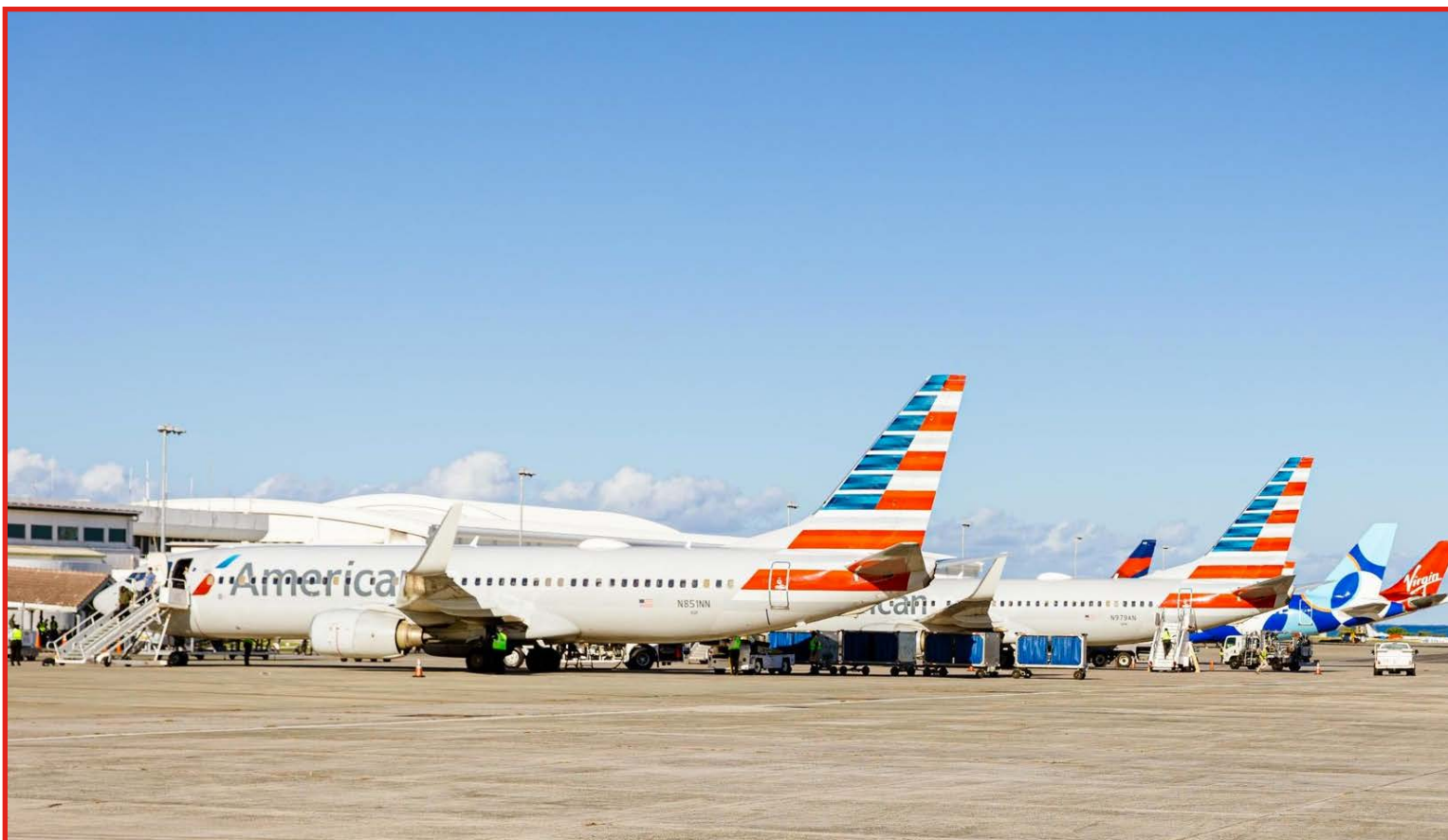


# Air Arrivals Soar at Year's End

*Story on page 3*



*Strong holiday traffic closes 2025 on a high note for tourism photo source - V C Bird International Airport*

## Unity, Responsibility, and the Test of Our Institutions



The period following Christmas often reveals more about a society than the moments of celebration. With the festivities behind us, the country is left to reckon with how it will resolve disagreements, manage growth, and protect the institutions that hold national life together.

In recent days, several seemingly separate stories have converged on a common theme: unity must be matched by responsibility, and inclusion must be anchored in respect for process.

From the diaspora came a renewed call for cooperation beyond political lines and geography, reminding Antiguan and Barbudans everywhere that nation-building is not confined by borders. That same spirit surfaced locally in the resolution surrounding Country-Fest, where dialogue corrected miscommunication and preserved a cultural platform that has long supported community development, youth opportunity, and indigenous expression. In both cases, restraint and engagement took precedence.

At the same time, the partial collapse

of the St. John's Harbour boardwalk served as a sobering reminder that progress entails obligations. Strong tourism numbers and increased activity place real pressure on public assets. Stewardship, accountability, and proactive management are not optional add-ons to development; they are its foundation. The Port Authority's assumption of responsibility for the boardwalk signals an understanding that growth must be accompanied by care.

These lessons extend beyond infrastructure and culture into governance and law.

The questioning of the Leader of the Opposition as part of an ongoing investigation into the burning of public utility materials has been framed by some as persecution rather than process. Yet the strength of a democracy is measured not by who is questioned, but by whether institutions are allowed to function without intimidation, presumption, or political theatre. Due process is neither punishment nor privilege; it is the mechanism through

which accountability is established.

Calls for public mobilization around active investigations risk blurring the line between democratic expression and pressure on institutions responsible for maintaining order and fairness. In a system governed by law, confidence is built when procedures are respected and outcomes are guided by evidence, not by volume.

Taken together, these moments present a quiet yet important test. Unity cannot be selective. Responsibility cannot be deferred. And institutions cannot be trusted only when their actions are convenient.

As Antigua and Barbuda moves into the new year, the work ahead is not merely to grow, celebrate, or contest, but to govern well, maintain what we have built, and resolve differences within the bounds of law and respect. That is how trust is sustained, culture protected, and democracy strengthened.

The season has passed. The responsibility remains.



## Air Arrivals Soar at Year's End



**Minister of Tourism Charles 'Max' Fernandez**


Antigua and Barbuda closed out 2025 with a sharp rise in international air arrivals, as more than a dozen overseas flights landed at V.C. Bird International Airport on Saturday, December 27, underscoring strong demand during the peak holiday travel period.

According to information released by the Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority, the heavy flight rotation underscored sustained interest in the destination during the winter season, along with steady regional services and continued private jet activity.

The arrivals included flights operated by British Airways, Virgin Atlantic, American Airlines, United Airlines, JetBlue, Delta Air Lines, Air Canada, Sunwing, and Norse Atlantic Airways, underscoring the breadth of source markets feeding the destination during the holiday period.

Tourism Minister Charles Max Fernandez said the surge in air capacity reflected continued airline confidence in Antigua and Barbuda as a leading winter-sun destination.


