Hawksbill Antigua want to express our deepest gratitude and admiration for the Campbell's for choosing our hotel as their home-away-from-home not one, not ten times but for an incredible 100 times," he stated.

In his response, Hugh Campbell thanked everyone for coming to join in their celebration and he spoke of the joy both he and his wife share each time they have visited the country and Hawksbill hotel, dating back to the late 1980's.

Also on hand to welcome the Campbell's was leader of the Burning Flames band, Clarence 'Sir Oungku' Edwards whose music the Campbell's say they have enjoyed many times by visiting the Lion's Den at Carnival time when the band played there.

As part of the celebration, the Campbell's were presented with a gift basket of local treats, a stunning painting of Hawksbill Beach by local artist Stephen Murphy, a commemorative plaque marking their 100th visit, and a copy of Antigua and Barbuda: Absolutely Beautiful, featuring breathtaking photography by Joseph Jones.



Local News

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Eleven contestants to vie for Miss Labour Queen, 2025

Eleven contestants have been selected to compete in the 2025 instalment of the annual Miss Labour Queen Pageant, slated for May 2, 2025.

The contestants were selected following a screening session that took place at the People's Place on Saturday. A committee headed by co-chairs, Senator Shenella Govia and Shenique Barry oversaw the screening process where the contestants were selected based on their competence in three specific areas; interview, swimwear and performing talent.

Spokesman for producers of the show Marsh and Marsh Productions, Brucilla Marsh said the 2025 Miss Labour Queen Pageant will be held under the lights of the annual Labour Week activities organised jointly by the Antigua



theme: Renaissance 'the Rebirth'.

The Miss Labour Queen Pageant is one of the high-

Trades and Labour Union and the Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party.

The show will be held at

People's Place. The contestants will compete in five categories; Introductory Speech, Performing Talent, Swimwear, Evening Wear, and an Interview.

In recent years, the Miss Labour Queen Pageant has served as a stepping stone for young ladies who wish to enter the Queen of Carnival pageant for Carnival.

According to Marsh...the names of the contestants and the constituencies that they will represent will be unveiled on Wednesday.

The Reigning Miss Labour Queen is Aliyah Wayne who represented All Saints West constituency in last year's pageant,



Local News



Antigua and Barbuda young leaders are invited to apply for a special leadership training programme in Canada

Young leaders from Antigua and Barbuda are being encouraged to apply for special leadership training programme that takes place in Canada this year.

From May 22 to June 1, the Caribbean Canada Leaders Dialogue 2025 (CCLD 2025) educational leadership experience hosts 100 participants from the Caribbean and Canada for a cross-sector experiential leadership development program.

Under the CCLD 2025 umbrella theme of Impact-Driven Leadership: Creating Positive Change in Our Communities, there is a focus on six crucial sub-themes – diversity and inclusion, sustainability and innovation, ethics, impact, collaboration, and advocacy.

An opening plenary will be held in Toronto, Ontario with all 100 participants who will have the opportunity to hear from leaders across government, industry, education, and civil society.

During the opening, seven groups of 14 participants, and one group of 16, will be created with a mandatory sector balance. Each tour will travel to one Caribbean country to explore one of the six sub-themes, with the 7th group exploring the umbrella conference dialogue across real-time, complex issues, so that the quality and relevance of their decision-making





theme. Tour countries include Bahamas, Barbados, Bermuda, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, and Jamaica.

The diverse participants selected from across Canada and the Caribbean, will have first-hand exposure to new peer-topeer interactive learning experiences provoking

is improved.

Participants will learn from site visit interaction, and more importantly, from each other. Equally important is that field visits/reports must have unanimous team support – the "magic" formula that makes these conferences so unique. Team members align

themselves with opposite sector colleagues to carry their points internally, producing better dialogues and more informed citizens.

Meeting again at the closing plenary in Barbados, ideas, concepts, and solutions explored during the tours will be presented to a panel for further dialogue and exploration.

Applications are accepted from Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Aruba, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Haiti, Montserrat, Netherlands Antilles, Puerto Rico, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos and the United States Virgin Islands; and across all of Canada's provinces and territories.

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Local News



Indian Rower and Indian Honorary Consul pay courtesy call on The Governor General

Governor General, Sir Rodney Williams, recently received a courtesy call from Vijay Tewani, India's Honorary Consul to St. John's and Ananya Prasad, the first woman of Indian origin to complete a solo row across the Atlantic Ocean.

Honorary Consul Tewani has been instrumental in strengthening diplomatic ties between Antigua and Barbuda and India. His efforts have facilitated significant cultural and economic exchanges, enhancing the relationship between the two nations.

Prasad, an Indian-born adventurer who resides in the UK, recently made history by becoming the first woman of colour to



