

PM rejects human trafficking claims

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Group photo of attendees at National Diplomatic Encounter with FA Minister, E.P Chet Greene and National Hero, Sir Vivian Richards (centre of front row)

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Local News



PM Browne: Antigua and Barbuda rejects claims of human trafficking



Antigua and Barbuda's Prime Minister Gaston Browne

Antigua and Barbuda's Prime Minister Gaston Browne has again dismissed any suggestions that the country is involved in any form of human trafficking regarding its use of members of the Cuban Medical Brigade as is being claimed by US Secretary of State, Marco Rubio.

Following meetings with Caribbean leaders this week, Secretary Rubio reiterated the claim stating that the Cuban government sends out these medical teams as part 'forced labour' and the US government has threatened actions against the leaders of countries which utilize the medical personnel in their health services.

"I have made it abundantly clear, certainly in the case of Antigua and Barbuda, as I have said to them if there are any issues regarding the way the payments are structured, we are willing to adjust accordingly. However, we completely reject this issue of trafficking of Cuban doctors and nurses," he declared. PM Browne is on record stating that the government will

pay one hundred percent of the wages due to the Cuban doctors and nurses, including

having them meet their statutory obligations.

In related development, the Antigua and Barbuda leader voices concerns over the decision by the US Administration to impose a 25 percent tariff on countries which purchase petroleum products from Venezuela.

"The reality is that the Venezuelan PetroCaribe has been a lifeline for many Caribbean countries, especially during the global crisis when they provided petroleum products on credit. For Antigua and Barbuda, we remain very grateful for what Venezuela has done for us; they have given us about half a billion dollars in credit. Interesting-

ly, my administration has not benefited from the Venezuelan petroleum trade. In fact, I don't think we have had a single shipment within the last 10 years," he emphasized.

He noted that all the arrangements with Venezuela regarding petroleum products were negotiated by the previous administration.

The Trump Administration has ramped up its belligerence against both Cuba and Venezuela with countries such as Antigua and Barbuda and others in the region caught in the middle as unintended collateral damage.

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Cabinet defends the country's CIP



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The Cabinet is reporting that it held a discussion on the evident threat to the vthat several OECS Countries are successfully pursuing.

This comes against the backdrop of the recent claim by the Secretary of State of the United States, Marco Rubio, who suggests that the US is concluding that CIPs are a threat to its security.

“This position was once made by the European Union Commission and was successfully debunked. The same will happen, the Cabinet believes, when the USA enters such a claim against the OECS countries. The Ministry of Legal Affairs, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Citizenship by Investment Unit(CIU) are already armed with legal briefs and other published data which would prove the US Secretary of State to be wrong,” according to the Cabinet Notes of this week.

It noted that the Prime

Minister of Barbados, Mia Mottley, who was meeting with the US Secretary of State at the same time the Cabinet of Antigua and Barbuda was convened, holds responsibility as Chairman

of CARICOM to argue on behalf of the OECS countries with CIP against the US findings.

The Barbados Prime Minister is a Queens' Counsel (QC), the Cabinet Notes added.



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FA Minister Greene: A&B diplomats must not just be skilled negotiators but adaptable visionaries



FA Minister E.P. Chet Greene



Members of the Antigua and Barbuda diplomatic services in session

Foreign Affairs Minister, E.P. Chet Greene, wants the men and women in the Antigua and Barbuda diplomatic services to recognize the changing global environment and to craft responses that are nimble, responsive and with the interest of the country front and centre of all that they do.

FM Greene made the charge when he addressed the nation's diplomats and other representatives of the foreign service at this week's National Diplomatic Encounter that opened at the Royalton Hotel on Thursday morning.

"Today, we embark on a profound discourse centered on the theme of 'Alignment of Diplomatic Outreach with National Priorities,' a topic that carries significant urgency as we navigate the complexities of a rapidly evolving

geopolitical landscape," Minister Greene stated.

He told the diplomatic service officers that as they gather to ponder the challenges that lie ahead, they do so as inhabitants of a world marked by shifting alliances, transforming power dynamics and pressing global issues that demand their unwavering resolve. He noted that issues such as climate change, economic inequality and the promotion of human rights are not mere concepts; they are imperatives that require their immediate attention.

For the foreign affairs minister, Antigua and Barbuda, as a small island developing nation, must remain astutely cognizant of these dynamics, for they have profound implications for its sovereignty, stability and potential for development.



Ambassador Sir Curtly Ambrose among those in attendance at Thursday's Diplomatic Encounter

Borrowing a phrase from Kofi Annan, who said "Di-
the late African diplomat, **con't on pg 5**

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plomacy is a bridge", Minister Greene stated that Antigua and Barbuda today stands on that bridge.

"Today, we stand on that bridge, where the intricate dance of international relations requires not just skilled negotiators but adaptable visionaries. It is imperative that our diplomats possess a comprehensive understanding of international law, economic diplomacy, cultural nuances and strategic negotiation tactics. Our human resources must transcend traditional qualifications; as we seek individuals who exemplify innovative thinking and who embody

the core values of our nation," he emphasized.

The minister wants to see Antigua and Barbuda explore closer relations with countries on the African continent, Central and South America and India.

"The expansion of our relationships in these areas is not a mere ambition but a necessity," he noted.

The diplomatic encounter continues Friday with a discussion on Artificial Intelligence and a look at the operations of the Citizenship By Investment programme (CIP).

On Thursday, the heads of the overseas missions gave their country reports which are to be compiled



FA Minister E.P Chet Greene presents a gift bag to Guest Speaker Martin Kimani

into a booklet and which will help to inform the formulation of the nation's diplomatic outlook over the next two years.

The encounter also heard reports from UN Permanent Representative, Walton Aubrey Webson

on last year's hosting of the SIDS4 conference as well as an update on the plans for the hosting of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in St. John's next year. That update was provided by UK High Commissioner, Karen-Mae Hill.



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Antigua and Barbuda Launches Diplomatic Encounter 2025

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Barbuda Affairs officially launched the Diplomatic Encounter 2025 Thursday at the Royalton Resort. This two-day event serves as a critical platform for fostering global diplomacy, bringing together local and international leaders to engage in discussions on strategic priorities and the evolving role of Antigua and Barbuda in international relations.

Key Highlights from Day One of Diplomatic Encounter 2025:

The encounter began with an inspiring Keynote Address by Ambassador Martin Kimani, who addressed the diplomatic corps, non-resident ambassadors and honorary consuls. In his speech, Ambassador Kimani acknowledged the vital role that small island states, like Antigua and Barbuda, play in shaping the global diplomatic landscape. He highlighted the country's continued commitment to multilateralism, advocating for climate justice, and addressing the global challenges that disproportionately affect small states, including economic stability, the erosion of sovereignty, and the need for reform in international institutions such as the United Nations Security Council.

Ambassador Kimani also underscored the importance of continued collaboration between Antigua and Barbuda and other small island developing states (SIDS), as well as key partners across the African continent and the wider global community. He emphasized that only through strategic coalitions and shared responsibility could nations successfully confront the pressing challenges of our time.

Ambassador Clarence E. Pilgrim, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, also addressed the attendees, introducing the theme for the Diplomatic Encounter 2025: "Alignment of Diplomatic Outreach with National Priorities." In his remarks,



Martin Kimani

he reinforced the need for Antigua and Barbuda to ensure its diplomatic efforts align with its national development goals, focusing on economic prosperity, security, environmental



Ambassador Clarence E. Pilgrim, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

protection of small states' sovereignty and the global financial system, with particular emphasis on debt sustain-



sustainability, and regional cooperation.