"These flights reinforce confidence in



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 FLIGHTS IN ONE DAY

VS 1310 LHR 333	UA 1355 EWR 739
B6 1420 JFK 220-300	DL 1410 JFK 737-800
DL 1445 ATL 737-800	AA 1349 JFK 737MAX
BA 1425 LGW 772	NO 1630 MAN 789
AA 1538 CLT 737-800	AA 1505 MIA 737-800
AA 1641 MIA 737MAX	WG 1829 YYZ 737MAX
NO 1510 LGW 789	AC 1520 YYZ 319

**Saturday December 27, 2025**



our tourism product and Antigua and Barbuda's standing as a premier winter destination," Fernandez said, noting that demand has been driven by leisure travellers, returning diaspora families, and cruise-related travel, including home-porting activity.

Stay-over arrival figures through November showed steady growth throughout 2025, with December expected to strengthen overall performance for the year further.

Colin C. James, Chief Executive Officer of the Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority, attributed the positive performance to expanded air capacity and targeted destination marketing.

"Increases in air capacity during high-demand periods this year, sup-

ported by focused marketing efforts and favourable weather conditions, have resulted in sustained performance for 2025," James said.

The year-end surge in international flights offers an early signal of what 2026 may hold for Antigua and Barbuda's tourism sector: sustained demand, intensified competition for air capacity, and increased pressure on supporting infrastructure.

With airlines showing confidence through expanded winter schedules, attention is expected to shift toward maintaining route viability beyond peak periods and converting seasonal gains into more consistent year-round performance.

The growth in arrivals also under-

# Local News



**V.C. Bird International Airport on Saturday, December 27**

scores the importance of operational readiness throughout the visitor economy, including airport operations, ground transportation, accommodations, utilities, and public spaces.

For policymakers and tourism stake-

holders, the momentum heading into 2026 presents both opportunity and responsibility: to deepen market diversification, strengthen service standards, and align infrastructure investment with projected growth.

As Antigua and Barbuda enters the new year, the strong finish to 2025 reinforces tourism's role as a central economic driver and highlights the need for coordinated planning to support continued expansion.



## Early Closure Notice

Please be advised that all banks will

**close at 12:00 PM**

on the following dates:

**Wednesday December 24<sup>th</sup>**

**Wednesday December 31<sup>st</sup>**

We encourage customers to plan their banking activities accordingly and take advantage of digital banking services for added convenience. Warm wishes for a joyful holiday season.

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## Opposition Leader Questioned by Police in Old Road Fire Investigation

Opposition Leader Jamale Pringle reported to Police Headquarters on Boxing Day, where he was questioned in connection with an ongoing investigation into the burning of materials belonging to the Antigua Public Utilities Authority (APUA) at Old Road.

Pringle's appearance followed an invitation issued by the Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda to assist with investigations into the malicious damage to APUA property. He was not arrested, and no charges were announced following the questioning.

According to a statement issued by the Police Administration, discussions were held between the Leader of the Opposition and Commissioner of Police Everton Jeffers, during which Pringle indicated he would be available to assist the investigation on Friday, December 26, at 10:00 a.m. That arrangement was communicated to his attorney, who agreed to the time and assured that they would attend Police Headquarters as requested. The Police Administration stated that the purpose of the invitation was to obtain information relevant to the ongoing investigation. Police further expressed dissatisfaction with public statements made by Pringle after the agreement, noting that those statements were contrary to what had been discussed and agreed.

The police response followed a statement circulated earlier by the United Progressive Party, which accused the police of acting under political influence and claimed the invitation was issued at the direction of Prime Minister Gaston Browne. The opposition characterized the matter as political persecution and called on supporters to mobilize publicly under the banner "Freedom Day."

In its statement, the Police Administration reaffirmed its commitment to act in the best interests of all citizens, regardless of political affiliation or




**Opposition Leader Jamale Pringle reported to Police Headquarters**

persuasion. The public was reminded that the laws of Antigua and Barbuda must be respected at all times, and that the police will continue to perform their duties with professionalism, fairness, and impartiality.

The fire at Old Road, which destroyed APUA materials related to ongoing


work, remains under investigation. Police have maintained that invitations and summonses issued during investigations do not constitute arrests and are routine parts of the information-gathering process in criminal inquiries involving damage to public property.



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# Summons Is Not Persecution

Opposition rhetoric tests respect for the rule of law

The United Progressive Party (UPP) and Opposition Leader Jamale Pringle's decision to cast routine police summons as political persecution is a reckless distortion of due process and a disservice to democratic norms.

A police summons is not an arrest. It does not imply guilt, detention, or a criminal charge. It is a lawful investigative tool used to obtain information and clarify facts, particularly in matters involving public safety and public property. Presenting it otherwise is a deliberate misrepresentation of the facts.

The burning of materials belonging to the Antigua Public Utilities Authority at Old Road was not a symbolic protest. It was the destruction of assets tied to national infrastructure and public service delivery. Any responsible police force is duty-bound to investigate such an incident thoroughly and impartially. Political office does not confer immunity from that investiga-



**Opposition Leader Jamale Pringle**

tion.

The Police Administration has clarified that the invitation extended to the Opposition Leader was issued solely to assist the investigation. The date and time were discussed directly with the Commissioner of Police and confirmed through the Leader's attorney, who agreed to the arrangement. These facts contradict claims of ambush or

victimisation.

Despite this, the Opposition chose escalation over restraint, issuing public statements that questioned police integrity and called for mobilization under the banner of "Freedom Day." This posture was unnecessary and irresponsible, transforming a routine investigative step into political theater and placing unwarranted pressure on law enforcement.

When political leaders claim that lawful police procedures are illegitimate whenever they involve opposition figures, they set a dangerous precedent: that accountability is selective. That position is incompatible with the rule of law.

No charges have been filed. No findings have been announced. The investigation remains ongoing, as it should.

Leadership in a democracy requires respect for institutions, not attempts to discredit them when they are inconvenient. The rule of law is not persecution. It is protection. And it must be defended.




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**NAOMI RAINE - SAMUEL MEDAS - JOHNMARK WIGGAN**

**RASHID WALKER - MINISTER BEVERLEY DANVERS - ROXY - RICHIE PELLE**

**PSALMIST ROBYN - MADELYN & DUNAMIS WORSHIP - MELONNIE SADLER**

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# Port Authority Assumes Responsibility for Boardwalk

Pedestrian access has been partially restored along the St. John's Harbour boardwalk after emergency stabilization work, allowing the route between Redcliffe Quay and Heritage Quay to reopen under controlled conditions during the peak cruise season.

Port officials confirmed that the damaged section has been temporarily reinforced, allowing only pedestrian traffic while longer-term structural solutions are developed. The controlled reopening is intended to ease congestion along the harbor front while maintaining public safety during periods of heavy visitor traffic.

Port Manager Darwin Telemague said the Antigua Port Authority has now assumed full responsibility for the boardwalk's management and maintenance, a move intended to strengthen oversight and accelerate necessary upgrades. This enables a more coordinated approach to inspections, safety enforcement, and long-term planning.

He noted that a comprehensive inspection and redesign are being fast-tracked, with engineers assessing load capacity, usage patterns, and structural integrity to ensure the boardwalk can safely meet modern cruise-era demands.