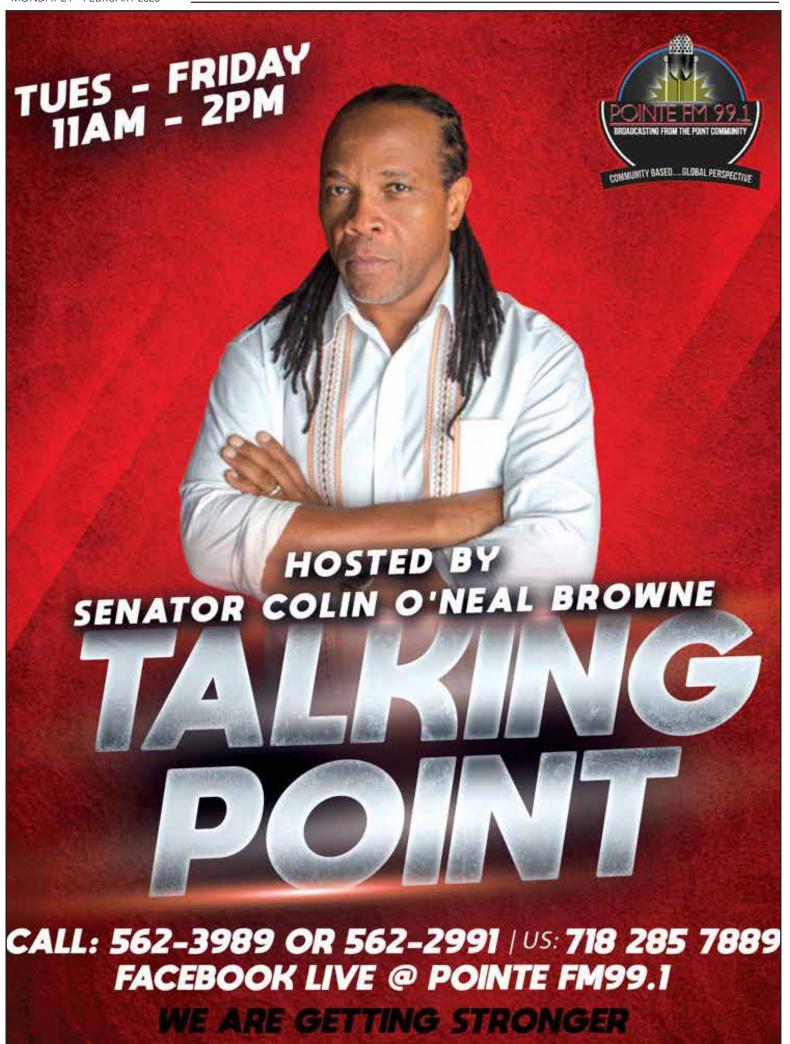
Photo left to right, Standing -Mr Vijay Tewani, Honourary Consul, Ms Ananya Prasad, Solo Rower, His Excellency Sir Rodney Williams, Governor General of Antigua and Barbuda

row solo and unsupported across the Atlantic Ocean.

She completed the grueling 3,000-mile journey in 52

days, 5 hours, and 44 minutes, securing second place in the solo category of the World's Toughest Row race. Her achievement stands as a powerful testament to perseverance, courage, and determination. Funds raised from her endeavour will be donated to charitable causes for mental health support. During the meeting, Sir Rodney commended both individuals for their outstanding contributions. He lauded Tewani's dedication to fostering international relations and praised Prasad's remarkable feat, which not only marks a milestone in adventure sports but also serves as an inspiration for women and minority groups worldwide.





Commentary



Good Humans 268 Expands Recycling Initiative to Tertiary Institutions





How often do we consider where our waste ends up? Do we think about the impact of a single plastic bottle tossed carelessly into the trash? Good Humans 268, a non-profit organi-

zation committed to environmental consciousness, aims to shift that mindset and inspire sustainable actions across Antigua and Barbuda. On Thursday 20th February 2025,

they took a bold step by expanding their distribution of recycling bins to the tertiary level, starting with the University of the West Indies (UWI) Five Islands campus. As Mahatma Gandhi once said, "Be the change that you wish to see in the world." The students and staff at the UWI Five Islands campus seemed to have embraced this call to action as they became the latest academic institution to join the school recycling program spearheaded by Good Humans 268.

During the handover ceremony, a representative from the UWI School of Health and Behavioral Sciences emphasized the importance of taking action now. "We understand the importance of climate change, we see the effects, and we know that we have to do something now because of all the challenges that we are facing here as Small Island Developing Sates. We want to thank Good Humans 268 once again from the School of Health and Behavioral Sciences and the faculty and students who are here just saying to our community that we are on board," the representative said.

Why wait for someone else to solve the climate crisis when we all have the power to make a difference? This is the question that the UWI community is answering with their commitment to sustainability. The introduction of recycling bins is a tangible step towards reducing waste and creating a greener campus environment.

One of the core objectives of this recycling

con't on pg 11

Commentary

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con't from pg 10

program is to tackle the mounting issue of plastic waste. Have we ever considered the journey of a single plastic bottle from its creation to its disposal? Left unchecked, plastic waste threatens marine life, pollutes the land, and takes hundreds of years to decompose. Good Humans 268 is working to change this reality by encouraging the proper collection, sorting, and recycling of plastic bottles.

A representative from UWI explained the importance of this initiative: "We see that there are a lot of plastic bottles, which, instead of sending them to the waste bin or trash heap, we can reuse, recycle, and reduce. So, we deeply appreciate the support and partnership with Good Humans 268." The recycling bins placed at the UWI Five Islands campus are specifically for empty plastics, cans and glasses. These bottles are collected and sorted by Good Humans 268 to ensure that they are properly recycled, ultimately reducing the amount of waste that ends up in landfill. It begs the question:

If one campus can make a difference, what could happen if every institution and business followed suit?

The President of Good Humans 268 expressed her gratitude to the Sandals Foundation and GEF Small Grants for providing the initial funding for the program. "Without their support, we would not have been able to get this program off the ground. Their investment has given us the opportunity to drive real change," she remarked.

Is it possible for one person, one organization, or one campus to make a meaningful impact on climate change? The answer, as Good Humans 268 has demonstrated, is a resounding yes. But it requires collective action, commitment, and a willingness to change.