Day One of the encounter provided a rich dialogue on the importance of strengthening Antigua and Barbuda's international partnerships, advancing its economic interests, and promoting sustainable development. Discussions were held on key national priorities such as the blue and orange economies, renewable energy, and climate action. The event also touched on the

ability, trade, and economic resilience.

The Diplomatic Encounter 2025 will continue Friday, March 28, 2025, with further sessions focused on actionable diplomatic strategies and global cooperation. This two-day session brings together ambassadors, foreign ministers, and high-ranking officials from around the world to tackle critical issues facing Antigua and Barbuda and the broader international community.

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Local News



Pharmacy Council, freight forwarders to discuss pharmaceutical import practices

The Antigua and Barbuda Pharmacy Council is set to convene a critical meeting with freight forwarders to address concerns surrounding the unauthorized importation of pharmaceutical products into the country.

The meeting will take place on Thursday, May 1, 2025, at 2:00 PM in the Conference Room at the Villa Community Centre, located at the Villa Polyclinic.

The discussion will focus on ensuring that all pharmaceuticals imported into Antigua and Barbuda comply with the necessary regulatory approvals set by the Pharmacy Council. Freight



forwarders play a key role in the importation process, and their cooperation is essential in maintaining the safety and efficacy of medical products available to the public.

The Pharmacy Council is committed to upholding international standards in pharmaceutical regulation and safeguarding public health.

Freight forwarders and other relevant stakeholders are urged to attend and engage in this important dialogue to ensure compliance with the established guidelines.

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Commentary

Embracing Unity: A Call to the People of Antigua and Barbuda



by *Garfield Joseph*

In moments of uncertainty, words of wisdom resonate across time. Ellen G. White, a noted author and religious leader, once urged: “Let us set aside contention, criticism, and division, embracing unity as the foundation of our mission.” Written during a time when her organization faced internal challenges while expanding globally, White’s words emphasized collaboration and mutual respect, recognizing that only unity could fulfill their shared purpose.

Fast forward to today, her message holds even greater relevance for nations navigating an increasingly turbulent world. Antigua and Barbuda, though small in size, is not immune to the seismic shifts in global geopolitics and the resulting social, economic, and political strain. White’s timeless message reminds us that unity is not merely a moral choice but a survival strategy in a world demanding cohesion and resilience.

The Current Global Context The global stage is shifting in profound ways. Trade wars, evolving alliances, and fluctuating tariffs are creating

ripples that disproportionately impact small island developing states (SIDS) like ours. Economies deeply reliant on global trade and tourism face heightened vulnerabilities, such as rising import costs and diminished access to key markets. These external pressures threaten even the most resilient sectors of our society.

Moreover, as major powers prioritize self-interest in negotiations, smaller nations are often sidelined in global decision-making. This marginalization leaves SIDS grappling with both economic fragility and existential threats such as climate change, which exacerbate inequalities. In this turbulent environment, unity becomes essential—both within our borders and in collaboration with other nations—to safeguard our interests.

Antigua and Barbuda’s Local Challenges Closer to home, our beloved Antigua and Barbuda faces challenges that mirror these global pressures. Social fragmentation, driven by inequality and cultural tensions, threatens to erode the bonds that unite us. Economic pressures strain local businesses and households, while political disagreements often descend into unproductive conflict, delaying progress and undermining trust.

These challenges, while complex, are not insurmountable. History has shown that unity is the antidote to division, and collaboration is the key to overcoming adversity. Ellen G. White’s call to set aside contention, criticism, and division serves not just as a lofty ideal but as a practical roadmap for navigating these difficult times.

Lessons from Ellen G. White’s Call White’s original message emerged from a deeply spiritual and mission-focused context, emphasizing

that division weakens while unity fosters strength and purpose. In her time, she appealed to diverse individuals to rise above their differences, embrace mutual respect, and work toward a common goal.

This principle remains profoundly applicable today. In the face of social, economic, and political challenges, unity has the transformative power to pool strengths, harness creativity, and approach problems with a shared determination. White’s call transcends its religious roots, offering a universal principle that every society can embrace.

A Vision for Unity in Antigua and Barbuda What does unity mean for us? It begins with each of us taking responsibility to foster collaboration and harmony. Here’s how we can bring this vision to life:

- 1. Social Inclusivity and Cooperation:** Let us celebrate our diversity as a source of strength. By fostering dialogue, supporting community initiatives, and uplifting one another, we can bridge divides and promote a sense of belonging for all. Unity means leaving no one behind.
- 2. Economic Resilience through Collaboration:** Global geopolitical shifts demand innovative economic strategies. Businesses, government, and citizens must work hand-in-hand to strengthen local industries, promote entrepreneurship, and invest in education and skills. Together, we can build resilience against uncertainties.
- 3. Political Respect and Cooperation:** Healthy debate is vital in a democracy, but divisiveness for its own sake hinders progress. Leaders and citizens must prioritize the

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greater good, setting aside partisanship to focus on policies that uplift Antigua and Barbuda.

4. Global Advocacy for SIDS: Unity extends beyond our shores. Standing together with other SIDS amplifies our voice on the global stage, enabling us to advocate for fair trade agreements and push for stronger commitments to combat climate change.

5. Environmental Stewardship: Our environment is both a treasure and a lifeline. Unity in addressing climate challenges—through sustainable practices, conservation, and adaptation—secures our future. Environmental stewardship must also address the growing problem of roadside garbage, which mars our nation's beauty and threatens our vital tourism industry. Visitors seek pristine landscapes and unspoiled charm; unchecked littering jeopardizes this. Let us take action by properly disposing of waste, participating in clean-up efforts, and encouraging others to do the same. Together, we can restore the cleanliness of our surroundings, ensuring our nation remains a source of pride and prosperity.

Why Unity Matters Now Our challenges are interconnected. Social discord weakens our ability to address economic strains, which exacerbate political tensions. Political instability, in turn, hinders progress on global issues. Unity is the thread that weaves these fragmented pieces into a cohesive whole, enabling us to face challenges head-on.

As global tensions rise and local hurdles persist, Ellen G. White's words remind us that division weakens while unity strengthens. Her call to rise above polarization and embrace collaboration underscores that our nation's success hinges on collective effort.

Moving Forward with Purpose The road ahead will not be without obstacles. Disagreements and frustrations are inevitable, but unity offers a guiding principle. Overcoming adversity requires courage, humility, and a willingness to listen and collaborate.

Imagine an Antigua and Barbuda where unity is our cornerstone—a nation where communities thrive, industries flourish, and leaders serve with integrity. Envision a future where every child has access to opportunity, every voice is valued, and every effort contributes to the common good.

Ellen G. White's call to action—"Let us set aside contention, criticism, and division"—is not just a reflection of the past but a beacon for our present and future. Unity is not an abstract ideal; it is a necessity that determines the strength, resilience, and prosperity of our nation.

In the face of unprecedented global shifts and local challenges, let us stand together as one people, united in purpose and bound by hope. For it is through unity that we will rise, overcome, and secure a brighter future for Antigua and Barbuda.