Part of the redesign process will involve clarifying how different sections of the boardwalk are used, particularly where pedestrian flow intersects with commercial activity and marine operations.

Mr. Telemague explained that certain sections were never intended for concentrated passenger traffic or water-taxi loading, and that clearer design standards and controls will be critical moving forward.

The Port Authority will continue to closely monitor the reopened section as cruise calls remain heavy throughout the winter tourism season.

Beyond the immediate repairs, the



boardwalk incident underscores the broader reality facing Antigua and Barbuda's cruise infrastructure: visitor volumes have exceeded the original design assumptions for several legacy waterfront assets.

The Port Authority's decision to assume direct responsibility for the boardwalk signals a shift toward more centralized oversight of cruise-facing infrastructure, with safety, load capacity, and usage clarity taking precedence over informal or inherited arrangements.

It also underscores the need for infrastructure planning that aligns with modern cruise operations, including clearer pedestrian routing, designated loading areas for water taxis and tours, and materials engineered to withstand sustained, high-density foot traffic.

As cruise arrivals remain a key pillar of the tourism economy, the episode underscores that maintaining a positive visitor experience depends as much on behind-the-scenes engineering and as-

set management as on hospitality and marketing. Proactive investment and coordinated oversight will be essential to ensuring that growth at the port is matched by resilience on the ground.

The emergency intervention followed the collapse of a section of the boardwalk earlier this week, between Redcliffe Quay and Heritage Quay, on a busy cruise day when more than 12,000 visitors were on the island.

Reports indicate that at least two tourists were injured when the structure failed, with at least one falling into the water. Engineers and maintenance crews were deployed immediately to stabilize the area and prevent further damage.

Although no fatalities were reported, the incident has underscored the pressures on downtown harbor front infrastructure and the importance of proactive maintenance, clear usage designations, and timely upgrades in high-traffic public spaces.



## Diaspora Officer Hits the Ground Running

Even as plans for 2026 take shape, Dr Dave Ray has begun setting the tone for his tenure, using the Christmas season to issue a message centred on unity, service, and nation-building.

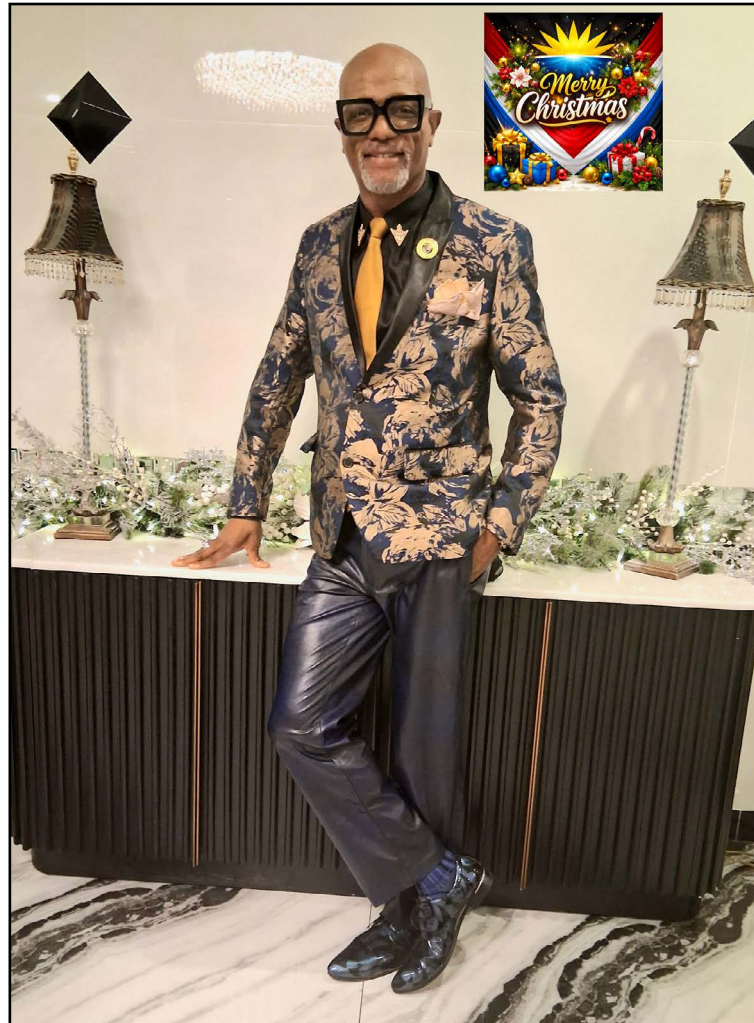
In his Christmas message to the diaspora, Ray encouraged reflection on the challenges of the past year and urged Antiguan and Barbudans abroad not to allow political division to undermine collective progress.

Calling on overseas nationals to “raise the standard, raise it boldly” and to recommit themselves to the work of building “a true nation,” Ray framed the diaspora not as distant observers, but as active partners in Antigua and Barbuda’s development.

“As your appointed Diaspora Liaison, I implore you all to commit to working with me on projects great or small for the furtherance of our country’s development,” he said, stressing that his role is rooted in service. “I’m here only to serve, and nothing more.”

Ray’s message comes as the Government of Antigua and Barbuda formalises its approach to diaspora engagement with his appointment as a dedicated Diaspora Officer.

Foreign Affairs Minister E. P. Chet Greene said the role is intended to strengthen relationships with Antiguan



**Dr Dave Ray**

and Barbudans living overseas, moving engagement beyond traditional consular services toward a more structured and strategic framework.

Greene explained that the government recognises the diaspora as a critical partner in national development, with potential contributions in areas such as investment, skills transfer, entrepreneurship, and community development.

As part of this renewed focus, government plans are already underway for a Diaspora Business Forum

to be held in St. John’s in 2026, with the timing expected to align with the Carnival season.

According to the minister, scheduling the forum during Carnival is a deliberate effort to make participation easier for diaspora members who already travel home during that period, reducing the need for multiple trips while maximising engagement.

The forum is expected to provide a platform for structured dialogue between diaspora stakeholders, local businesses, and

government officials, with discussions likely to focus on investment opportunities, national priorities, and practical avenues for collaboration.

Beyond the symbolism of appointment and seasonal messaging, the creation of a dedicated Diaspora Officer underscores the Government of Antigua and Barbuda’s view of its overseas nationals as stakeholders in national development.

The alignment of the planned 2026 forum with Carnival suggests an intention to integrate diaspora engagement into existing national rhythms, rather than treating it as a stand-alone exercise.

Equally significant is the emphasis placed on unity over division. By urging cooperation across political lines, Ray’s early messaging frames diaspora engagement as a national project rather than a partisan one.

Ray’s Christmas message, grounded in faith, service, and national responsibility, sets an early benchmark for how the role may function: accessible, inclusive, and action-oriented.

With a dedicated liaison now in place and concrete plans already emerging, the approach suggests that diaspora engagement is being repositioned as a year-round development strategy.



## VC Bird International Puts Emergency Response Systems to the Test



As passenger traffic peaks during the holiday travel season, Antigua and Barbuda's primary international gateway will place its emergency response systems under scrutiny, with a full-scale aviation security and emergency exercise scheduled for Monday, December 29.