The expansion of the recycling program to the UWI Five Islands campus is just the beginning. Good Humans 268 has announced that this is the first of several expansions planned for the upcoming weeks. The organization is urging businesses, event promoters, and other community stakeholders to join the recycling

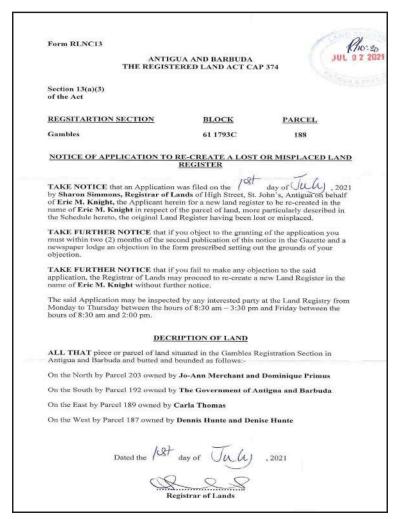
cause and support efforts to reduce waste and promote sustainability.

"Recycling turns things into other things, which is like magic," But in truth, recycling is more than just turning waste into something new—it's a way to protect our planet for future generations. Imagine a

world where recycling is the norm, where businesses, schools, and communities are all united in the mission to reduce waste. What would that world look like? It would be cleaner, healthier, and more sustainable.

The work being done by Good Humans 268, with the support of partners like the Sandals Foundation and GEF Small Grants, is a reminder that every action counts. Let's ask ourselves: What role can we play in making a difference? By embracing recycling, we are taking a step towards creating a better, greener future for all.

Joshuanette Francis Business Teacher at All Saints Secondary



Regional News



American tourist dies after fall on Dominica's Boiling Lake trail

Police are investigating the circumstances surrounding the death of a foreign national along the Boiling Lake trail on Thursday.

Emergency officials responded to reports of a male foreign national who had fallen on the trail, a popular yet challenging hike in Dominica known for its steep, narrow paths, rugged terrain, and occasional slippery sections.

The man, identified as 67-year-old American citizen David Stein, had set out for the Boiling Lake with his wife, Robin Eisman, at around 7:45am.

on Thursday.

The couple was accompanied by tour guides which is always highly recommended for this hike. The police reported that while en route to the Boiling Lake around 11am David slipped off a narrow section of the trail, falling approximate-

ly 30 feet into a ditch where he sustained head injuries.

Despite the efforts of several tour guides and emergency responders, the man tragically succumbed to his injuries. (Loop Caribbean)



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Regional News



St Lucia's Opposition Leader seeks court injunction against CIP



Former Saint Lucia Prime Minister and current Opposition Leader, Allen Chastanet

Former Saint Lucia Prime Minister and current Opposition Leader, Allen Chastanet, has filed an injunction against Investment Minister, Dr Ernest Hilaire, and the Citizenship by Investment Programme's (CIP) Board, aiming to halt the processing of citizenship applications tied to two controversial development projects until a full judicial review is conducted.

Court documents, filed on February 20, 2025, named Minister Hilaire as the first defendant and the CIP as the second defendant in the case. Chastanet is requesting the court to issue an injunction that would prevent any further approval or processing of citizenship applications linked

to investments in the Caribbean Galaxy Real Estate Limited's (Galaxy) real estate project and the Bemax LLC Rock Hall Housing Development Project.

The injunction would remain in place until the court can conduct a judicial review of the case, which Chastanet claims involves unlawful practices under the CIP.

Chastanet is challenging several aspects of the CIP, particularly the approval of these two projects despite alleged violations of legal investment requirements. According to Chastanet, the investments linked to both projects did not meet the legal criteria, such as full payment of the required investment

sums.

Additionally, he claims the government allowed citizenship by investment applications at discounted rates as low as USD 65,000, which is well below the legally mandated minimum of USD 200,000 for real estate investments under the CIP.

Chastanet argues this undermines the integrity of the programme and deprives the state of vital revenues.

In his legal claim, Chastanet also contests the retroactive approval of these projects, which he asserts was done in violation of the law.

He argues that Minister Hilaire lacked the legal authority to approve such projects with retrospective effect, making these decisions ultra vires, or beyond their lawful power.

Furthermore, Chastanet claims that proper legal and procurement procedures, such as the Public Procurement and Asset Disposal Act (PPADA) and the Finance (Administration) Act, were not followed, further tainting the legitimacy of the approvals.

Chastanet's application for a judicial review also speaks to a lack of proper regulations and guidelines for investments under the "Infrastructure Option" of the CIP, which he says created a process that was arbitrary, unlawful, and unreasonable.

With the failure to establish necessary legal frameworks, he argues that the approval process was conducted in a way that undermines transparency and fairness.

Through this injunction and judicial review process, Chastanet is seeking to ensure that no further citizenship by investment applications related to the two developments are processed until the legality of these approvals and the associated practices can be fully examined. (Loop Caribbean)