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Commentary



The U.S. “Joining” the Commonwealth: an unreasonable expectation



By Sir Ronald Sanders

Recent media stories have suggested that King Charles III could “invite” the United States to join the Commonwealth of Nations. Yet as Professor Philip Murphy, Director of the History and Policy Institute of Historical Research in London, wrote in *The Times* on March 23, membership in the Commonwealth “is not in the King’s gift”.

Gaining membership starts with an application by the country desirous of becoming a member. And, as Murphy states, the process is “typically a lengthy one and success depends upon the consent of all existing members”.

This is a fact that is very well known in Buckingham Palace and one that has been respected by the Sovereigns of Great Britain since 1949 when the Modern Commonwealth emerged, and several countries led by India and Pakistan became Republics with their own Heads of State. The Commonwealth is not a formal political or economic union; it is a network of countries that choose to cooperate on shared issues. The British monarch serves in a symbolic role as the Head of the Commonwealth.

This framework arose from a 1949 Declaration of Commonwealth leaders which formalized the Commonwealth’s structure and recognized the British monarch as “the symbol of the

free association of the independent member nations and, as such, Head of the Commonwealth.” In this capacity, King Charles plays an important ceremonial role but cannot commit the organization. Consequently, it is worth clarifying why these media reports about a supposed “Associate Membership” are mistaken.

No Such Thing as “Associate Membership”

Murphy rightly pointed out that there is no category called “Associate Member” in the Commonwealth. In November 2007, at their meeting in Uganda, the Commonwealth Heads of Government emphatically rejected any idea of “Associate Membership”. They confirmed that the Commonwealth would retain only one class of membership - full membership by sovereign states.

Their stance followed the recommendations of a special committee that was established under the Chairmanship of former Jamaican Prime Minister P.J. Patterson. In its October 2007 report, the Committee was categorical in stating that the idea of “Associate Membership” was “fraught with difficulties”. They reaffirmed their conviction that “the Commonwealth was fundamentally an association of sovereign member states who were equal in all respects”.

On the basis of the 8-person Committee report, the Commonwealth leaders established a four-step process for any nation seeking admission. This process involves: informal assessment by the Secretary-General following a country’s expression of interest; consultations with existing member governments; a formal application by the interested country, if no objections are raised; evidence of democratic processes in the country and public support for membership, such as a resolution of the applicant’s legislature.

Therefore, no “associate” or partial membership exists, nor is there any procedure for a single leader - monarch, president, or prime minister - to unilaterally invite a nation to join.

Why a U.S. Application Is Unlikely

It is difficult to imagine the U.S. administration choosing to apply for membership of the Commonwealth - or any other organization for that matter. In the case of the Commonwealth’s application process, it would have to subject itself to a potentially contentious review - something that neither the administration nor the U.S. Congress would tolerate.

Further, national sentiment in the U.S. would likely bristle at the idea that its president and legislature must formally acknowledge the British King as the “Head” of an organization in which the United States participates. Even though the King’s position today is purely symbolic, the notion of again recognizing a British monarch - however ceremonial - would surely spark intense debate among a population that first achieved nationhood by breaking away from British rule.

A Voluntary Association of Equals

Furthermore, even if the U.S. were to apply, the Commonwealth’s culture of consensus and egalitarian decision-making stands in stark contrast to the usual role of the U.S. in international affairs. The Commonwealth is a network of 56 sovereign nations, rich and poor, large and small, that have chosen to collaborate on shared values: democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and development. Its informal style - particularly during the “retreat” sessions of the biennial Heads of Government meetings - promotes frank, off-the-record dialogue among leaders who interact on an equal footing.

For a su-

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perpower accustomed to steering global discussions, consensus decision-making where any member can stall or derail a proposal, would be a difficult fit for the US. The comparable situation is the U.S. membership of the Organization of American States (OAS), which the U.S. helped to shape in 1947 with Latin American and Caribbean countries, and in which it has played a forceful role.

However, the culture of the OAS, fashioned out of concerns only from the nations of the Americas (32 participating states), is different from the Commonwealth's remarkable diversity – 56 nations, spanning continents, faiths, ethnicities, and political systems. Commonwealth members have fostered an atmosphere of ideological pluralism that has matured over seven decades.

The Bottom Line

All of this explains why the recent media discussion about a “King’s invitation” to the U.S. misrepresents the Commonwealth’s rules and operation.

Membership can only be achieved through a formal application approved by all existing member governments. And as long as those rules stand, the British monarch’s headship is a ceremonial reflection of voluntary association, without the power to grant membership to anyone. Against this background, no “invitation” to the U.S. could truly exist. Significantly, Buckingham Palace has not confirmed the media stories.

For the United States to join the Commonwealth, it would have to follow the established process of its own accord, and that is not only very unlikely, it would also be an unreasonable expectation.

(The writer is Antigua and Barbuda’s Ambassador to the US and the OAS. The views expressed are entirely his own. He served as a Member and Rapporteur of the Eminent Persons

Group commissioned by Heads of Government to recommend reform of the Commonwealth 2010-2011. Responses and previous commentaries: www.sirronaldsanders.com)



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Prime Minister Gaston Browne Visits The SDA Pre School



Photo Essay



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Polluted tides now kiss the sea.



The forests whisper in the breeze,
Yet ax and flame bring them to knees.
The air we breathe, once fresh and light,
Now chokes with smoke, a hidden blight.



But change begins with me and you,
A simple step, a choice so true.
For climate's fate is in our hands,
Not distant lands or far-off sands.



So start at home—turn off the light,
Unplug devices through the night.
Reduce, reuse, and sort with care,
Recycle waste, be more aware.



Collect the rain, let gardens grow,
 Compost scraps and seeds will show
 That nature thrives when we take part,
 Protecting Earth with hand and heart.



Walk or cycle—skip the drive,
 Carpool, share, keep green alive.
 Choose the foods that help sustain,
 Less waste, less harm, much more to gain.



Teach the children, spread the word,
 Let climate calls be felt and heard.
 For every home can be a spark,
 A guiding light within the dark.



The fight is tough, the road is long,
 Yet side by side, we're brave and strong.
 So act today, don't wait too late,
 Together, we control our fate.

For Earth is ours to love and keep,
 Let's wake her dreams from restless sleep
 One home, one town, one world in sight,
 Our future's bright—let's do it right.



Regional News



Rubio to re-evaluate US travel advisory for Jamaica

While lauding Jamaica for making “impressive” strides in its crime-reduction efforts, United States (US) Secretary of State Marco Rubio has promised to re-evaluate the US travel advisory for Jamaica to reflect the current reality regarding crime.

The US State Department issued a Level 3 threat for its citizens last January, advising them to “reconsider travel” to Jamaica. The department revised the language of the warning in July but maintained its concerns about crime and the medical infrastructure.

However, Rubio committed to having a further assessment of the advisory during a press conference yesterday at the Office of the Prime Minister in St Andrew, following his meeting with Prime Minister Dr Andrew Holness.

“We did talk about tourism because obviously, it’s a significant part of your economy, and we pledged that when we go back and re-evaluate the travel advisories as they currently stand to ensure that they do reflect the reality of the new numbers and what the numbers show.

“You do make very impressive progress in your general numbers overall when it comes to the murder rate and so forth,” he said.

Senator Kamina Johnson Smith (right), minister of foreign affairs and foreign trade, escorts US Secretary of State Marco Rubio to his vehicle following his arrival at the Norman Manley International Airport in Kingston yesterday.

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“You do make very impressive progress in your general numbers overall when it comes to the murder rate and so forth,” he said.