The Antigua and Barbuda Airport Authority (ABAA) will lead the exercise at V.C. Bird International Airport between 9:00 a.m. and 12:00 noon, in collaboration with the National Office for Disaster Services (NODS) and several national response agencies.

Participating partners include the Antigua and Barbuda Defence Force (ABDF), the Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda (RP-FAB), Emergency Medical Services (EMS), and other key airport stakeholders.

Airport officials said the exercise forms part of a structured programme of periodic simulations designed to test coordination, communication, and response times across agencies in high-risk scenarios. Such drills are a requirement under international aviation safety and security standards and are critical to maintaining operational certification at interna-

tional airports.

"These exercises allow us to test our systems under controlled conditions and ensure that all agencies are prepared to respond quickly and effectively should a real emergency occur," an Airport Authority official said.

The Airport Authority has emphasised that normal flight operations will continue uninterrupted throughout the exercise. Flights arriving at and departing from VC Bird International Airport will not be delayed, and travellers are encouraged to proceed with their normal preparations. Members of the travelling public and residents in nearby communities may observe an increased presence of emergency vehicles, law enforcement personnel, and response teams on the airfield and adjacent roadways during the exercise period.

As part of the simulation, trained actors will portray injured passengers in realistic emergency scenarios. These controlled simulations are intended to assess medical response, evacuation procedures, and inter-agency coordination, while posing no risk to the public. Authorities have stressed that this activity is strictly a drill and not an actual emergency.

Officials noted that the timing of the exercise is particularly significant as Antigua and Barbuda continues to experience strong passenger volumes during the peak holiday and winter travel season. Regular drills allow agencies to identify gaps, refine procedures, and strengthen readiness without disrupting airport operations.

Beyond regulatory compliance, the exercise is also aimed at reinforcing confidence among airlines, passengers, and the wider public that Antigua and Barbuda's aviation infrastructure is supported by robust emergency preparedness and coordinated national response systems.

The Antigua and Barbuda Airport Authority expressed appreciation to the public for its understanding and to all participating agencies and stakeholders for their continued commitment to aviation safety and national security. Officials said lessons learned from the exercise will be reviewed and incorporated into future emergency planning and training programmes.

Media inquiries regarding the exercise may be directed to Ms. Geneva George at [gh.george@abairportauthority.com](mailto:gh.george@abairportauthority.com) or 484-2303.



## CountryFest Back on the Calendar: Event Confirmed with Government and Festival Commission Support

December 19, 2025 - CountryFest, one of Antigua and Barbuda's most respected grassroots, community-based cultural festivals, is officially back on the national calendar. The confirmation follows earlier reports that the event had been canceled for lack of financial backing.

Head of CountryFest Dennis 'Menace' Roberts said the Minister of the Creative Industries, Hon Daryll Mathew, made contact and clarified the miscommunication, which had been interpreted as a halt to the usual government support.

As the Owner and Executive Producer, he never issued any public statement or encouraged any to be made. "The CountryFest Brand is community-centered and always positive in its outlook, and I intend to work with my team to keep it that way."

Responding to the Festivals Commission grant confirmation from Minister Matthew, Menace expressed his delight that the matter has been settled and that all parties are now aligned. 'CountryFest has always been about community, culture, and opportunity. It is about keeping our culture alive, educating our youth, and ensuring that our communities continue to have a voice on the national stage. We are grateful that the Ministry and the Festivals Commission have come on board to ensure the continuation of this important platform.'

Since its launch in 2017, CountryFest has built a strong reputation for developing soca talent, pageantry, and supporting rural communities. CountryFest has produced artists who have gone on to achieve national and regional success. The Alumni in-



clude Kid Vicious, Low Rider, King Bless I, Buttaz, Princess Ava, Lyrical Boss, and Empress.

Minister Mathew indicated that the financial support reflects the government's continued commitment to preserving indigenous culture, expanding cultural tourism, and empowering creative practitioners, particularly at the community level.

This edition of CountryFest 2026

will feature the Party Monarch, live performances, and opportunities for vendors and cultural practitioners, reinforcing its role as both a cultural showcase and an economic driver.

The organisers encourage the public, sponsors, and cultural stakeholders to rally behind the event.

Further details on the February 21st, 2026 event will be released in the coming weeks.



# The Morning Pointe Show Moves to Pointe TV

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The Morning Pointe Show airs weekdays from 6:00 AM to 9:00 AM on Point TV, Cable Channel 9, and simulcast on PointFM 99.1.

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With insight, energy, and experience, the hosts bring balanced and engaging conversations to the morning airwaves.

The Morning Pointe Show is designed to inform, uplift, and connect audiences across Antigua and Barbuda.

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## PRESS STATEMENT

**Hon. Daryll S. Matthew Offers Prayers and Well Wishes to Cultural Icon  
Sir McLean Emmanuel "King Short Shirt"**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – SATURDAY, 27<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2025 – ST. JOHN'S, ANTIGUA.....**

The Honourable **Daryll S. Matthew**, Minister of Education, Sports and the Creative Industries, along with the Antigua Barbuda Festivals Commission, extend prayers for strength and healing to our beloved cultural icon, Sir McLean Emmanuel "King Short Shirt," as he remains hospitalized. Our nation stands united in faith and gratitude for our icon that has given so much to Antigua and Barbuda.

*As I rewatch King Short Shirt's most recent performance on Thursday, October 30th, 2025, at the Independence Calypso Competition, where he appeared as a guest artiste, I am reminded, yet once again, of the power of his legacy. At 83 years old, Sir McLean delivered "Our Pledge" with unwavering conviction, deep patriotism, grace, strength, and emotional clarity. His iconic voice did not crack; instead, it stood firm, rich, steady, and commanding, perfectly matching the weight and sincerity of his message. It was not merely a performance; it was a masterclass in purpose, pride, and national identity. Minister Matthew went to say. Sir McLean is more than a calypsonian for us; he is a living monument of our cultural history, a storyteller of our struggles and triumphs, and a guardian of our national conscience. Through song, he has educated, inspired, challenged, and uplifted generations.*

The Minister offered prayers for divine healing and restoration. *May God's grace and mercy surround you, Sir McLean. May His healing hands rest upon you, granting strength, peace, and a speedy and complete recovery. May divine favor follow you in abundance, and may every breath testify to God's enduring love and protection over your life.*

Please allow me to share this video from that iconic performance, a moment that will forever be etched in our cultural memory and hearts. -  
<https://www.facebook.com/share/v/19ckDF2fit/> -

**By the grace of God, long live Sir McLean Emmanuel "King Short Shirt."**

– Ends –



# Feature

## The Annual Boxing Day at Baker's Corner in The Point





**TUES - FRIDAY  
11AM - 2PM**



**HOSTED BY  
SENATOR COLIN O'NEAL BROWNE**

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# Regional News

## Guyana's non-oil sector grows more than 7%



Guyana's non-oil economy grew by 13.8% in the first half of 2025, according to the mid-year economic report.

Tourism, Industry and Commerce Minister Susan Rodrigues described the figures as exceptional by global standards, saying "by any measure, that is a remarkable growth percentage".

