

# Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority hosts US Travel Advisory Board for retreat

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## Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority hosts US Travel Advisory Board for retreat

The Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority (ABTA) recently welcomed its U.S. Travel Advisory Board to St. John's for a strategic on-island retreat, bringing together leading travel advisors from key source markets for immersive destination experiences, high-level discussions, and relationship building with local partners.

Led by Dean Fenton, U.S. Director for the ABTA, the visit marked the final on-island meeting for the current Advisory Board ahead of the appointment of a new committee in March and is part of ABTA's ongoing efforts to enhance destination appeal, strengthen trade relationships, and drive increased bookings.

Designed as a combination of strategic planning and experiential engagement, the retreat allowed board members to deepen their firsthand knowledge of the destination through site inspections at premier resorts,



curated marine and culinary experiences, and collaborative meetings with ABTA leadership.

Minister of Tourism, Charles Fernandez, met with the group during

the visit and showed appreciation for its support of Antigua and Barbuda.

"We are pleased to welcome our US travel advisors back to Antigua and Barbuda and to thank them for



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their continued advocacy of the destination. Their presence here reinforces the confidence we have in our tourism product and the message that Antigua and Barbuda remains fully open and welcoming to travelers. As valued partners in driving growth their feedback continues to play an important role in our US marketing efforts.

"The value of hosting our Advisory Board on-island is immeasurable," said Dean Fenton, U.S. Director for the Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority. "By experiencing Antigua and Barbuda firsthand, our advisors are better equipped to authentically sell the destination, identify new opportunities, and strengthen the partnerships that ultimately lead to increased visitation and long-term growth."

Throughout the retreat, Advisory Board members participated in a thoughtfully curated program designed to showcase Antigua and Barbuda's diverse hospitality, marine, and culinary offerings. The group was hosted at Blue Waters Resort & Spa and Hodges Bay Resort & Spa, where they conducted resort site inspections and held strategic meetings. Culinary experiences included dining at The Palm and The Cove at Blue Waters, as well as White Sands Restaurant at Hodges Bay. The itinerary also featured a sailing experience aboard the Excellence Catamaran, with time to explore and shop in St. John's, visits to Prickly Pear Island, and beachfront dining at The Hut. The program concluded with a dinner at Mamma Mia, highlighting the island's vibrant dining scene and variety of guest experiences.

As part of the visit, the group also participated in a brief community outreach initiative, including a beach clean-up and a donation of supplies to the Denis Bowers Rehabilitation Centre, reflecting ABTA's continued commitment to responsible tourism

and community engagement.

The tourism minister applauded the group on this initiative and thanked them for participating in the beach clean-up at Jabberwock Beach.

The Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Advisory Board is comprised of senior travel advisors representing a range of specialties, including luxury travel, destination weddings, honeymoons, and experiential travel. Current board members include:

Paula McCarty, Travel Smart with Paula

Natalie Faglanelli, Bayside Travel

Kimberly Jacoby, Romantics Travel

Donna Blasi, Blissful Honeymoons and Destination Weddings

Mark Hennigan, Destination Weddings and Honeymoon Specialist

Kathy Brancifort, First Class Travel

Viviane Gringer, Travel Edge

Roberta Long-Kelleher, Protravel International

Daren Southgate, Tzell Long Island

Insights and recommendations from the retreat will help inform ABTA's trade engagement and marketing initiatives as the destination looks ahead to continued growth in 2026 and beyond.

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# ABEC sends its top officials to a global democracy conference in India



Chairman of the Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission (ABEC), Ambassador Arthur G. B. Thomas and Supervisor of Elections, Ian S Hughes, are representing the twin island state at the India International Conference on Democracy and Election Management (IICDEM) 2026.

The conference began on January 21<sup>st</sup> and concludes today (January 23<sup>rd</sup>) at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, India.

IICDEM 2026 is convened by the Election Commission of India, through the India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM), in partnership with International IDEA, as part of India's Chairmanship of the Council of Member States of International IDEA.