Jamaica, last year, enjoyed a 19 per cent reduction in murder when compared to the previous year after ending the year with 1,139 murders.

The country’s positive streak in its murder reduction has continued, with the country recording a 30 per cent reduction in March when compared to the same period last year.

Against that backdrop, Rubio added, “I think we need to analyse that and just ensure that the status we’re currently in accurately reflects the status quo and takes into account the progress you’ve already made this year and

made last year, year over year, which I think is one of the highest numbers in terms of reductions that we’ve seen of any country in the region.”

Holness, earlier in the press conference, noted that he and Rubio had discussed the issue of the travel advisory and highlighted the significant progress that the country was making in reducing all major crimes.

“... Jamaica today is safer than at any time in the last two decades.

“In fact, crimes against visitors represent less than 0.01 per cent of the more than three million visitors to Jamaica annually,” Holness said.

Rubio’s visit to Jamaica marked his first stop on his two-day tour of the Caribbean, where he will be meeting with the country’s leaders to advance President Donald Trump’s US foreign policy priorities in the Caribbean.

Rubio, while in Jamaica, will also hold bilateral engagements with heads of state from Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, and Haiti before travelling to Guyana and Suriname.

Meanwhile, Holness said several critical areas of cooperation were discussed to include security, which is a major concern for both countries.

“We reaffirmed our commitment to enhancing cooperation in combating transnational crime, ensuring the collective safety of our citizens and neutrally secured borders. We discussed a global war on gangs, and there is already significant policy alignment with both countries in this regard.”

He noted that the US has been instrumental in supporting Jamaica’s efforts to bolster its marine-domain awareness and intelligence-surveillance capabilities, which are crucial in the fight against organised criminal networks.

“We are committed in ensuring our partnership delivers results in driving down criminality and trafficking in this country,” he said. (Jamaica Gleaner)

PM defends use of medical missions; Rubio says exploitation concerns may not apply to Jamaica

Prime Minister Dr Andrew Holness has defended Jamaica's use of Cuban medics to support the local health sector, declaring that there is no exploitation in the programme that has surfaced as a blot on the Trump administration's radar.

Holness, who, on Wednesday, held bilateral talks with United States Secretary of State Marco Rubio at the Office of the Prime Minister, said the Cubans, more than 400 of them, support the health sector amid the consistent migration of Jamaican healthcare workers.

"Let us be clear. The Cuban doctors in Jamaica have been incredibly helpful to us," said Holness, who pointed to a "deficit" in the sector.

"We're, however, very careful not to exploit the Cuban doctors in our care. We ensure that they are treated within our labour laws and that they benefit like any other worker. So any characterisation of the programme by others certainly would not be applicable to Jamaica," he asserted.

He said the Government has ensured that the programme operates in accordance with international labour laws and standards to which Jamaica is party.

He declared Jamaica's stance amid the Trump Administration's pressure on regional leaders to discontinue the Cuban medical mission programme under its expansion of its Cuba restrictive policy.

In February, Rubio said the expanded restrictions target individuals and immediate

family members of individuals believed to be responsible for the programme, which he described as "forced labour," threatening to revoke their visas.

On Wednesday, Rubio sought to clarify the US's position,



noting that the administration had no issues with the medical missions but, instead, how the programmes are run globally.

"This is not about doctors. This is not about the provision of medical assistance. I'm not speaking about Jamaica. We've discussed this today about following international labour standards and the like. I'm talking about the programme in general and how it's operated around the world," said Rubio.

He argued that doctors are not paid directly, with the earnings from their labour going to the Cuban government, which decides how much is given to them.

"They take away their passports. They, basically, operate as forced labour in many places. Now, there are places that have better labour standards. Perhaps Jamaica is one of those, and that's fine. I'm describing, generally,

around the world what the programme has been. It has operated that way in many parts of the world that place these people in tremendous danger," Rubio said.

"I think we can all agree that the trafficking and labour, be they doctors or farmworkers, is not something that we would want to be supportive of, and we find that to be an egregious practice on the part of the Cuban regime."

He said that because of the US's relationship with Jamaica, the two countries will continue discussions on the matter, noting that the alleged exploitative nature of the programme might not be taking place in Jamaica.

Rubio is the fifth US secretary of state to visit Jamaica in the past 15 years. His visit follows those of Hillary Clinton in June 2011, Rex Tillerson in February 2018, Mike Pompeo in January 2020, and Antony Blinken in March 2024.

He is scheduled to leave the island for Guyana this morning.

Meanwhile, Health and Wellness Minister Dr Christopher Tufton is rejecting claims that Cuban doctors are leaving Jamaica in droves because of the US's position on the programme.

He noted that the mission allows Cuban medics to travel to countries to work for a period before returning to the island.

He said that coincidentally, that period has come to an end for several of them, who will go back for others to come.

According to Tufton, in some instances, extensions are granted but up to a particular time.

Additionally, he said the memorandum of understanding between Cuba and Jamaica is currently being negotiated, with the possibility for change.

"So there is an opportunity, given the recent discussions coming out of the US regarding the programme, for us to clarify issues and maybe adjust elements of the agreement, and that conversation is now taking place," said Tufton. (*Jamaica Gleaner*)

Regional News



Caribbean Women in Leadership launches 10th chapter in Dominica

Dominica has officially joined the Caribbean Women in Leadership (CIWiL) network as its tenth chapter, marking a significant milestone in the organization's ongoing mission to empower women across the Caribbean.

The launch of the Dominica chapter was formalized on March 20 with the election of its inaugural executive team, setting the stage for a new era of female leadership on the island.

A dynamic and diverse team of women was elected to lead the new chapter, a press release from CIWiL Dominica announced.

Mandisa Ducreay-Oseni, a passionate advocate for women and youth, was elected Chairperson. Maritime professional Joanne John-Baptiste Guiste was named Vice President, while Vernesta Newton, a successful entrepreneur, will serve as Coordinator and Secretary. The team is further strengthened by Nichola James-Charles, an air traffic controller, who takes on the role of Treasurer, and Julie Roberts, an entrepreneur, who will lead as Public Re-

lations Officer.

CIWiL is a non-partisan, regional organization dedicated to increasing the representation of women in decision-making spaces through mentorship, advocacy, and capacity-building programs.

With chapters across the Caribbean, the organization has become a driving force in advancing women's leadership, civic engagement, and gender-inclusive policies throughout the region.

The launch of the Dominica chapter is expected to create new opportunities for women on the island to network, receive mentorship, and access training designed to unlock their leadership potential.

The executive team has outlined plans to implement a range of initiatives aimed at strengthening the leadership capabilities of women, fostering inclusive communities, and driving national and regional development.

The newly elected executive is calling on women from all walks of life to join

CIWiL Dominica and take part in its wide-reaching initiatives.

In the coming months, the chapter will roll out a series of capacity-building workshops, policy discussions, and mentorship programs designed to equip women with the tools, knowledge, and confidence needed to thrive in leadership roles.

The new leadership team is committed to ensuring that women in Dominica are well-represented in all decision-making spaces and that their voices are amplified in the conversations that shape the future of the island. CIWiL Dominica has promised to share further details about upcoming initiatives, membership opportunities, and ways to get involved in the near future.