She said in a broadcast that the overall economy grew by 7.5% for the fifth consecutive year of broad-based economic expansion in Guyana, highlighting the performance across the non-oil sectors in a number of areas including agriculture, tourism, trade and infrastructure.

"Guyana's economy is

extremely diversified, and that is something that we are very proud of, and we will continue to build on," she said, making reference to the country's next phase of development.

"Our objective is very simple—to ensure that prosperity reaches every single Guyanese regardless of your geography, background, your ethnicity, your religion or your political affiliation," Rodrigues said. She said this strategic direction will be reflected in various agencies such as the Small Business Bureau, Guyana National Bureau of Standards, Guyana Tourism Authority and the Competition Consumer Affairs Commission. (CMC)

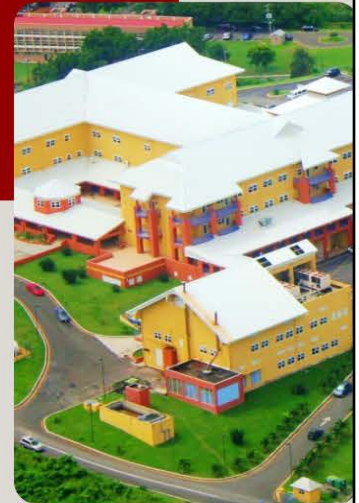
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## US lawmakers condemn Trump plan targeting Caribbean immigrant families

Immigration leaders in the Senate and House of Representatives in the United States have condemned President Donald Trump's proposed rule that would punish Caribbean and other immigrant families for lawfully accessing health care and food assistance, among other benefits.

The legislative leaders submitted a formal regulatory comment to the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) opposing the Trump administration's proposed "Public Charge Ground of Inadmissibility" rule, warning that the proposal unlawfully rewrites longstanding immigration law and would deter Caribbean and other immigrant families from accessing basic health, nutrition, and housing assistance they are legally entitled to receive.

The comment was submitted by Congressman Jamie Raskin, Ranking Member of the House Judiciary Committee; Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal, Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Immigration Integrity, Security, and Enforcement; Congressman Robert Scott, Ranking Member of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce; Senator Dick Durbin, Ranking Member of the Senate Judiciary Committee; Senator Alex Padilla, Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Border Security and Immigration; and Senators Bernie Sand-



ers and Ron Wyden.

The lawmakers said the proposed rule would circumvent the US Congress to alter the meaning of "public charge, a term that for more than 135 years has applied only to individuals who are primarily dependent on the government for subsistence."

They warned that if an immigrant is determined likely to become a public charge, it can affect their eligibility to enter the United States.

"The Trump administration's proposal would penalise immigrants for using supplemental benefits like health care, nutrition, or housing assistance that Congress deliberately made available to immigrant populations to support working families," the legislators wrote.

"DHS is seeking to circumvent Congress by ad-

ministratively altering the 135-year-old meaning of the term 'public charge' in violation of congressional intent," they added. "Congress has deliberately rejected the very changes that DHS now seeks to implement administratively in complete defiance of our will and intent."

The members noted that the US Congress has repeatedly revisited immigration law without ever redefining "public charge" to include the use of non-cash benefits.

They argued that federal agencies have long recognised that programs such as Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and housing assistance are supplemental benefits that promote public health, food security, and housing stability to help working families remain self-sufficient.

"DHS's proposal would ignite widespread fear and

confusion in immigrant communities, leading families to forgo medical care, nutrition assistance, and housing support even when they qualify under federal law," the lawmakers said.

"DHS itself expressly concedes in the proposed rule that the policy could lead to worse health outcomes, increased poverty, housing instability, and greater use of emergency rooms for basic care—harms that would extend well beyond immigrant households to communities nationwide," they added.

The leaders said Congress has "consistently made decisions about immigrants' access to public benefits through eligibility rules, not by barring people from adjusting their immigration status for using those benefits."

They said that recent legislation, including the 2025 reconciliation law, "deliberately preserved access to key programs for certain immigrant populations."

For these reasons, the members urged the Trump administration to "abandon the rule and maintain the 2022 regulations that reflect congressional intent, protect public health, and ensure that families are not punished for using lawful, life-sustaining assistance."

Several New York City agencies have also condemned the proposed rule. (CMC)



# Regional News

## PM blames 'lawlessness' for new penalties: threatens fireworks ban

### *"Lawlessness."*

This is the reason Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar cited as the driving factor behind her Government's decision to impose significantly tougher penalties for road traffic offences.

On December 25, a legal notice was published announcing increased penalties across a range of offences, including speeding, dangerous driving breaches, documentation violations and other road traffic infractions.

Most of the fines have been doubled and will take effect from January 1, 2026.

Persad-Bissessar, as Opposition Leader, had previously criticised the former People's National Movement (PNM) administration for imposing what she described as hardship on citizens through the demerit points system and high traffic fines.

However, responding to questions from the Sunday Express yesterday, the Prime Minister said her Government removed the demerit system, yet reckless road behaviour continued, causing deaths and endangering lives.

She said people were blatantly breaking the law and pointed out that even with regulations governing fireworks usage, citizens still breached the law over Christmas Day.

She warned that if people refuse to comply, a ban will follow.

"Some people are making a habit of mistaking leniency and kindness as a licence to keep breaking the law. I have seen it over this Christmas where there has been a disregard for the fireworks law. So, the next step will be to ban fireworks outright if citizens cannot adhere to the law.

"Similarly, we removed the traffic demerit points system and some per-



sons took that as a permit to abuse leniency and break the law on the roads," she said.

The Prime Minister was uncompromising. "So, the fines have been increased to tackle this lawlessness because some people's lack of respect for the law and sub-par intelligence levels simply can't accept kindness and mercy, they can only operate lawfully under fear of punishment. That's how it goes and I take full ownership of the decision."

She stressed the need for firm law and order, warning that innocent citizens continue to suffer because of reckless individuals.

"If any citizen wants to break the law and drive recklessly and kill themselves on the road, that's fine by me, the problem is that they usually kill innocent law abiding citizens along with themselves. So short answer is drive within the laws," she said.

Persad-Bissessar also clarified that her earlier criticism of high penalties under the former administration was based on what she said was double punish-

ment—fines plus demerit points.

"I spoke about the fact that you were being doubly punished by having to pay fines and also accumulating demerit points. The demerit points have been removed (except for drunk and reckless driving) and only the fines remain," she explained.

She accused the Opposition of attempting to manufacture controversy where none exists, saying the solution is simple: obey the law.

"The simple solution is to drive safely and within the legal limits. The only people who will be affected are people who break the law, so if you can't operate your vehicle within the limits of the law, you will have to pay the fines," she said.

Issuing one final warning, the Prime Minister stated, "If you don't want to get hang in the gallows, you don't commit murder; if you don't want to be imprisoned for life, you don't commit rape. So if you don't want to pay the traffic fines, simply drive within the law." (Trinidad Express)



## Iran's president says his country is in a 'full-scale' war with the West

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said Saturday his country is in a full-scale war with the United States, Israel and Europe ahead of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's meeting Monday with US President Donald Trump.

Pezeshkian said in an interview published on the website of the country's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Saturday that the war is worse than Iran's deadly war with Iraq in the 1980s.