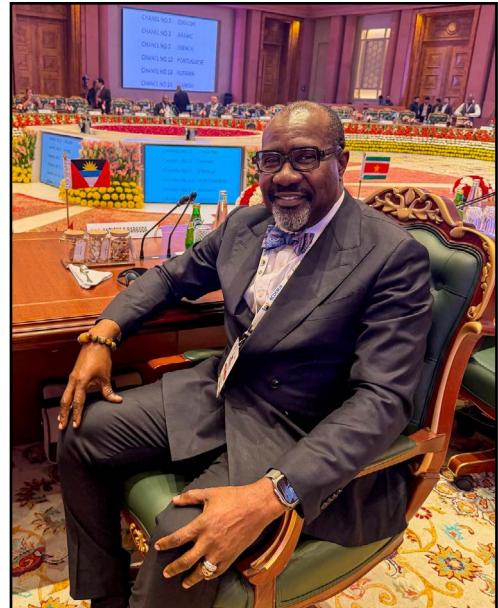
The Conference brought together more than 40 Election Management Bodies and representatives from over 30 countries, alongside diplomats, senior election officials, electoral experts, academics, and practitioners.

The overarching theme of the Conference is "Democracy for an Inclusive, Peaceful, Resilient and Sustainable World," reflecting a global focus on strengthening democratic institutions,

electoral integrity, and public trust in rapidly evolving political and technological environments.

As part of the official programme, Chairman Thomas participated in the thematic session on "Regulating Media Campaigns" (Best Practices and Innovation – BP 20), scheduled for Friday, January 23, 2026. His address focused on the growing challenges posed by fast-moving information, unverified claims, opaque political advertising, and coordinated manipulation across both traditional and digital media platforms.

Drawing on comparative international experience and the regulatory framework of Antigua and Barbuda, Chairman Thomas outlined key principles for balanced media regulation, including equitable access to media, transparency in political advertising, sponsor disclosure, balanced coverage, and safeguards against hate speech and incitement. He also addressed emerging risks such as misinformation, artificial amplification, and political micro-targeting, and discuss practical, context-appropriate strategies for election management bodies



seeking to preserve fairness, informed participation, and public confidence.

The participation of Antigua and Barbuda in IICDEM 2026 underscores the country's continued commitment to independent and professional election management, democratic governance, and international cooperation. It also provides an important platform to share Caribbean perspectives while engaging with global best practices in election administration and democratic innovation.



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# Local News

## Venezuelan Embassy mounts #Bring Them Back campaign



The Venezuelan Embassy in St. John's has launched a campaign under the hashtag, #Bring Them Back designed to mount international pressure on the efforts to see the return of Venezuelan President Nicholas Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores.

On January 3, the United States mounted a military action during which both Maduro and his wife were captured, flown to the US and are currently in custody facing multiple criminal charges.

Ambassador Carmen Velasquez described the events of January 3 as a 'sad day' in the history of Venezuela as she addressed a gathering at the embassy Thursday evening of persons in the community who wished to show solidarity with the Venezuelan people.

"I would like to thank you for your presence here tonight, so that together in prayer, we can send a strong message for peace and dialogue to prevail in Venezuela, Latin America and the Caribbean. Very importantly, let us pray for the swift and safe return of President Nicholas Maduro and Cilia Flores to Venezuela," she stated.

The ambassador revealed that she



was in Caracas on the night of the US military action and that her home was in the same area where the military action took place and from where Maduro and Flores were taken.

She described being awoken by the sound of explosions and that her first thought was that the sound came from a fireworks display. But as the explosions continued she looked outside

her window to see the explosions and she heard the helicopters overhead although she noted that they traveled without lights.

Ambassador Velasquez also spoke of seeing drones firing rockets at various targets.

The audience included Cuban Ambassador, Sergio Martinez, the new Chinese Ambassador Jiang Wei, Sen-



ator Colin O’Neal, Ambassador Dorene O’Marde, Ambassador Anthony Liverpool, representatives from the ACLM, Pastor James Warner of the All Saints Fellowship of Believers, members of the Venezuelan community in Antigua and Barbuda and representatives of the media.

The Cuban Ambassador was invited to speak, he thanked his Venezuelan counterpart for organizing the event as a mark of respect for those who died ‘defending the sovereignty of Venezuela’.

He described the US military action in Venezuela as ‘a brutal attack’ adding that those who died will not be forgotten.