CIWiL has national chapters in Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Belize, Grenada, Jamaica, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and

Tobago. (*Jamaica Gleaner*)

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Former Jamaican PM warns Haiti is ‘perilously close’ to being a failed state

Former Jamaican prime minister Bruce Golding on Wednesday warned that Haiti is “perilously close” to being a failed state and urged the international community and other stakeholders to play a much more meaningful role in ensuring the future security of the French-speaking CARICOM country.

Golding, who is one of the three CARICOM Eminent Persons Group (EPG) seeking to facilitate inclusive dialogue among Haitian stakeholders in an effort to find a solution to the protracted multi-dimensional crisis in the country, also cast doubt on Haiti holding elections later this year.

Speaking during a World Bank sponsored webinar on Haiti, Golding said that since the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in July 2021 “gangs have expanded their control over vast sections of Port au Prince, the seat of government, making it virtually impossible to have an election of a new president within the constitutionally mandated period of 120 days.

“The security situation has continued to deteriorate and under the interim administration of Prime Minister Ariel Henry and the delay in the restoration of constitutional authority has drained he legitimacy of his administration and its inability to provide basic public services have sapped public confidence of government and its institutions”.

Golding, who along with former prime ministers Dr



Kenny Anthony of St. Lucia and Perry Christie of the Bahamas, form the EPG, said the collapse of the Henry government last year, led, with CARICOM’s input, to the establishment of the rotating nine member Haitian Transitional Presidential Council (TPC).

“It is not an ideal situation but it was designed to seek to ensure inclusiveness of the...political actors and political elements in Haiti. We have worked with them now over the last 18 months (and) I can’t tell you I am happy and satisfied with the progress.

“The political differences have continued to disrupt the process, to interfere with the programme that had been hammered out at a meeting in Jamaica in March last year. But it is the best arrangement that we think can work”.

Golding said as a result, CARICOM continues to provide support to its member state “bearing in mind the solution to the Haitian problem has to be Haitian led, Haitian managed.

“Haiti has suffered enough from external interference

and therefore we have to be very respectful of its sovereignty, bearing in mind it is the country which blazed the trail for independence of black countries. We provide support, but we do not instruct, we do not dictate,” Golding told the webinar held under the theme “Haiti-Looking Towards Creating Solutions”.

The former Jamaican prime minister said none of the plans the TPC has set about, in terms of constitutional reform and the holding of elections in November of this year, can proceed unless there is a restoration of security.

“You cannot hold elections unless people feel free to leave their homes and to go to the polling locations to cast their votes, and that issue has not been going well.”

He said CARICOM is grateful that the Kenyan government has provided almost 1,000 troops on the ground, “but in discussions we had with the Kenyan commander two weeks ago, he indicated that for their efforts to be effective, they need an additional 1,500 boots on

the ground.

“My own view is that is understated, but I am not a security manager, he is. One Thousand five hundred additional boots on the ground is not undoable, provided the resources, financing for it can be put in place.”

Golding said he is sure if the financial resources can be put in place “those 1,500 boots on the ground could be mobilised within the Latin American region, but it is absolutely necessary to get an effective force, an overwhelming force to be able to push back against the gangs, to restore security [and] the other arrangements that are necessary for bringing Haiti back from the brink of a failed state.”

He said that in a global economy, in the state index, Haiti now ranks 103.5 on a scale of one to 120.

“It is perilously close to failure, but if we can bring the security situation under control then we can proceed with the constitutional reform programme, we can hold elections to elect a new president and a new legislature and then the rebuilding of Haiti can begin.”

The United Nations (UN) Security Council in 2023 passed a resolution for the Kenya-led MSS Mission, aimed at combating gang violence and restoring stability in the country. Criminal gangs are seeking to take complete control of the capital Port au Prince, and have launched several attacks, killing women and children among others. (*Jamaica Gleaner*)

South Sudan opposition says vice president's arrest ends peace deal



South Sudan's opposition has said that the overnight arrest of First Vice President Riek Machar, long-time rival to President Salva Kiir, has invalidated their 2018 peace deal and risked plunging the country back into war.

A convoy of 20 heavily armed vehicles entered Machar's residence in the capital, Juba, late on Wednesday and arrested him, according to a statement issued by a member of his party – a dramatic escalation of a conflict that has been building for weeks in the world's youngest country.

Al Jazeera's Malcolm Webb, reporting from Nairobi, said that "military vehicles came to his [Riek Machar's] residence

in the night and forcibly disarmed all of his guards. They removed all of the phones and the laptops from the property, arrested the guards and took them away to an unknown location, leaving only Machar at the residence."

Webb said that "the area has been cut off by soldiers. In other parts of the city, life is continuing as normal. This comes off the back of weeks of escalating violence which IO [the Sudan People's Liberation Army In Opposition, or SPLM/IO] describes as a series of attacks by President Kiir's forces, in breach of the peace deal."

A power-sharing deal between Kiir and Machar has been gradually unravelling, threatening a return

of the civil war that killed around 400,000 people between 2013 and 2018.

"The prospect for peace and stability in South Sudan has now been put into serious jeopardy," said Oyet Nathaniel Pierino, deputy chairman of Machar's party.

There was widespread international condemnation, including from the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), warning that the reported arrest left the country "on the brink of relapsing into widespread conflict".

The US Department of State on Thursday called on Kiir to "reverse this action and prevent further escalation" in a post on X.

Analysts say that Kiir, 73,

has been seeking to ensure his succession and sideline Machar for months through cabinet reshuffles.

Daniel Akech, a senior analyst on South Sudan for International Crisis Group, told Al Jazeera that "the agreement of 2018 was centred on two key issues. One was to create a constitution acceptable to all parties. The other one, which was really the key, was power sharing. And part of the power sharing was about military power sharing between the opposing sides."

Akech said that "the president had fired a governor in February who was supposed to be on the opposition led by Machar. He also recently fired the governor in Upper Nile – who was supposed to be with the opposition."

"So, this is clearly a power grab," he said.

"As we speak, this process is no longer binary," Akech said. "We are talking about the president and vice president as though they are the only two actors, but there are plenty within the opposition who are opposed to the government. So, if this escalates to violence, this could be very decentralised with multiple actors, making it difficult to put the fire out."

(Al Jazeera English)



Six dead as tourist submarine crashes off the coast of Egypt

At least six people have died after a tourist submarine crashed in the Red Sea off the coast of Egypt early Thursday.

The Egyptian governorate office said in a statement that all of those killed when the submarine sank were foreign nationals, according to Reuters.

While the governorate did not confirm the submarine's details, five Russians were among those killed aboard the Sindbad submersible when it crashed in the Red Sea less than a mile off the coast of the Egyptian city of Hurghada, according to an Egyptian ambulance source who spoke to RIA news agency.

Russia's embassy in Cairo told NBC News in a statement earlier Thursday

that four of those killed aboard the Sindbad were Russians.

They were among 45 tourists aboard the vessel, which has the same name as the hotel that owns it, said the Russian statement, which did not provide further details on the crash or what the Sindbad crashed into.

"Most of those on board were rescued and taken to their hotels and hospitals in Hurghada," the embassy said, adding that "their health condition is not a concern."

Two municipal officials not authorized to speak to the media told The Associated Press that nine other people were injured in the incident.

The Consulate General in Hurghada confirmed that 38 people had been res-

cued, with 14 people taken to hospital and 24 taken back to their accommodation, according to RIA news agency.

The fate of eight others is still unknown, Russian Consular General Viktor Voropaev told the state news agency TASS. "Our employees are currently on the pier and monitoring the situation," he added.