"We are in a full-scale war with the US, Israel and Europe; they don't want our country to remain stable," he said.

Pezeshkian said the West's war against Iran is "more complicated and more difficult" compared to the 1980-1988 war with Iraq that left more than 1 million casualties on both sides.

The remarks came two days before a planned meeting between Trump and



Netanyahu during Netanyahu's visit to the US. Iran is expected to be a key topic in the talks.

Israeli and US strikes on Iran that came

during a 12-day air war in June killed nearly 1,100 Iranians including senior military commanders and nuclear scientists. Retaliatory missile barrages by Iran killed 28 in Israel. (AP)

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- Demonstrate strong team management leadership abilities.
- Proficiency with Microsoft Office applications.
- Proficiency with inventory and billing software (QuickBooks Enterprise is a plus)

### Qualifications

- An associate or bachelor's degree (having a degree in business administration or any studies or experience in supply chain management, or a related field is advantageous).
- 3–5 years of experience in inventory control or warehouse operations with demonstrated supervisory or leadership roles, preferably in wholesale or distribution.
- Must be a holder of a valid class D3 driver's license or willing and able to upgrade to a D3.

---

Interested candidates should send their resume and cover letter to: **The Human Resource Manager, St John's, Antigua** by email: [humanresources.ntw@gmail.com](mailto:humanresources.ntw@gmail.com) by December 29, 2025. Only those short-listed candidates will be contacted.



## Polls close on first day of Myanmar's widely criticised 'sham' election



The first of three phases of voting has finished in Myanmar, in an election widely dismissed as a “sham”, with major political parties dissolved, leaders jailed and as much as half the country not expected to vote due to an ongoing civil war.

The military government is holding a phased ballot nearly five years after it seized power in a coup, prompting widespread opposition and spiralling into civil war.

Observers say the junta, with China's support, is seeking to legitimise its power as it seeks a way out of the devastating stalemate.

More than 200 people have been charged for disrupting or opposing the polls under a new law which carries severe punishments, including the death penalty.

There were reports of explosions and air strikes across multiple regions as the first round of voting took place on Sunday. A rocket attack on an uninhabited house in the Mandalay region in the early hours of the morning injured three people, the region's chief minister told the BBC.

Separately, a series of explosions

damaged more than 10 houses in the Myawaddy township, near the border with Thailand, late on Saturday. A resident told the BBC that a child was killed and three others were taken to hospital.

Voters have told the BBC that the election feels more “disciplined and systematic” than previous polls.

“The experience of voting has changed a lot,” said Ma Su ZarChi, who lives in the Mandalay region.

“Before I voted, I was afraid. Now that I have voted, I feel relieved. I cast my ballot as someone who has tried their best for the country.”

First-time voter Ei Pyay Phy Maung, 22, said she was voting because she believed it is “the responsibility of every citizen”.

“My hope is for the lower classes - right now, the prices of goods are skyrocketing, and I want to support someone who can bring them down for those struggling the most,” she said.

“I want a president who provides equally for all people.”

The Burmese junta has rejected criticism

of the polls, maintaining that it aims to “return [the country] to a multi-party democratic system”.

After casting his vote at a highly fortified polling station in the capital, junta chief Min Aung Hlaing told the BBC that the election would be free and fair.

“I am the commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces, a civil servant. I can't just say that I want to be president,” he said, stressing that there were three phases of the election.

Earlier this week, he warned that those who refuse to vote were rejecting “progress toward democracy”.

Film director Mike Tee, actor Kyaw Win Htut and comedian Ohn Daing were among the prominent figures convicted under the law against disrupting polls, which was enacted in July.

They were each handed a seven-year jail term after criticising a film promoting the elections, state media reported.

UN Special Rapporteur Tom Andrews on Sunday called on the international community to reject the election - saying “nothing legitimate” can come of it.

“An election organised by a junta that continues to bomb civilians, jail political leaders and criminalise all forms of dissent is not an election - it is a theatre of the absurd performed at gunpoint,” he said.

The military has been fighting on several fronts, against both armed resistance groups who oppose the coup and ethnic armies that have their own militias. It lost control of large parts of the country in a series of major setbacks, but clawed back territory this



# International

AROUND THE WORLD



year following relentless air strikes enabled by support from China and Russia.

The civil war has killed thousands of people, displaced millions more, destroyed the economy and left a humanitarian vacuum. A devastating earthquake in March and international funding cuts have made the situation far worse.

All of this and the fact that large parts of the country are still under opposition control presents a huge logistical challenge for holding an election.

Voting is set to take place in three phases over the next month in 265 of the country's 330 townships, with the rest deemed too unstable.

The next rounds of voting are scheduled for 11 and 25 January, with results expected around the end of the month.

There is not expected to be any voting in as much as one half of the country. Even in the townships that are voting, not all constituencies will go to the polls, making it difficult to forecast a possible turnout.

Six parties, including the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party, are fielding candidates nationwide, while another 51 parties and independent candidates will contest only at the state or regional levels.

Some 40 parties, including Aung San Suu Kyi's National League of Democracy, which scored landslide victories in 2015 and 2020, have been banned. Suu Kyi and many of the party's key leaders have been jailed under charges widely condemned as politically motivated, while others are in exile.

"By splitting the vote into phases, the authorities can adjust tactics if the results in the first phase do not go their way," Htin Kyaw Aye, a spokesman

of the election-monitoring group Spring Sprouts, told the news agency Myanmar Now.

Ral Uk Thang, a resident in the western Chin state, believes civilians "don't want the election".

"The military does not know how to govern our country. They only work for the benefit of their high-ranking leaders," the 80-year-old told the BBC.

"When Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's party was in power, we experienced a bit of democracy. But now all we do is cry and shed tears."

Western governments, including that of the UK and the European Parliament, have dismissed the vote as a sham, while regional bloc Asean has called for political dialogue to precede any election. (BBC)



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## Three killed in Sweden as major storm sweeps across Nordic countries



A third person has died in Sweden after a powerful winter storm swept across Nordic countries, causing travel disruption and power outages.

Sweden's meteorological agency issued alerts for strong winds for large parts of the northern half of the country as Storm Johannes hit.

One man in his 50s died after being struck by a tree at the Kungsberget ski resort in the country's south, local media and police reported. Further north, regional utility company Hemab said one of its employees died in an accident while out working.

Police also said a man in his 60s was taken to hospital after being hit by a tree while working in a forest in Hofors, east-central Sweden, and later died of his injuries.

Tens of thousands of homes in Sweden, Norway and Finland have been left without power as a result of the storm.

In Sweden, more than 40,000 homes were affected by power outages and numerous rail services were cancelled, Swedish news agency TT reported.

Several flights, rail and ferry services across parts of the Nordic nations have been cancelled.

Roads and rail services have also been

disrupted due to the storm conditions.

In Norway's Nordland region, one of the most northerly counties in the country, the fire department responded to more than 200 weather-related incidents, broadcaster NRK reported.

Storm Johannes cut power to around

23,000 homes in Nordland and a further 9,000 were without electricity in the Inland region, according to NRK.

In Finland, the storm - known there as Hannes - subsided on Sunday morning but had left more than 60,000 homes without power, according to public broadcaster Yle.