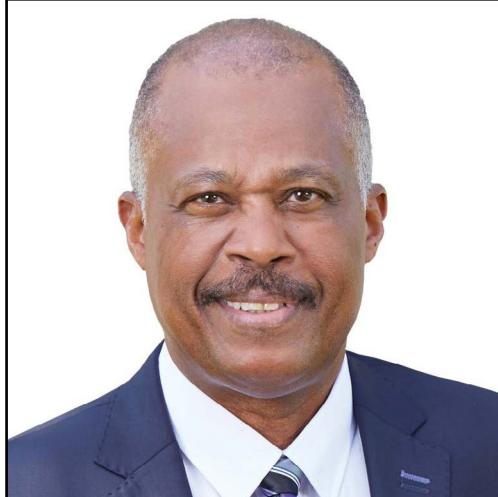
Also addressing the gathering was Senator O’Neal who expressed solidarity with the people of Venezuela.

For his part, Pastor Warner offered prayers for Venezuela and its people as the members of the audience lit candles and held them up as a mark of respect for those who sacrificed their lives and for the safe return of the Maduros.

The Embassy has opened a Book of Condolences and it is inviting members of the public to go there and to sign as a show of solidarity with the people of Venezuela.



# UWI Rises in Global Rankings



**Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sir Hilary Beckles**

The University of the West Indies (The UWI) begins 2026 with excellent news. *Times Higher Education* (THE), the gold standard in global higher education rankings, announced that it has risen among the 33,000+ universities and higher degreegranting institutions in the world.

In the 2025 year-end release of the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2026, which assess institutional performance across teaching, research, knowledge-transfer and international outlook, only 2,191 universities from 115 countries qualified to be ranked. The UWI continues to rise relatively as the number of universities also increases. It is selected and ranked annually based on criteria of academic excellence. It now stands in the top 3.6% of these 33,000+ institutions.

Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sir Hilary Beckles, noted: "We continue to adhere steadfastly to our strategic plan, which has proven to be an expert guide that keeps us focused on building out our intellectual productivity, scholastic brand, and global partnership profile. The results merely indicate the output of our considerable collective input."

Since the prior year, the results show that our scholars have improved the quality of their research. This has resulted in a significant rise in the recog-



nition and impact of publications and other academic presentations. Also on the rise is our international outlook, as measured in scholarly impact, global partnerships, and membership in elite intellectual networks. Shaping regional and global research environments through projects and publications has also attracted rising numbers in the rankings.

These considerable achievements serve to demonstrate the impact of the University's expert leadership on the

world stage, in academia and beyond. From climate change research to public health, arts and culture narratives to economic development studies and social justice paradigms, the University continues to make its mark by punching well beyond its fiscal and financial constraints.

"I am very proud of this intergenerational achievement, as we look to The UWI's centenary in 2048" the Vice-Chancellor noted.

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## New Dominican Republic Consul General takes up assignment in St. John's



**New Dominican Republic Consul General to Antigua and Barbuda, Julio Cesar Mateo Baez**

The Dominican Republic diaspora in Antigua and Barbuda has welcomed a new Consul General to St. John's following the departure of the former Consul General, Joaqiun Lopez Diaz last week.

The new Consul General is Julio (Yulyn) Cesar Mateo Baez who says his goal while based in Antigua and Barbuda is to primarily

serve the needs of the large Dominican Republic community in the country as well as to foster closer ties between the DR and Antigua and Barbuda.

"We understand that Antigua and Barbuda is a valued country with hard-working and dedicated people. The Dominican Republic is proud and satisfied with the relationship it currently



**Consul General Julio Mateo Baez (centre) Vice Consul Victor Alvarez (right) and Wis Perez Florian (left)**

enjoys with St. John's. We ask the members of the DR community in the country to 'represent' their country well in all their actions here by maintaining a high standard and by observing the laws of the land," he admonished.

Over the coming weeks, the Consul General is expected to meet with senior government officials to ex-

change greetings and to exchange views on matters of mutual interest.

His first official engagement will take place on Sunday when he attends a special service at the Holy Family Cathedral – the Bridging of Altagracia – which is a significant celebration for the people of the DR.