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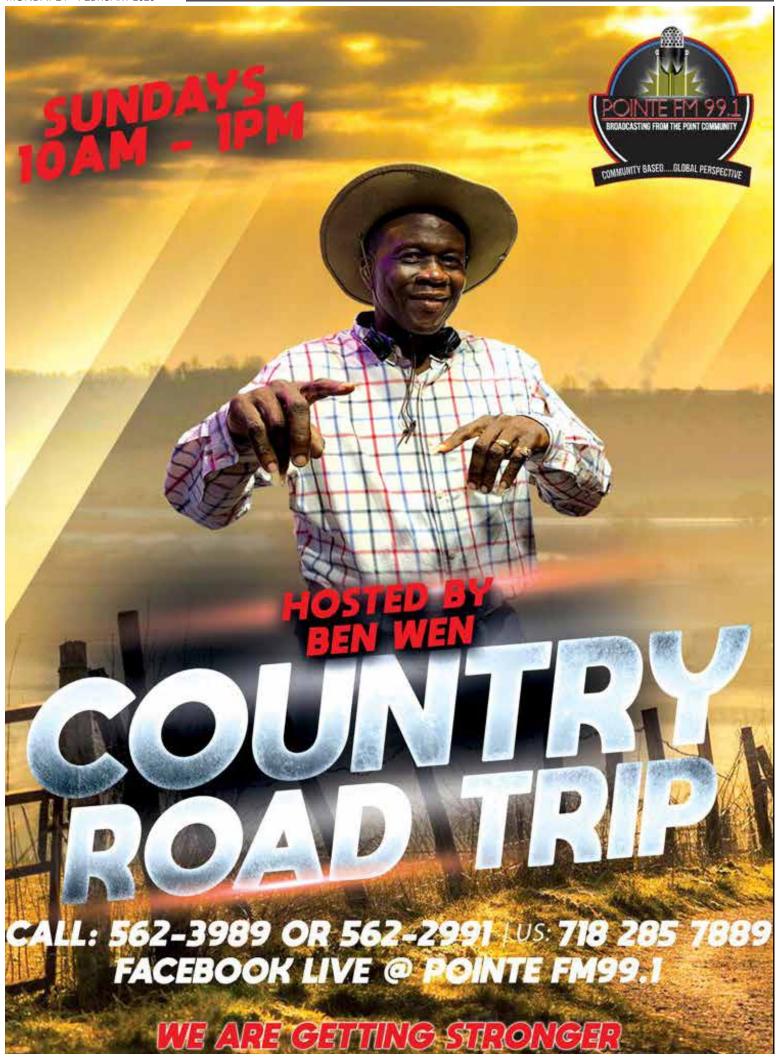
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Regional News

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Mitchell resigns as Leader of Grenada's Opposition, Pierre takes over



Dr Keith Mitchell and Emmalin Pierre Dr Keith Mitchell has resigned as Leader of the Opposition of Grenada.

In a formal letter submitted to Governor General Dame Cecile La Grenade, Dr Mitchell communicated his decision to step down from the leadership role effective February 21, 2025 marking the end of an era. In his statement, Mitchell expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to serve as leader but emphasized that it was time for new leadership. "I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to serve in this role and believe it is time for new leadership to guide the party and the opposition forward," he stated.

The former prime minister had announced his decision not to seek re-election as political leader of the New National Party (NNP) in December 2024.

Mitchell reaffirmed his commitment to the people of Grenada, asserting that while he would no longer be the leader of the opposition, he would continue to serve as the Member of Parliament for St George North West.

With his resignation, Mitchell handed over the leadership of the opposition to Emmalin Pierre, the first female political leader of the NNP. He offered his full support for

Pierre's leadership and expressed his confidence in her ability to lead with strength, empathy, and a deep commitment to the people of Grenada, Carriacou, and Petite Martinique.

Pierre emphasized her deep sense of responsibility as she prepared to take on the role of Leader of the Opposition. She pledged to continue advocating for the needs of Grenadians, saying, "As I step into the role of Leader of His Majesty's Opposition, I do so with a deep sense of responsibility and an unwavering commitment to continuing the work of advocating for the needs of our citizens."

"I pledge to uphold the values of integrity, service, and dedication that you have exemplified throughout your career," she said to the former leader

Pierre also paid tribute, acknowl-

edging Mitchell's transformative leadership and the significant impact he had on Grenada's development. She remarked: "Dr Mitchell, your leadership has been a guiding light, and your counsel will remain invaluable as we forge ahead. On behalf of the people of Grenada and the New National Party, we thank you for your selfless service and unwavering dedication."

"Your tenure as Leader of His Majesty's Opposition and, before that, as Prime Minister, has been marked by a vision for progress, a passion for nation-building, and an enduring love for the people," she said. Mitchell became leader of the New National Party (NNP) in 1989 until 2024 and has been the Leader of the Opposition in the House of Representatives of Grenada from 2008 to 2013, and again since 2022. (Loop Caribbean)



Regional News



Miss Dominica 2025 pageant will switch things up



Festivals and Events Manager of the Discover Dominica Authority (DDA) Ayodele Andrew has announced changes to the order of segments for the Miss Dominica Pageant.

Andrew, who was delivering remarks at a weekly Carnival Press Conference on Thursday, said the interview segment will be the first round in which the contestants will compete.

In previous years the interview segment has always been the final segment for the contestants.

"This year we have the interview segment first, then Spectacular Wear Creation, Talent, Swimwear, and Evening Wear," she revealed.

According to her, the ladies have been working very hard, "and they are

prepared to give you a good show."

Contestant number 1 representing Giraudel is Laveda Liverpool, contestant number 2 representing Canefield is Meeya Francis sponsored by the Dominica National Lottery, contestant num-

ber 3 representing Fond Canie is Tanisha Balson sponsored by Central Cooperative Credit Union, contestant number 4 representing Canefield is Aliyah Jean-Jacques sponsored by the National Bank of Dominica (NBD), and contestant number 5 representing

Pichelin and Grandbay is Ruth-Anne Henderson, also sponsored by NBD.

The Miss Dominica Pageant is scheduled for Thursday, February 27, 2025, at the Windsor Park Sports Stadium Forecourt from 8:00 PM. (*Dominica News Online*)



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International

POINTEXPRESS

AROUND THE WORLD

Mali's army says investigating soldiers accused of killing 24 civilians

Mali's army has launched an investigation into the killing of civilians allegedly by soldiers and Russian mercenaries earlier this week in a rare probe of human rights abuses since the military took power in 2020.

The Front for the Liberation of Azawad, the Tuareg independence movement based in the country's north, accused the Malian soldiers and Russian Wagner Group mercenaries of intercepting two civilian vehicles bound for Algeria from the eastern Malian city of Gao and "coldly executing" at least 24 people among the passengers on Monday.