Flights at Kittila airport in northern Finland were grounded after heavy winds pushed a passenger jet and a smaller plane off the runway and into a bank of snow, the Helsinki Times reported.

The Swiss Air jet, carrying about 150 passengers, had just landed from Geneva and was taxiing when it veered off, the paper said. The smaller jet, a 400XT model, was on the ground at the same time and was also pushed off course by the wind, it added.

There have been no reported injuries. (BBC)



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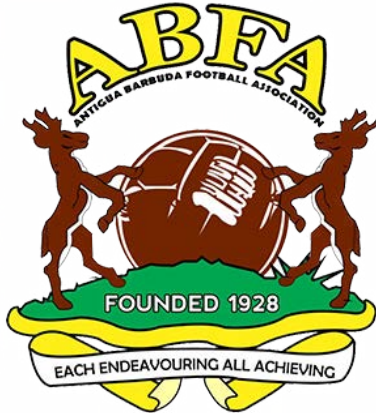
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## ABFA's First Division League resumes today



Competitive action in the Antigua and Barbuda Football Association's (ABFA) First Division League will resume on Monday.

Six teams will be in action in three matches that are all slated to kick off at 4:15 pm.

SAP FC will meet Five Islands FC at the ABFA Technical Center, the Freemans Village Scorpions will entertain the Greenbay Hoppers at the Freemans Village playing field, and the Swetes

Vipers FC will clash with the Willikies FC at the Mack Pond playing field in All Saints.

Meanwhile, the Freemans Village Scorpions continued their unbeaten run during the latest round of matches in the First Division League.

The Scorpions notched up their fifth win in six matches by snatching a 1-0 victory against FC Master Ballerz at the Freemans Village playing field.

Roy Gregory scored the only goal of the match with a strike in the 60th minute. Brandon Satchell failed to convert a penalty kick for FC Master Ballerz.

The result carries the Freemans Village Scorpions to 16 points, while the FC Master Ballerz remains on six points after succumbing to their fourth loss in eight matches.

Kemon Samuel and Kemoi Alexander each scored twice to propel the Swetes Vipers to their second win in eight matches with a 5-0 drubbing of

Bendals FC at the St. Johnstone's Village Stadium.

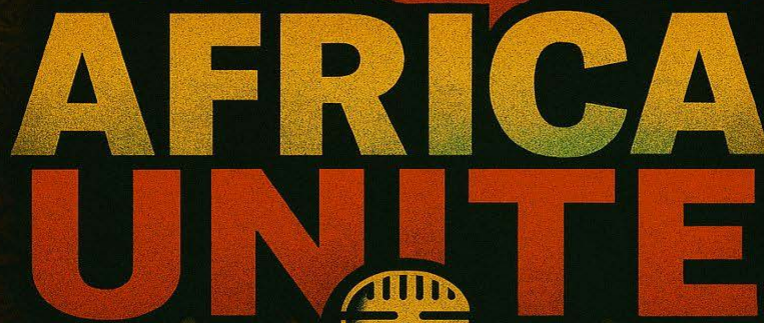
Samuel scored in the 17th and 85th minutes, while Alexander had conversions in the 72nd and 77th minutes. Dejaun Francis scored the other goal for the Swetes Vipers FC in the 35th minute.

The result allows the Swetes Vipers FC to move on to 10 points, while Bendals FC remains on two points after suffering their seventh defeat in nine matches.

Empire FC claimed their fourth win in eight matches by snatching a 1-0 victory against Bolans FC at the Keithley Sheppard Recreational Park.

Marckens Dorisca scored the winner for Empire FC with the only goal of the match.

The result allows Empire FC to advance to 14 points, while Bolans FC remains on seven points after losing for the third time in eight matches.



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## Jamaica women's relay team cops award at Junior Pan Am Games



**Jamaica's quartet of Alana Reid, Sabrina Dockery, Marissa Palmer and Serena Cole were voted the Best Women's Team at the Junior Pan American Games.**

KINGSTON, Jamaica – Jamaica's women's junior 4×100 metre relay team was recently voted the Best Women's Team at the Junior Pan American Games, which were held in August.

The quartet of Alana Reid, Sabrina Dockery, Marissa Palmer and Serena

Cole won gold in the event in a championship record 43.52 seconds, ahead of Trinidad and Tobago (43.89) and Colombia (44.01), who placed second and third respectively.

Their impressive performance saw them being named the best team, securing 24.1 per cent of the votes,

ahead of Colombia's sprint cycling team with 23.48 per cent, and Brazil's volleyball team, which claimed 20.58 per cent of the votes.

Argentina's hockey team, Chile's rowing team and Brazil's handball team finished fourth, fifth and sixth in the voting, respectively.

The winners are set to be awarded at the next Pan Am Sports General Assembly to be held next year.

The team's historic achievement has been hailed by the Jamaica Olympic Association (JOA), with President Christopher Samuda maintaining that the recognition serves as another global recognition of Jamaica's excellence track and field programme.

"The JOA celebrates with our juniors in winning Pan Am's Best Women's Team award. The award underscores the excellence that the team demonstrated in the 4x100m relay at the Games.

"It was a display of team spiritedness and an unwavering commitment to Jamaica to be atop the podium, where the admiration and pride of a nation beams," Samuda said. (CMC)



# Festivals Greetings

From the Antigua Barbuda Festivals Commission!

As we celebrate the spirit of Christmas and welcome a bright New Year, we extend heartfelt gratitude for your continued support. We look forward to creating even more moments of joy, creativity, and national pride together.

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## England survive Melbourne mayhem to claim drought-breaking win



England's Jamie Smith, left, Ben Stokes, second left, Harry Brook and Joe Root, right, shake hands after defeating Australia on Day 2 of their Ashes cricket Test match in Melbourne, Saturday, Dec. 27, 2025. (AP)

MELBOURNE (Reuters) - England celebrated their first Test win in Australia in 15 years on Saturday as they chased down 175 runs for a four-wicket Ashes victory, which was completed in two manic days at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Though the hosts had already locked away the urn after three straight victories in Perth, Brisbane and Adelaide, Ben Stokes's men gave their travelling army of fans a consolation prize for staying loyal through the depths of a mostly dismal tour.

Their nerves were jangling when England were reduced to 165 for six, 10 runs short of victory, but Harry Brook (18 not out) and Jamie Smith (three not out) held on, with the winning run taken with four leg

byes off pace bowler Mitchell Starc.

It was England's first Test victory in Australia since the 2010/11 Ashes, when Andrew Strauss's team thumped the hosts by an innings and 83 runs in the fifth match of the series at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

For Stokes and long-time comrade Joe Root, winless in Ashes tours dating back to 2013/14, it was a day of joy and relief.

"This win does mean a lot. Been over here a few times and not managed to get a win," Stokes told reporters.

England were under fire after surrendering the urn meekly in Adelaide, and amid reports of heavy drinking during the mid-tour break in Noosa.

The victory came without

injured paceman Jofra Archer, while Gus Atkinson was out of service due to a hamstring strain early on day two after Australia had resumed with a 46-run lead and 10 wickets in hand.