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# Local News

## Charles Walwyn Receives Halo Foundation's Crystal Volunteer Award



**Photo caption:** L-R: H.E. Lady Williams, H.E. Sir Rodney Williams, Mr. Charles Walwyn, Mrs. Karen Walwyn

Managing Director of Grant Thornton, Charles Walwyn, is the latest recipient of an award from the Halo Foundation following a special presentation ceremony at Government

House when he received the 2025 Crystal Volunteer Award.

During the ceremony, Founder of Halo Foundation, Lady Sandra Wil-

liams expressed sincere appreciation for Walwyn's unwavering support and generosity, noting his continued interest in the Foundation over the past decade. She highlighted his willingness to assist, stating, "The door to Mr. Walwyn is one upon which we can knock whenever there is a need, and it comes with the certainty that he will always respond with kindness." She also acknowledged the quiet but consistent input of his wife, Karen Walwyn.

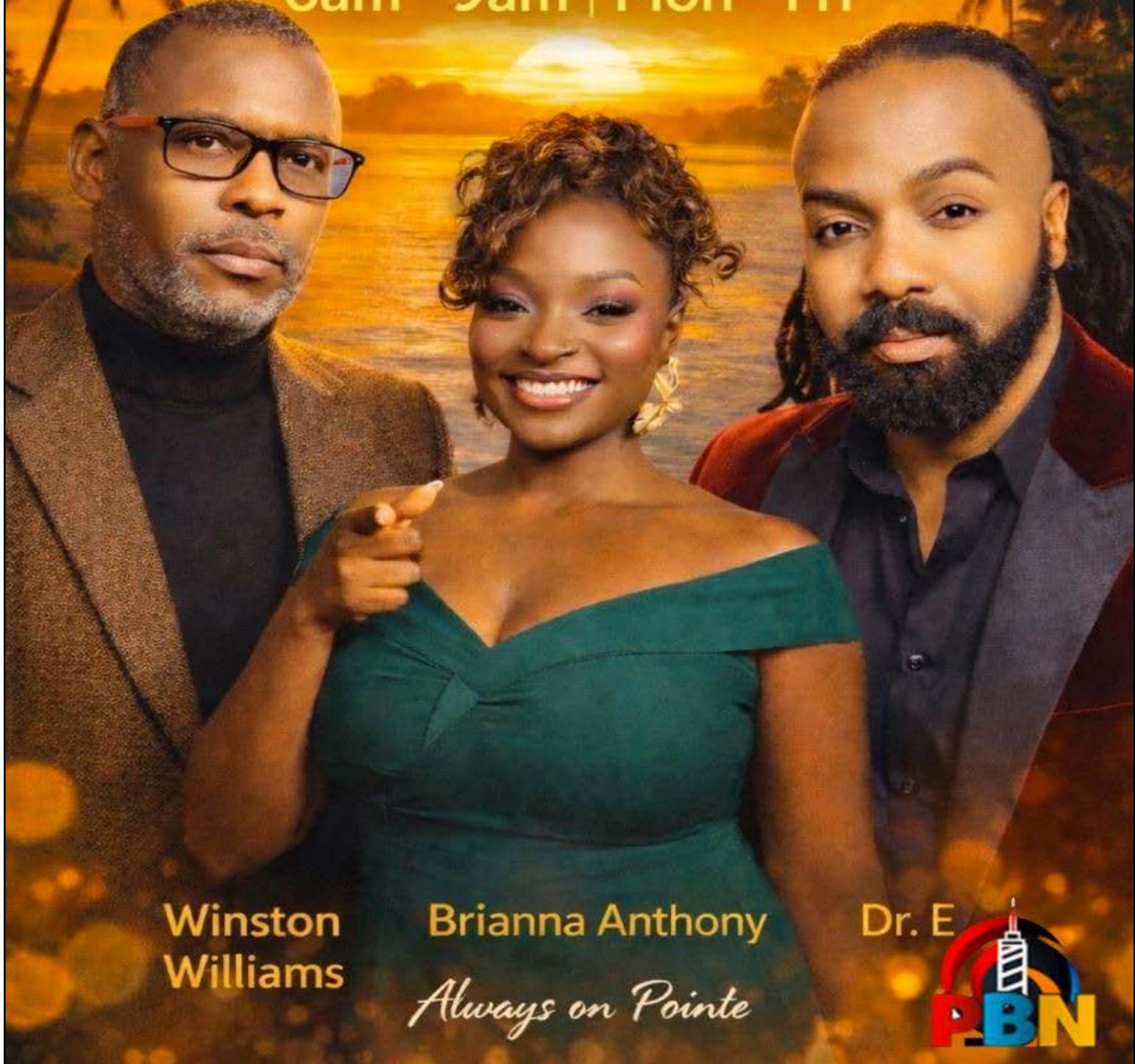
The Crystal Volunteer Award is presented annually to individuals who have demonstrated exceptional commitment, service, and goodwill toward the mission of The Halo Foundation. Walwyn's long-standing partnership has played a meaningful role in advancing the Foundation's youth-focused initiatives and community outreach programmes.