The tour operator, Sindbad Submarines, owns two of the world's 14 recreational submarines, according to its website.

In November last year, a tourist yacht sank in the Red Sea after warnings of rough waters, Egyptian officials said at the time. At least four people drowned, while 33 were rescued. (*NBC News*)

Wildfires continue to rage in the Carolinas as hundreds are evacuated

Another day of fire danger is forecast throughout the Carolinas as wildfires continue to rage fueled by wind, low humidity and a tinderbox of dry, downed timber left in the wake of Hurricane Helene.

North Carolina and South Carolina have both declared states of emergencies for multiple counties, as hundreds of residents have been evacuated and several structures destroyed.

Fire threats continued Thursday — but to a lesser degree than Wednesday, with no red flag warnings in place. However, humidity levels will be below 25% for much of the East Coast and there will still be wind, though lighter than yesterday, NBC meteorologist Dylan Dreyer forecast.

It's all-hands-on-deck in the mountainous parts of the states, and statewide burn bans are in effect.

In North Carolina, there are eight active wildfires in Caldwell, Buncombe, Polk, Jackson, Haywood and Swain counties, according to an interactive map by the North Carolina Forest Service.

New fires sparked in dry conditions Wednesday, prompting Gov. Josh Stein to declare another state of emergency “to make sure we have every tool at our disposal” to respond to

fires in the western part of the state.

The worst blazes are the Black Cove Complex Fire and the Deep Woods Fire, both in Polk County and Henderson County.

The Black Cove Complex fire stood at 3,053 acres and 17% contained, according to a Wednesday-evening update by the North Carolina Forest Service. This fire first ignited March 19 via a downed power line.

“The Black Cove Fire has continued to burn to the west, farther into Henderson County on both sides of the Green River. Firefighters continue protecting structures and attempting to prevent the fire from spreading toward homes off Summerhaven and Macedonia roads,” the N.C. Forest Service said.

The Deep Woods Fire is 3,231 acres and 11% contained. It was first reported March 19 and the cause remains under investigation. Meanwhile, the Fish Hook Fire, also in Polk County, was 199 acres in size and 86% contained, as of Wednesday evening, with forward progression stopped.

In South Carolina, two major fires have burned more than 6,000 acres.

The Table Rock Fire near Table Rock State Park in Pickens County nearly doubled in size Wednesday,

to 4,556 acres. Strong wind gusts led the southern front of the fire to breach containment lines yesterday, the South Carolina Forestry Commission said. The Pickens County Sheriff's Office said March 21 that the fire was caused by “the negligent act of some hikers.”

“The young men that are responsible for the fire have been identified. The investigation is continuing by agents and detectives with the sheriff's office as well as those with the South Carolina Forestry Commission, and the appropriate charges will be discussed and made at a later date,” Sheriff Tommy Blankenship said.

Meanwhile, the Persimmon Ridge Fire grew to 1,553 acres Wednesday, expanding in eastern, western and southern directions and jumping U.S. Highway 276 to the west and Persimmon Ridge Road to the South.

No injuries have been reported in the blazes.

Yesterday, the commission called for the immediate evacuations of residents in Greenville and Pickens counties.

“Never in my 52 years did I think would I be running from my home in a fire,” Wendy Clarke, who evacuated her home in the Caesar's Head area near the Persimmon Ridge Fire to

a local shelter, told NBC News' Marissa Parra.

Extreme fire behavior — including low humidity and gusty winds — on Wednesday led to new evacuations and “a second straight day of rapid expansion,” the South Carolina Forestry Commission said.

The agency noted that dry, downed timber from Hurricane Helene, which hit in September, is a major threat for fire growth.

“The amount of downed debris and timber in the woods is almost indescribable,” Madeline Stewart, the South Carolina Forestry Commission Public Information Coordinator, said on NBC's “TODAY” show.

On Thursday, there's an elevated fire risk in Georgia, the Carolinas, as well as Washington, D.C., up to New York.

Meanwhile, Texas will see rain Thursday in a storm system that will slowly creep east. Parts of south Texas are under a flood threat, with slow-moving showers and storms. Tomorrow, east Texas and Louisiana will see downpours, and by Saturday the storms will rumble into Tennessee and Mississippi with widespread severe risk from Texas to Ohio. (NBC News)

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30 years after music icon Selena's murder, killer Yolanda Saldívar is up for parole in the US



Thirty years ago, music legend Selena Quintanilla-Pérez was killed by her fan club's president, Yolanda Saldívar, who is now up for parole in the US state of Texas. The 64-year-old convict has been serving a life sentence.

Saldívar has a petition for parole under review, according to Texas Department of Criminal Justice online records. On Sunday, she is up for parole for the very first time.

According to a spokeswoman for the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles, her case will be voted on or around then, but there's no exact date for the decision to be released.

Born in 1971, Quintanilla-Pérez demonstrated an incredible vocal gift in

childhood, fronting Selena y Los Dinos with her siblings AB. and Suzette Quintanilla.

Her superstardom arrived in the early 1990s, with her unique blend of Tejano, pop, cumbia and other musical styles manifesting in huge hits like "Bidi Bidi Bom Bom," "Como la Flor," "Amor Prohibido," "No Me Queda Mas" and "Tu Solo Tu."

Known the world over as The Queen of Tejano, or even more simply just as Selena, she broke barriers for women in Latin music. She opened the floodgates for a new generation of contemporary artists of Latin descent who would go on to enjoy huge popularity with mainstream American audiences. She often sang

in Spanish and spoke in English, reflecting a cross-cultural identity that resonated with listeners.

She won her first Grammy in 1994 for best Mexican/Mexican-American album for "Live," becoming the first female Tejano artist to win the category. She was just 23 when she was killed the following year. But her legacy endures for Mexican Americans, Mexicans, Texans, Latinos and beyond.

Her posthumous English-language crossover album released a few months after her death, "Dreaming of You," topped the Billboard 200, featuring hits like "I Could Fall in Love" and "Dreaming of You." In 1997, a biographical film about her life, "Selena," would quickly become a

classic, further launching the career of lead Jennifer Lopez.

In 2017, she received a posthumous star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. At the time, according to a Hollywood Chamber of Commerce spokesperson, the crowd was the largest-ever for a Walk of Fame ceremony, breaking a 1998 record set by onlookers at the unveiling of the star for Mexican singer Vicente Fernández.

In 2021, she received a posthumous lifetime achievement award from the Grammys. There was no tribute.

Yolanda Saldívar, a former nurse, was the founder and president of Selena's fan club. She was also a manager of Selena's clothing boutiques, Selena Etc., but was fired in early 1995 after money was discovered missing.

On March 31, 1995, Selena went to Saldívar's room at the Days Inn motel in Corpus Christi, Texas, to pick up business records she needed for a tax filing, according to court testimony. A confrontation followed.

Selena was shot in the back with a .38-caliber revolver in the motel room, ran outside and collapsed in the lobby. She was rushed to a nearby hospital and pronounced dead about an hour later.

Motel employees testified Selena named "Yolanda" in

“room 158” as her attacker. “I didn’t mean to do it. I didn’t mean to kill anybody,” a sobbing Saldívar said during a 9-hour stand-off with police, during which she held a gun to her head. She told police she had bought the .38-caliber revolver to kill herself.

The trial was moved to Houston because of heavy publicity.