Without referring to the

killings on Wednesday, the Malian armed forces slammed "intoxicating campaigns" against the army. By Friday, the army announced it was opening an investigation into the deaths.

According to the Tuareg independence movement earlier this week, one vehicle was set on fire while the other escaped with some survivors.

A family member of one of the drivers of the vehicles told the AFP news agency on Tuesday that one car had been transporting migrants.

"They encountered a group of Wagner mercenaries and some Malian soldiers who shot at them. In the first car, everyone died. My cousin, too," they said on the condition of anonymity.

However, Rida Lyammouri, a senior fellow at Policy Center for the New South, a Moroccan think tank, told The Associated Press that it was unlikely that the army's investigation into the incident would find fault in the actions of the soldiers or the Russian mercenaries.

"The objective of the investigations is going to be more about countering the allegations against [the army] and Wagner, rather than trying to find any wrongdoing by the latter. The conclusion of the investigation is likely to say that those allegations are false," Lyammouri said.

Mali has been in a crisis for more than a decade. In 2020, a military group, riding on popular discontent over attacks by armed groups, seized power in a coup that toppled the democratically elected president.

Mali's military rulers, led by Colonel Assimi Goita, turned to Russia's Wagner Group of mercenaries for security after breaking ties with former colonial ruler France.

In December, Human Rights Watch condemned the "atrocities" committed against civilians by the army and its Russian ally, as well as by groups affiliated with ISIL and al-Qaeda. (Al Jazeera English)



International

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British couple in their 70s arrested by Taliban

A British couple in their seventies have been arrested by the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Peter Reynolds, 79, and his wife Barbie, 75, were

The couple, who originally met at the University of Bath, married in Kabul in 1970. Since 2009 they have been running training projects in five schools in

four children by text message. The family knew that their parents were "being held by the interior ministry" and were assured by them that they were "fine".

they wrote. "They have communicated their trust in you, and that as Afghan citizens they will be treated well."

"We recognise that there have been instances where exchanges have been beneficial for your government and western nations. However, our parents have consistently expressed their commitment to Afghanistan, stating that they would rather sacrifice their lives than become part of ransom negotiations or be traded." The Foreign Office is aware two British nationals have been detained in Afghanistan. But assistance is limited by the fact that the UK does not recognise the Taliban and has no embassy in Kabul.

Taliban official sources have told the BBC they arrested British nationals, who they believe were working for an non-governmental organisation (NGO) in Bamiyan province. An official claimed they had been arrested, about 20 days ago, after using a plane without informing Bamiyan police headquarters or the border security forces.

The Taliban announced women would be banned from working for NGOs in 2022 and in December last year Al Jazeera reported the government had said it would close any NGOs employing women. (BBC News)



returning to their home in Bamiyan on 1 February when they were detained. The couple have been running training projects in Afghanistan for 18 years and their daughter, Sarah Entwistle, told The Sunday Times that "they were just trying to help the country they loved".

It is not known exactly what the couple were arrested for but projects run by them include one training mothers and children, which had apparently been approved by the local authorities despite a ban by the Taliban on women working and on education for girls older than the age of 12. Kabul and one project in Bamiyan training mothers and children.

While the Taliban's return to power in August 2021 saw most of their staff leave – along with most westerners – Mr and Mrs Reynolds insisted on staying put. Their daughter, Sarah Entwistle, who lives in Daventry, Northamptonshire, told the Sunday Times: "They said they could not leave when Afghans were in their hour of need.

"They were meticulous about keeping by the rules even as they kept changing."

After their arrest, the couple were initially able to keep in touch with their

Three days later, however, the texts stopped. The children have heard nothing since.

Their daughter told the Times: "My mother is 75 and my father almost 80 and [he] needs his heart medication after a ministroke. They were just trying to help the country they loved. The idea they are being held because they were teaching mothers with children is outrageous." According to the paper, their daughter and her three brothers have also written a letter to the Taliban, pleading with them to release their parents.

"We do not understand the reasons behind their arrest,"



International

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Pope Francis is in 'critical' condition



Pope Francis was in critical condition Saturday after he suffered a long asthmatic respiratory crisis that required high flows of oxygen, the Vatican said.

The 88-year-old Francis, who has been hospitalised for a week with pneumonia and a complex lung infection, also received blood transfusions after tests showed low platelet counts associated with anemia, the Vatican said in a late update.

"The Holy Father continues to be alert and spent the day in an armchair although in more pain than yesterday. At the moment the prognosis is reserved," the statement said.

Doctors have said Francis' condition is touch-and-go and that he is by no means out of danger.

They have warned that the main threat

facing Francis would be the onset of sepsis, a serious infection of the blood that can occur as a complication of pneumonia. As of Friday, there was no evidence of any sepsis, and Francis was responding to the various drugs he is taking, the pope's medical team said in their first in-depth update on the pope's condition.

Francis, who has chronic lung disease, was admitted to Gemelli hospital on February 14 after a weeklong bout of bronchitis worsened.

Doctors first diagnosed the complex viral, bacterial and fungal respiratory tract infection and then the onset of pneumonia in both lungs. They prescribed "absolute rest" and a combination of cortisone and antibiotics, along with supplemental oxygen when he needs it.