The Halo Foundation also extends gratitude to its wider network of partners and supporters who continue to ensure the sustainability and impact of the Foundation's work across Antigua and Barbuda.



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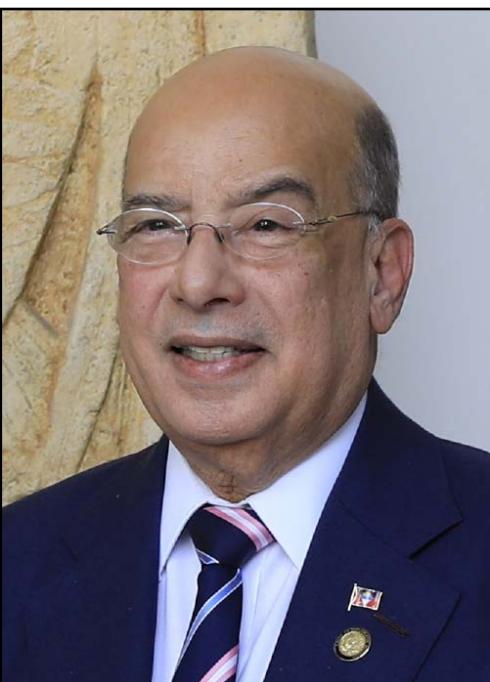
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# Feature

## As Migration Closes, CARICOM Must Build Jobs at Home



*By Sir Ronald Sanders*

On January 14, 2026, the U.S. Department of State announced that, effective January 21, it would pause the issuance of all immigrant visas for nationals of 75 countries, including eleven in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), deemed to be at “high risk of public benefits usage.” Applications may still be submitted, but no immigrant visas will be issued during the pause.

The notice sets out the policy logic plainly. President Donald Trump has directed that immigrants must be financially self-sufficient and must not become a “public charge.” Visas are described as a privilege, not a right, and admissions as national-security decisions. Implemented by a Department led by Secretary Marco Rubio, the language is deliberate and categorical. It signals a shift in doctrine, not a temporary pause awaiting reversal.

For the Caribbean, this matters because for decades outward migration absorbed part of the region’s internal economic pressure—unemployment, low wages, limited domestic markets, and frustrated professionals. That out-

let has now narrowed. The pressure, therefore, will intensify at home.

The composition of the 75-country list reveals the underlying logic. The countries are drawn overwhelmingly from the Global South—Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East, and parts of Central and Eastern Europe and Asia. What links them is not politics or proximity, but economic structure: high youth populations, weak labour absorption, persistent underemployment, and long reliance on outward migration to relieve domestic pressure. The pause thus functions as a broad structural screen, signalling that the United States will no longer accept migrants it does not actively seek.

It is now incumbent on the eleven CARICOM states to build conditions that attract investment, expand enter-

prise, and generate employment. The alternative is clear and costly: higher unemployment, deepening poverty, rising crime, social instability, and declining economic prospects.

This warning is not speculative. Research by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank shows a consistent pattern across Latin America and the Caribbean: persistent unemployment—especially among youth—drives poverty, fuels crime, weakens social cohesion, and deters investment. Stronger labour markets and rising real earnings, by contrast, are among the most reliable drivers of poverty reduction and stability.

Addressing these challenges, however, is not the responsibility of governments alone. It requires a collective

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# Feature

national effort.