Prosecutors contended that Saldívar shot the 23-year-old after the singer’s family suspected her of embezzling \$30,000. The defense argued the gun went off accidentally.

On October 23, 1995, the jury convicted Saldívar of first-degree murder. She was sentenced to life in prison, with the possibility of parole after 30 years — beginning in 2025.

Saldívar did not face the death penalty because the crime contained none of the aggravating circumstances required under Texas law, such as a multiple murder or a murder committed during a robbery.

In 1999, the Court of Criminal Appeals in Austin turned down Saldívar’s first plea for a new trial. In 2000, her lawyer Bill Berchermann asked the state to revisit the trial.

He argued that prosecutors wrongly dismissed potential jurors because of race, did not disclose the criminal record of a witness and made improper comments in court. He said police also violated Saldívar’s rights by

interrogating her after she asked for an attorney.

In 2009, Saldívar lost an appeal because it was filed in the wrong county. She had asked the court to order an appeal filed nine years earlier in Nueces County to move forward, but the state’s highest criminal appeals court said it should have been filed in Harris County, where she was tried and convicted.

She’s incarcerated at the Patrick L O’Daniel prison unit in Gatesville, Texas, about 90 minutes north of Austin.

In Texas, the parole division of the state’s Department of Criminal Justice identifies inmates six months before the date of their initial parole eligibility and pulls their case file for review. Notice of an inmate’s eligibility for parole is sent to officials involved in the trial, any victims and victims’ family members.

An institutional parole officer with the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles interviews an inmate and prepares a summary for the board. The victim or the victim’s family members can provide a written statement and can appear in person before board members.

The inmate’s file is then sent to the parole board and voted on by a three-person panel. The panel will vote on a case just prior to the inmate’s parole eligibility date and a majority of two votes is needed for a final decision.

In Texas, the board does not conduct public parole hearings. Parole release decisions are made independently by each panel member.

Representatives for members of Quintanilla-Pérez’s family did not immediately respond to The Associated Press’ request for comment this week.

A denial by the panel will include the date of the next time an inmate will be eligible for parole.

Saldívar was convicted of first-degree murder, one of the crimes where state law dictates that the next review after a denial can be done anywhere from one to five years from the date of the denial.

An approval by the panel could include special conditions the inmate will have to follow while on parole. Processing time for a release differs from case to case. Once a release certificate with an approved residence plan is issued, it will be audited by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice’s Classification and Records Department and a release date is calculated. Typically, these processes can take two to six weeks to complete.

The governor cannot veto a parole decision by the pardons board. The governor, upon recommendation by a majority of the pardons board, can grant clemency. That includes pardons, commutations and reprieves. (*Jamaica Gleaner*)




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Sports News



Success for Navigators and Spanish Heat 2 in ABBA's Second Division



The Navigators and Spanish Heat 2 recorded wins in the Antigua and Barbuda Basketball Association's (ABBA) Second Division on Wednesday evening.

The Navigators claimed their ninth win in 12 matches by snatching a narrow 61-58 victory against the Old Road Daggers in the second game of a

double-header at the JSC Sports Complex.

Ariel Quallis sank 20 points and grabbed 12 rebounds; Ryan Sheppard produced 11 points, 10 rebounds, and five steals; and Ralph Spooner scored 10 points and claimed 19 rebounds for the Navigators.

Kelvin Simon converted 15 points and claimed nine rebounds; Craig Thomas sank 12 points and snatched eight rebounds; Kedar Clarke narrowly missed out on achieving a triple double with 11 points, nine rebounds, eight steals, and five assists; and Braulio Estrada scored 10 points for the Old Road Daggers, who suffered their fourth loss in 11 games.

Spanish Heat 2 recorded their eighth win in 10 games with a 109-62 drubbing of Da Project in the first game of

Wednesday's double-header.

Spanish Heat 2 was led by Sandy Valdez with 19 points and five rebounds; Kevin Pimentel with 16 points and six rebounds; and Derek Perez with 15 points.

In support, Erwin Rodriguez sank 12 points and grabbed 18 rebounds; Maicol Reyes produced 11 points, 14 rebounds, and six assists; and Charlie Daniel converted 11 points and claimed 14 rebounds for Spanish Heat 2.

Nathan Matthew produced 19 points; Raheem Charles converted 10 points and grabbed 10 rebounds; and Gabriel De-Suza scored 10 points and snatched six rebounds for Da Project 2, who suffered their 11th loss in as many games.

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Villa Lions achieve fifth-place finish in Premier Division League

Aston Villa Lions have secured fifth place in the Antigua and Barbuda Football Association's (ABFA) Premier Division League.

The Villa Lions wrapped up their Premier League campaign on a winning note by recording a 5-3 victory against the Willikies Warriors in their final encounter at the ABFA Technical Center on Wednesday evening.

The result means that the Villa Lions finished their campaign in fifth place with 36 points after notching up their 11th win during their quota of 19 matches.

It also means that the Willikies Warriors became the third of the four teams that will be automatically relegated at the end of the Premier League to compete in next season's First Division.

The Willikies Warriors, who have one game remaining, are currently third from the bottom of the 14-team competition on goal difference with 11 points after slumping to their 13th defeat in 18 matches.

Bottom team Parham and Cool and Smooth Greenbay Hoppers, who are currently second from the bottom of the standings, will also be automatically relegated from the Premier League.



Players of the Villa Lions team place with 17 points and one match to play.

The teams that finish in positions 11th, 12th, 13th and 14th will be relegated at the end of the season. The team that finishes in 10th place will enter a playoff with the third and fourth place finishers in the second in the First Division, with the winner playing in the Premier Division next season.

Five Islands and Attacking Saints are the other two teams in danger of being the fourth and final team to be relegated.

Attacking Saints are currently in the relegation zone in 11th place with 16 points with one game remaining. Five Islands currently occupy the playoff spot in 10th

place with 17 points and one match to play. Defending champions Special Security Services and Bitar Pizza All Saints United have already secured their second successive Premier Division league title, while Sandals and APUA Inet Jennings Grenades have finished in the runners-up position for the second successive season.

All Saints United, which has one game remaining, has already retained the title by achieving an unassailable 49 points from 18 matches.

All Saints United will play the last encounter of the season when the Premier League concludes with the

final round of matches at the ABFA Technical Center this weekend.

All Saints United will face Garden Stars in the final game of a double-header on Sunday at 7 pm. It will be preceded by an encounter between the Willikies Warriors and Green City FC, who will clash in their final match of the season at 5 pm.

The Attacking Saints and Five Islands will clash in their final match during the opening game of a triple-header on Saturday at 4 pm. Island Original John Hughes will take on the Greenbay Hoppers at 6 pm, and Parham will tackle the Potters Tigers at 8 pm.


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Sports News



PMS advance to Under-20 Girls Division school league final

Defending champions Princess Margaret School (PMS) is on course to make a successful defense of their title in the Under-20 Division of the Ministry of Sports Cool and Smooth Joma International Female School Football League.

Princess Margaret School advanced to the final after finishing at the top of the standings on goal difference ahead of St. Anthony's Secondary School at the end of the round-robin preliminary stage of the competition.

Both teams finished the preliminary stage with 10 points each after Princess Margaret recorded a 3-0 victory against St. Anthony's Secondary School in a top-of-the-table final-round clash at the ABFA Technical Center on Wednesday.

Kamiellia Hughes struck twice with goals in the 35th and 68th minutes after teammate Ajana Martin opened the scoring with a 12th-minute conversion.