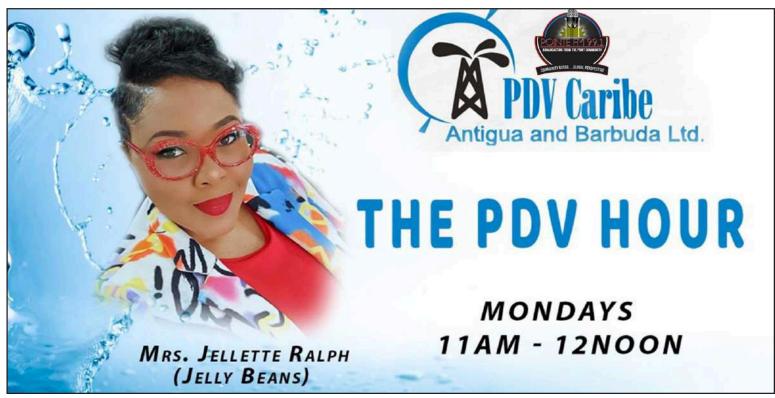
Dr Sergio Alfieri, the head of medicine and surgery at Rome's Gemelli hospital, said the biggest threat facing Francis was that some of the germs that are currently located in his respiratory system pass into the bloodstream, causing sepsis. Sepsis can lead to organ failure and death.

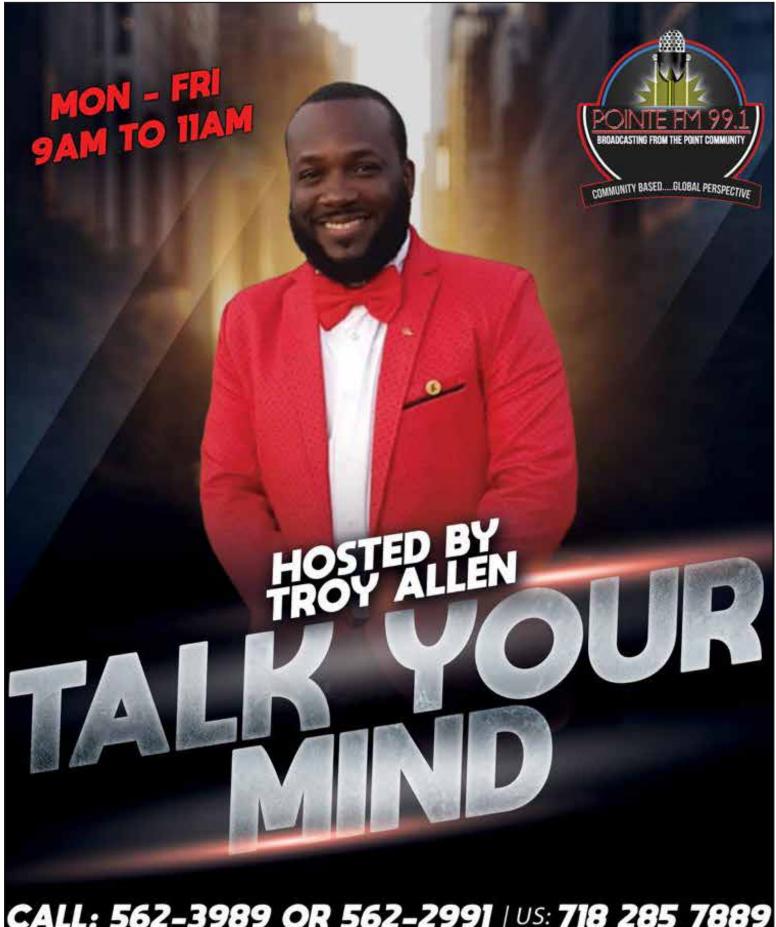
Meanwhile, the Vatican hierarchy went on the defensive to tamp down rumors and speculation that Francis might decide to resign. There is no provision in canon law for what to do if a pope becomes incapacitated.

Francis has said that he has written a letter of resignation that would be invoked if he were medically incapable of making such a decision. The pope remains fully conscious, alert, eating and working.

The Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, gave a rare interview to Corriere della Sera to respond to speculation and rumors about a possible resignation. It came after the Vatican issued an unusual and official denial of an Italian media report that said Parolin and the pope's chief canonist had visited Francis in the hospital in secret. Given the canonical requirements to make a resignation legitimate, the implications of such a meeting were significant, but the Vatican flat-out denied that any such meeting occurred.

Parolin said such speculation seemed "useless" when what really mattered was the health of Francis, his recovery and return to the Vatican. (*Jamaica Gleaner*)





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Sports News

PAGE 25

Edwards continues to lead Leewards at regional women's tournament



Amanda Edwards

Antiguan Amanda Edwards will once again lead the Leeward Islands during the regional CG United Women's Super50 Cup, which will take place in St. Kitts from Monday, February 24 to March 7.

Edwards is one of five Antiguans who have been selected in the Leeward Islands 14-member squad to compete in the 50-over contest against the other five regional territorial teams.

The other Antiguans selected are all-rounder Shawnisha Hector, Tonya Martin, Chey-Anne Moses, and Kimberley Anthony. But Antiguan Terez Parker, who represented the Leewards at last year's tournament, which was also hosted in St. Kitts, failed to gain selection.

Cricket West Indies (CWI) on Friday confirmed the squads of the six regional teams participating in the 2025 CG United Women's Super50 Cup.

The matches will be played at



Tonya Martin

three venues in St. Kitts: Warner Park, the Conaree Cricket Centre, and St. Paul's Sports Complex, with the 50-over matches starting at 10 am local time.

The tournament will bowl off with the opening round of matches on Monday, February 24.

The Windward Islands will meet the Leeward Islands at St. Paul's, Barbados will take on Guyana at Conaree, and Jamaica will begin their title defense against Trinidad and Tobago at Warner Park.

The CG United Women's Super50 Cup continues to serve as a vital platform for the next generation of West Indies cricketers, providing emerging talent with the opportunity to showcase their skills on a competitive stage.

With senior international players Hayley Matthews, Deandra Dottin and Chinelle Henry unavailable, this year's tournament presents a unique chance for emerging talent to step up, gain valuable experience, and stake their claim for future regional and international



Kimberley Anthony

selection.