But with the help of a sporting pitch and some injudicious Australian batting, the tourists routed the hosts for 132 in 34.3 overs midway through the second session.

England's supporters could be forgiven for feeling uneasy about the chase, given how lamentable the tourists' batting has been throughout the series, but the top order functioned well, with three batters making vital contributions.

Zak Crawley (37) and Ben Duckett (34) set the tone, racing to a 51-run partnership at more than seven

runs-per-over before Starc shattered Duckett's stumps.

A ploy to promote tailender Brydon Carse to a slogging number three did not quite come off; he fell for six with a top-edge off Jhye Richardson.

However, 22-year-old Jacob Bethell, the replacement for the dropped Ollie Pope, kept the momentum in England's favour in just his fifth Test, putting on 47 runs for the third wicket before Scott Boland trapped Crawley lbw for 37.

Bethell's bid for a first Ashes fifty fell short after he cut Boland hard to the covers where Usman Khawaja crouched low for a fine catch to dismiss him for 40 off 46 balls.

Though the victory target had narrowed down to 38 runs, Australia's all-seam attack kept plugging away.

Richardson dismissed Root lbw for 15 and Starc had Stokes caught behind for two when he swung wildly at a short ball, leaving the tourists 10 runs from safety. Wicketkeeper Smith and Brook held firm to secure the win.

Following a two-day series-opener in Perth, Cricket Australia will be counting the cost of another lightning-quick test, even if day two's massive crowd of 92,045 gave the day one record of 94,199 a shake.

Day three at the 100,000-seat MCG would also have been a sell-out, leaving the host board millions out of pocket.

## Own goal hands Sudan fortunate win over Guinea at Cup of Nations

CASABLANCA (Reuters) - Sudan profited from a late own goal to beat Equatorial Guinea 1-0 at the Africa Cup of Nations finals on Sunday, picking up their first points of the tournament in Morocco.

Mohamed Eisa's free kick in the 74th minute was cleared by Equatorial Guinea's Luis Asue but struck teammate Saul Coco and ricocheted back past the despairing dive of goalkeeper Jesus Owono.

Sudan joined Algeria and Burkina Faso on three points in Group E, while Equatorial Guinea, the surprise packages of the last two Nations Cups, are on the brink of elimination after successive losses.

Meanwhile, Gabon are facing an early exit from the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations after slipping to a 3-2 defeat to Mozambique in their Group F clash on Sunday in Agadir, which ended a 40-year wait for a victory at the continental finals for the southern African side.

Gabon have now lost their opening two games, while Mozambique have three points from their two fixtures. Sudan had an early opportunity to go ahead as Eisa had a stab at a loose ball close in but the fourth-minute effort went wide.

Equatorial Guinea's Pedro Obiang had their two best chances of the first half at Stade Mohamed V. He miscued an effort in front of goal before, on the stroke of halftime, heading onto the roof of the net with Sudan goalkeeper Monged Elneel out of position.

There was a lengthy delay in the first half when Elneel suffered a knock to the head and was checked for suspected concussion but he was able to continue.

Equatorial Guinea substitute Jose Nabil proved a handful for Sudan after coming on at halftime, while veteran striker Emilio Nsue had a late chance



Sudan's players pose for the team picture before the Africa Cup of Nations group E soccer match between Algeria and Sudan in Rabat, Morocco, Wednesday, Dec. 24, 2025. (AP)

to equalise but hit his effort narrowly wide.

Equatorial Guinea knocked defending champions Algeria out of the 2021 finals and at the last tournament in the Ivory Coast they hammered the hosts 4-0 in the first round.

Mozambique scored their goals via Faisal Bangal, Geny Catamo and Diogo Calila in a deserved victory in which they were led by 42-year-old winger Elias Pelembe. It is their first win at the continental finals at the 17th attempt since their debut in 1986.

Gabon stayed in the contest to the end as Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang and Alex Moucketou-Moussounda netted goals, but back-to-back defeats mean their hopes of reaching the Round of 16 are hanging by a thread with a match against defending champions Ivory Coast to come on Wednesday.

Mozambique had managed four draws in their previous 16 Cup of Nations matches and never been past the group stages. They scored the opening goal their attacking play deserved in the 37th minute as Catamo's corner

was headed in unmarked by Bangal.

The Mambas were awarded a penalty two minutes later when their captain Pelembe was hauled down in the box by Bruno Ecuele Manga. Catamo sent the goalkeeper the wrong way from the spot to make it 2-0.

It was one-way traffic at that point but Gabon pulled a goal back before the break as Didier Ndong's thunderous shot from 30 yards was only parried by Mozambique goalkeeper Ernan Siluane and Aubameyang followed up to turn in the rebound.

But Mozambique made a strong start to the second period and extended their lead again in the 51st minute when Witi's cross from the left was met by an unmarked Diogo Calila on the run and he buried his header for his first international goal.

Gabon got back to within one goal when Mozambique failed to clear from a corner and after a goal-mouth scramble, Moucketou-Moussounda poked the ball into the net, but they could not force an equaliser after that.



## Grenades extend unbeaten run to stay 2nd in Premier Division

The Sandals and Inet Jennings Grenades maintained their unbeaten run and consolidated their position in second place in the Antigua and Barbuda Football Association's (ABFA) Premier Division League on Saturday.

The Jennings Grenades notched up their seventh win in nine matches by coming from behind to snatch a 2-1 victory against the Pigotts Bullets in the first game of a triple-header at the ABFA Technical Center.

Stanley Province struck the winner for Grenades with a strike in the 78th minute. Teammate Quinton Griffith snatched the equalizer for the Grenades with a 32nd-minute conversion after Javier Wilmot scored the opening goal of the match in the 10th minute to give Bullets the lead.

The result allows the Jennings Grenades to move within a point of the leaders and back-to-back defending champions, All Saints United, at the top of the standings.

The Jennings Grenades advanced to 23 points,



**A starting XI of the Jennings Grenades football team**

one adrift of All Saints United, who also have a game in hand. The Pigotts Bullets remain on 12 points after losing for the fourth time in eight matches.

The Ottos Rangers recorded their first win to move out of the cellar by pulling off a 2-1 victory against Green City FC in the last game of Saturday's triple header.

The Ottos Rangers moved from the cellar to second from the bottom of the 12-team standings with four points after securing their first win in nine matches.

Green City FC remains on 10 points after succumbing to their fifth loss in nine matches.

Eroy Gonsalves scored twice to propel the Aston Villa Lions to their sixth win in eight matches with a 3-1 victory against Old Road FC in Saturday's second game.

Gonsalves converted in the fifth and 30th minutes to give the Villa Lions a two-nil lead at halftime. Rakeem Joseph scored in the 51st minute to reduce the deficit for Old Road.

But any hopes of snatching an equalizer quickly

vanished as Old Road was reduced to 10 men in the 58th minute when Marvin Horsford was expelled after receiving a red card.

The Villa Lions capitalize on their numerical advantage to seal their victory by scoring a third goal, which was converted by Jahlanie Barzey in the 73rd minute.

The result allows the Villa Lions to jump into third place with 18 points, while Old Road FC remains on 16 points and drops from third to fourth place after losing for the second time in eight matches.