Governments must create conditions for growth—but they do not create jobs on their own. The private sector must invest, expand, innovate, and take calculated risks at home, not merely extract rents or wait for incentives. Trade unions must defend workers, while engaging seriously with productivity, skills upgrading, and enterprise sustainability. Political parties—especially those that aspire to govern—must treat economic reform as a national obligation, not a partisan weapon.

If this collective effort fails—if no national plan is jointly devised, implemented, and monitored—Caribbean economies will fracture under the weight of unemployment, accompanied by familiar cycles of bickering and finger-pointing among actors unwilling to place national interest above sectional advantage.

The region's difficulties are compounded by a self-inflicted handicap. World Bank and IDB assessments show that many Caribbean economies operate with high costs of doing business—slow approvals, overlapping regulation, expensive logistics, and especially high energy prices. Electricity costs in some states are two to three times higher than in North America. Regulation is often cumbersome, mired in red tape and institutional inertia, and in some cases distorted by practices that extract private gain for favourable treatment.

Too often, reform is postponed because it is inconvenient. Governments

fear backlash. Businesses resist competition. Unions resist change. Oppositions calculate advantage. The political cost of reform is exaggerated; the economic cost of delay is discounted.

That miscalculation is no longer theoretical. It is urgent. If unemployment remains high while migration outlets narrow, the result will not be patience. It will be rising poverty, higher crime, social strain, and a deteriorating investment climate. Investors will withdraw. Insurance costs will rise. Bank deposits will shrink and interest rates increase. Tourism will falter. Public finances will weaken. Social cohesion will fray.

This is why responsibility must now be shared—and openly acknowledged as such. CARICOM must also take its own commitments seriously. The Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas envisaged a regional industrial policy under the CSME. Heads of Government are expected to consider a CARICOM Industrial Policy Framework at their Fiftieth Meeting in St. Kitts and Nevis next month—more than three decades after the Treaty was signed.

Similarly, the Caribbean Skills Certificate and regional labour mobility were intended to create a genuine internal market for skills. They have yet to deliver at scale. Initiatives to deepen capital and financial-market integration—such as the long-promised regional stock exchange championed by the CARICOM Private Sector Organization—remain worthy causes deserving urgent support.

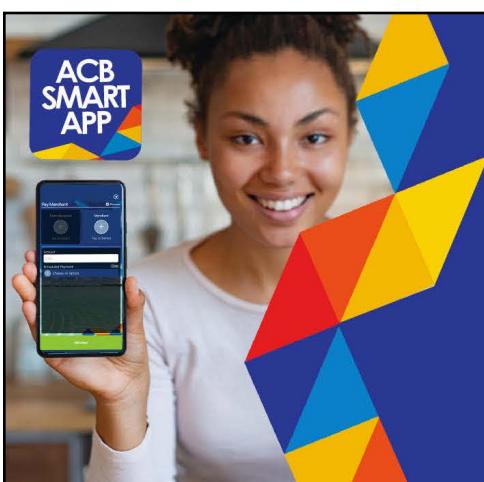
If external doors are narrowing, the region must make its internal space work—or accept the cost of fragmentation. What is required now is a new compact. Governments must lower the cost of doing business decisively. The private sector must commit capital and creativity to domestic production. Trade unions must champion skills, productivity, and fair wages together. Political parties must accept that economic reform is not optional, and that sabotaging it for short-term gain undermines everyone's future.

The State Department's notice does not single out the Caribbean, but its consequences should rivet regional attention. It removes the long-standing illusion that migration will always be available as a safety valve. That era is all but over. The door to migration to the United States is no longer ajar; it has been closed elsewhere for years.

Either Caribbean societies—governments, businesses, unions, and political movements alike—accept shared responsibility for building opportunity at home, or they continue to defer and allow unemployment, crime, and instability to exact a far higher price.

As migration closes, there is only one viable response: build opportunities for investment and jobs at home—together.