Princess Margaret School received a bye and advanced straight to the final by virtue of finishing at the top of the standings at the end of the preliminary stage.

The defending champions will face either St. Anthony's Secondary School or the Antigua Girls High School in the final.

St. Anthony's Secondary School, which finished second in the standings, will clash with third-place finishers Antigua Girls High School in a playoff, with the winner advancing to the final to take on Princess Margaret School.

Antigua Girls High School claimed third place with seven points after being awarded victory by default against Clare Hall Secondary School, which failed to show up for their final preliminary round encounter at the ABFA Technical Center on Wednesday.



The PMS senior girls will be defending their title in the Under-20 final of the Ministry of Sports Cool and Smooth Joma International Female School Football League. (File photo)

Meanwhile, reigning champions Five Islands Primary recorded their first win during the second round of matches in the annual Cool and Smooth, Joma International Ministry of Sports Primary School Cup football competition.

After being held to a 1-1 draw by former three-peat champions Golden Grove Primary in their opening encounter, Five Islands Primary snatched a 1-0 win against Jennings Primary during the second round of matches in Group A at the Golden Grove playing field.

It was the first loss for Jennings Primary, who prevailed 2-0 against Urlings Primary in their opening encounter.

Golden Grove Primary also secured their first win with a 6-1 drubbing of Greenbay Primary, while Urlings Primary picked up their first point with a 1-1 draw with Old Road Primary, who were playing their first match in this year's competition.

Greenbay Primary snatched a 4-2 victory against Olivia David Primary of Bolans in their opening encounter.

Runners-up in last year's competition, T.N. Kirnon Primary continued their poor start to their campaign in

Group B at the T.N. Kirnon playing field.

After suffering a 1-0 loss to Parham Primary in their opening match, T.N. Kirnon Primary was held to a goalless draw by Pares Primary in their second-round encounter.

Pigotts Primary and New Winthropes Primary kicked off their campaign in Group with a battle to a goalless draw, while Villa Primary made a winning start with a 2-0 victory against Potters Primary.

But Freemansville and St. Peters made it two wins in as many games with victories in Group C at the Buckley's playing field.

Freemansville Primary beat C.T. Samuel Primary 5-1, while St. Peters Primary prevailed 4-2 against Liberta Primary. St. Peters Primary secured a 3-0 victory against C.T. Samuel Primary in their opening encounter.

After suffering a 5-1 loss to Freemansville Primary in their opening match, J.T. Ambrose rebounded to record a 5-0 victory against Sea View Farm Primary.

It was the second heavy defeat for Sea View Farm Primary, who were hammered 5-1 by Buckley's Primary in their opening encounter.

AGS returns to winning form in Under-15s school cricket contest

Antigua Grammar School (AGS) claimed their second win in three matches in the Under-15 Division 30-Over Competition of the Ministry of Sports Schools' Cricket Championships on Wednesday.

After suffering a 54-run loss to Princess Margaret School in the second round, Antigua Grammar School returned to winning ways with a commanding 168-run win against Ottos Comprehensive School in their third-round encounter at the Rising Sun playing field in St. John's.

Set 181 to win, Ottos Comprehensive School was dismissed for 12 in 4.3 overs. Tiandre Charles snapped up four wickets for four runs, and Dante Odlum grabbed two wickets without conceding a run.

Antigua Grammar School made 180 for two off 15 overs. Shane Walsh slammed 62 off 45 balls, including eight fours and two sixes.

Isaiah Harris struck 43 off 26 balls with seven fours, and Leonaldo Ducreay scored 20 off 19 balls. There was also a contribution of 47 extras, comprising 23 wides, 12 byes, and 12 no balls.

J'Quan Hunte and Lyndon Matheson each picked up a wicket for Ottos Comprehensive School, who lost for the second time in three matches.

Jennings Secondary and All Saints Secondary also won their encounters in the third round of matches. Jennings Secondary defeated Sir Novelle Richards Acad-

emy by eight wickets at the Factory Grounds.

Sir Novelle Richards Academy was restricted to 81 for four off 20 overs. There was a contribution of 50 extras, including 41 wides.

Jeremiah Edwards made 11 not out, and captain Clayton Joseph scored 10. There was a wicket each for Giovanni Thomas, David Williams, Coby James, and Tiquan Tonge.

Jennings Secondary achieved victory by scoring 84 for two in 11.3 overs. There was a contribution of 35 extras, including 25 wides.

Captain Estan Hill hit 30 not out off 33 balls, and Tiquan Tonge got 16. Clayton Joseph captured both wickets for 20 runs for Sir

Novelle Richards Academy, who lost for the third time in as many games.

All Saints Secondary prevailed by nine wickets against Irene B. Williams Secondary in their third-round match at the Mack Pond playing field in All Saints.

Irene B. Williams Secondary was dismissed for 24. LeBron Jarvis grabbed four wickets for four runs, Nasri Brooks picked up two wickets without conceding a run, Kamarlie Benjamin captured two wickets for three runs, and Zion Challenger claimed two wickets for seven runs.

All Saints Secondary achieved victory at 25 for one. Nasri Brooks hit 21 not out, and Joshua Nathaniel captured one for 14.



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ABTTA names team for Regional Table Tennis Championships



Stuti Kashyap



Mekhi Simmons



Barrington Loague

The Antigua and Barbuda Table Tennis Association (ABTTA) has announced a national contingent, which has been selected to represent the country at the Caribbean Region Under-19 Youth Championships in Barbados next month.

According to a media release from the ABTTA, the 2024 Caribbean Under-15 Girls Champion, Stuti Kashyap, will lead the three-member team that will participate in the event, which is scheduled to take place in Bridgetown from April 20 to 26.

Kashyap is joined by teammates Mekhi Simmons and Barrington Loague, both of whom will be making their debut at the regional level.

The ABTTA claims Kashyap is currently ranked 100th in the world at the under-19 level and 56th in the under-17 category. She is the number one ranked female player at the under-17 level in the Americas.

The players will be accompanied

by President of the ABTTA Charles “Chucky” Bellot, who will also perform duties as manager and coach.

The three table tennis players will compete in both singles and doubles matches.

Stuti Kashyap and Mekhi Simmons will compete in mixed doubles, and Mekhi Simmons and Barrington Loague will contest the boys doubles.

Stuti Kashyap will team up with Shantal Charles of St. Lucia in the Girls Doubles, exemplifying regional camaraderie and collaboration.

The duo of Kashyap and Charles captured third place in the Under-15 Girls Doubles event at last year’s regional championships.

According to the ABTTA media release, Kashyap continues to elevate Antigua and Barbuda’s profile on the international stage with her consistent performances.

As the reigning Caribbean U15 champion and the current top-ranked

U17 player in the Americas, she brings valuable experience and momentum to the team as she steps into the Under-19 category.

Mekhi and Barrington, both making their Caribbean Youth Championships debuts, represent the promising next generation of national players.

Their inclusion reflects the ABTTA’s commitment to athlete development through exposure to elite regional competition.

This tournament is part of the ABTTA’s broader strategy to rebuild and expand its competitive programme.

The ABTTA aims to field full teams in all divisions — Under-11, Under-13, Under-15, Under-19, and Seniors — by 2026, with a strong emphasis on participation in team events.

The ABTTA extends its best wishes to the athletes and encourages the public to support the team as they proudly represent Antigua and Barbuda