Many of today's West Indies stars first made their mark in this competition, and with the added exposure of live broadcasts, this edition promises to unearth the next wave of Caribbean cricketing talent.

For the first time, the entire women's tournament will be broadcast live on ESPN Caribbean, bringing the action to fans across the region.

All preliminary round matches and the final at Warner Park will be televised, marking a historic milestone for women's cricket in the Caribbean.

This year, the teams will be vying for a championship prize of US\$ 30,000 with the runners-up securing US\$15,000.

Leeward Islands Squad: Amanda Edwards (Captain), Qiana Joseph, Reniece Boyce, Kayzg Boyles, Melicia Clarke, Rozel Liburd, Shawnisha Hector, Tonya Martin, Chey-Anne Moses, Sainavi Kambalapalli, Kimberley Anthony, Jahzara Claxton, Divya Saxena, and Davronique Maynard.

Sports News



Benna Girls lose opening game in CONCACAF Under-20 Qualifiers



Haiti's goalkeeper Kimberlie Prince, left, prepares to intercept the ball ahead of Antigua and Barbuda's Gabrielle De Suza during their opening match in Group A of the 2025 CONCACAF Under-20 Qualifiers at the ABFA Technical Center in Antigua on Friday, February 21, 2025. (ABFA Media)

Antigua and Barbuda's Benna Girls national team got off to a losing start in their campaign at home in the 2025 CONCACAF Under-20 Qualifiers, which will be taking place across six four-team groups in four host countries from February 21 to 25.

Antigua and Barbuda suffered a 3-1 loss to Haiti in their opening encounter in the fourteam Group A at the ABFA Technical Center at Paynters.

Antigua and Barbuda took the lead in the 9th minute as Iressiea Allen struck the nation's first goal in the tournament. Haiti drew level in the 17th minute when Ella Etienne snatched the equalizer.

Dominique Desert scored in the 31st minute to give Haiti a 2-1 lead. Dalanchy Pierre wrapped up the Haitian victory, heading the ball into the back of the net in the 52nd minute.

Guayana and Belize played to a scoreless draw, each taking a point, in the other opening round encounter in Group A.

Goalkeepers Nya-Grace Young of Guyana and Angelica Lopez of Belize earned their first clean sheets of the campaign.

The four teams will play their third and final round encounters at the

ABFA Technical Center on Tuesday.

Haiti will take on Guyana, while Antigua and Barbuda will clash with Belize.

After round-robin play between February 20 and 25, the first-place team from each group (six teams in total) will advance to the 2025 CONCACAF Under-20 Women's Championship, joining the two pre-seeded top-ranked nations, the United States and Mexico.



Sports News

PAGE 27

Lakers beat Nuggets behind Doncic's best game yet for LA



Los Angeles Lakers head coach JJ Redick, left, congratulates guard Luka Doncic as he heads to the bench late in the second half of an NBA basketball game against the Denver Nuggets, Saturday, Feb. 22, 2025, in Denver. (AP)

DENVER (AP) — Luka Doncic scored 32 points in his best game by far with the Lakers, leading Los Angeles to a 123-100 runaway win at Denver on Saturday night that snapped the Nuggets' nine-game winning streak.

LeBron James added 25 points, Austin Reaves scored 23, and Rui Hachimura had 21 when he left holding his left side with 10 minutes remaining — the Lakers didn't miss him, going on a 12-2 run to stretch their lead to 19.

The Lakers never trailed in winning in Denver for the first time since April 10, 2022. They had lost 13 of their previous 14

against the Nuggets.

Doncic averaged 14.7 points in his first three games with the Lakers. He surpassed that less than 10 minutes in and had 19 points by halftime with the Lakers up 63-54.

Aaron Gordon scored 24 points and Jamal Murray 19 for Denver, which lost for the first time this month. Nikola Jokic posted his 26th triple-double of the season, but he was just 2 of 7 from the floor with six turnovers.

The Nuggets have never won 10 in a row during coach Michael Malone's decade in Denver. Now, that's what the Los Angeles Lakers had in mind when they pulled off their shocking trade for Luka Doncic earlier this month.

After going 1-2 and averaging 14.7 points in his first three games with LA following his departure from Dallas, the 25-year-old superstar had by far his best game in a Lakers uniform Saturday night in Denver.

Doncic scored 32 points, grabbed 10 rebounds, dished out seven assists and stole four passes while leading the Lakers to their victory over the Nuggets.

"Finally feel like myself a little bit," Doncic said.

"Playing this game, this is what I love. Just finally being myself a little bit, that's why I was smiling all game."

So was LeBron James, who chipped in 25 points, 10 rebounds, five assists and three blocks — and several times was on the receiving end of Doncic's long passes for fast-break buckets as the Lakers led wire-to-wire against their recent nemisis.

"I am a natural-born wide receiver and he's a natural-born quarterback," cracked James.

Doncic said his chemistry with the Lakers, James included, is still budding.

"This is my fourth game," Doncic said.
"Chemistry takes time.
You saw today that it's getting better. Every day, it's getting better. ... Hard, different, but I'm happy to be playing basketball.
Every day is going to get better for me. I'm happy to be here. I'm happy for the new journey."

The duo's performance in Denver should give the Lakers and their followers a sense that they can make the kind of deep playoff run that eluded them the last two years when the Nuggets bounced them in the first round, winning eight of nine when James was teamed with Anthony Davis.

Sports News



Kohli aces another chase for India, Pakistan stare at exit

DUBAI (Reuters) - Milestone man Virat Kohli anchored a tricky chase with an unbeaten hundred as India put one foot in the semi-finals of the Champions Trophy with a six-wicket victory against Pakistan in a high-octane Group A match between the arch-rivals on Sunday.

An architect of countless successful chases, Kohli made 100 not out as India overwhelmed the 242-run target with 7.3 overs to spare to register their second successive victory of the tournament.

Electing to bat, Pakistan made 241 before being all out with two deliveries left in their stop-start innings with Saud Shakeel (62) and Mohammad Rizwan (46) scoring the bulk of the runs.

Player of the match Kohli also became only the third batter, after compatriot Sachin Tendulkar and Sri Lankan Kumar Sangakkara, to complete 14,000 runs in ODIs, reaching the mark quicker than them.

"I think the way we started with the ball was superb," India captain Rohit Sharma said.

"To restrict them to that kind of score was a great effort from the bowling unit. We knew it would get slightly better to bat under lights... we backed the experience that we have



India's Virat Kohli, left, and Axar Patel celebrate after winning against Pakistan during the ICC Champions Trophy cricket match between India and Pakistan at Dubai International Cricket Stadium, United Arab Emirates, Sunday, Feb. 23, 2025. (AP)

in our batting line-up to go out there and get those runs."

India seamer Mohammed Shami began with an 11-ball over that included five wides after Pakistan captain Mohammed Rizwan won the toss and elected to bat.

Shami looked in discomfort in his third over and, replacing him, Hardik Pandya had Babar Azam (23) caught behind. Pakistan lost their other opener in the next over when Imamul-Haq departed run out.

Saud and Rizwan added 104 runs to steady Pakistan but Pakistan lost both their set batters after Axar Patel bowled Rizwan and took a catch to send back Saud.

Spinner Kuldeep Yadav (3-40) dismissed Salman

Agha and Shaheen Afridi in successive deliveries but was denied a hat-trick.

Khushdil Shah contributed 38 down the order but played three dot balls in the final over before holing out in the deep to be the last man out.

Rohit (20) began briskly when India came out to chase but the opener had his stumps rearranged by an unplayable yorker from Afridi in the fourth over.

Shubman Gill (46) played some gorgeous drives and seemed to have luck on his side too as he pulled Haris Rauf but Khushdil at midwicket spilled the catch.

Gill fell short of his half-century when his defence was breached by a sharply turning delivery from Abrar Ahmed.

Shreyas Iyer (56) joined Kohli in accumulating risk-free runs to calm any nerves in the Indian dressing room.

Kohli manoeuvred the field with ease and sealed India's victory with a four that also brought up his 51st ODI hundred.

Pakistan's title defence hangs by a thread following their second successive defeat in the tournament and their theoretical chances of making the last four will depend on other results.

S OOFTS MONDAY 24TH FEBRUARY 2025



Steelers remain perfect, Flyers rebound in Division 1 League

Total Imports EMC's Potters Steelers maintained their unbeaten run in the Antigua and Barbuda Basketball Association's (ABBA) First Division League on Saturday evening.

The Steelers won for the seventh time in as many games to remain the only unbeaten team in the league with a 109-78 drubbing of the Lava Smoke Shop Warriors at the JSC Sports Complex.

Keroi Lee shot a game-high 27 points and snatched 14 rebounds, and Kareem Edwards sank 21 points and grabbed 12 rebounds for the Steelers.

In support, Devorn Benjamin converted 19 points, Darnell Azille scored 18 points and claimed 14 rebounds, and Cohen Desouza had 13 points for the Steelers.

Kebo Orford sank 26 points and claimed six rebounds; Lincoln Weekes converted 21 points; Kyle Alexander had 11 points and 13 rebounds; and Zuri Nesbitt got 10 points and seven assists for the Warriors, who suffered their fifth loss in seven games.

Reigning league and

playoff champions, the EZ Fit Flyers, have returned to winning form with back-toback wins in ABBA's First Daley had 10 points, nine rebounds, and five assists for the Flyers.

Humroy Wright sank



The EZ Fit Flyers basketball team

Division League.

After winning their first four games, the Flyers perfect start to the season was ended in an 81-84 loss to unbeaten the Potters Steelers.

But the Flyers rebounded to record their sixth win in seven matches with a 96-54 victory against the All Saints Slam.

Adonis Humphreys shot a game-high 28 points and grabbed 19 rebounds; Xavier "X-Man" Meade scored 20 points and claimed eight rebounds; David Hernandez converted 13 points; and Javonte 26 points, and Keaddy Martin had 10 points and seven rebounds for the All Saints Slam, who lost for the fourth time in six games.

The Flyers also soared to a 98-59 drubbing of Lava Smoke Shop Warriors.

Selassie Brathwaite shot a game-high 23 points and grabbed 23 rebounds; Adonis Humphreys had 17 points, 17 rebounds, and five blocks; Xavier "X-Man" Meade converted 14 points; Javonte Daley produced 13 points, 10 assists, and eight rebounds; Najee George scored 13 points; and Kwame Brathwaite sank 11 points for the Flyers.

Lincoln Weekes produced 13 points, seven rebounds, and five assists; Kebo Orford also scored 13 points; and Kyle Alexander had 11 points and eight rebounds for the Warriors.

After losing their previous three matches, newly promoted Da Project recorded their second successive win with a 75-67 victory over All Saints Slam.

Donte Trimmingham sank 21 points and grabbed 10 rebounds; T'shawn Lewis converted 20 points and claimed nine rebounds; Bryan "Hollywood" Matthew produced 13 points, nine rebounds, and five assists; and Olivee Morris scored 12 points for Da Project.

Humroy Wright shot a game-high 26 points and claimed eight rebounds; Kim Casey sank 11 points; Keaddy Martin converted 10 points; and Andrew Venture had eight points, six assists, and five rebounds for All Saints Slam.

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