*(The author is the Ambassador of Antigua and Barbuda to the United States and the OAS, and Dean of the OAS Ambassadors accredited to the OAS. Responses and previous commentaries: [www.sirronaldsanders.com](http://www.sirronaldsanders.com))*



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## Acceptance in Action: A Climate Call That Includes Us All



On January twentieth, mark the date,  
 A global pause to re-evaluate.  
 International Day of Acceptance stands,  
 A call for open hearts and joined hands.  
 Observed each year, the message is clear:  
 Accept all abilities, hold diversity dear.  
 Not just in words, not quietly said—  
 But lived, designed, and action-led.

Because climate change does not arrive the same,  
 Its burdens differ, though the storm has one name.  
 When floods rise fast and heat bears down,  
 Not everyone can flee the town.  
 When warnings sound and systems fail,  
 Some voices are lost in the siren's wail.  
 Acceptance asks: who's left unheard?  
 Whose safety plan forgot a word?

The climate crisis is not abstract,  
 It's lived in the present, sharp and exact.  
 It's heat on bodies that regulate less,  
 It's power outages causing distress.

It's shelters with stairs but no ramp in sight,  
 It's evacuation plans that assume full flight.  
 It's water shortages, food prices high,  
 It's silent struggles as days go by.

Acceptance means we widen the frame,  
 Change how we plan, rethink the game.  
 Climate action cannot move ahead  
 If disability is left unsaid.  
 Because people with disabilities are not just "at risk,"  
 They are leaders, innovators—essential, not ancillary or  
 brisk.  
 They bring lived wisdom, insight, and care,  
 Born from navigating systems never made fair.



We say it clearly, and we say it loud:  
 Inclusion is not optional—it's climate-proud.  
 From policy rooms to shoreline cleanups,  
 From data charts to community meetups,  
 Persons with disabilities must be part of the mission,  
 In action, in planning, in communication.  
 Not consulted last, not added by chance,  
 But leading the charge, given space to advance.

Acceptance reshapes how stories are told,



Not charity narratives, tired and old.  
But stories of strength, of climate resolve,  
Of problems faced—and solutions solved.  
Because when communication excludes a voice,  
We lose perspective, we lose choice.  
Accessible messages save lives too—  
Plain language, captions, formats new.

Climate justice is not whole or true  
If it only works for a chosen few.  
What good is a green, resilient plan  
If it fails the disabled woman, child, or man?  
What good are targets, timelines, and goals  
If they overlook human bodies and souls?  
Acceptance says: design from the start,  
With human diversity at the heart.

On small islands, on coastlines thin,  
Where climate impacts quickly begin,  
We know resilience is community-deep,  
It's who we protect and who we keep.  
Acceptance here is practical, real—  
It's ramps, it's jobs, it's a circular deal.

It's waste solutions that create inclusion,  
Green jobs built on shared contribution.

So this January twentieth, let's not pretend  
That acceptance is a trend that ends.  
Let it be climate action made complete,  
Where disability and sustainability meet.  
Because those most affected must help decide  
How we adapt, rebuild, and stride.  
Because those long excluded know best  
How to design systems that stand the test.

Acceptance is climate wisdom, clear and strong,  
It's how we right what's been wrong too long.  
Not sympathy, not silence, not delay—  
But shared leadership, starting today.  
For a future resilient, just, and free  
Must look like all of us—you and me.

So let acceptance be our guiding sign,  
On January 20, 2026—and beyond the line.  
A climate mission that truly succeeds  
Is one that includes all human needs.



# Feature

## IICA and partners foster buyer-seller connections to boost Caribbean agri-food trade

### 5th Caribbean Virtual Agri-Food Trade Mission brings prospects of US\$1.5 mn in new trade for 213 companies

After five successive years of regional trade missions- led by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) since 2021- Caribbean agri-food companies are better poised for intra-regional trade with other companies in the region, as well as extra-regional trade with Central America, North America, and South America. Two hundred and thirteen companies- 95% of them from the Ca-

effective way to connect with trade companies in the region,” said Haidy Aroma of Arom Amora, Suriname.

IICA initiated this intervention to promote intra-regional trade and respond to the challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. The virtual trade missions have been held each year since the inception in 2021, with support from the Central American Economic Integration Secretariat (Spanish acronym, SIECA) through its platform: the Central American Trade Network (Spanish acronym, RED-CA).

IICA sponsors the missions annually. However, the lead partners are the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat, the COmmittee Linking Entrepreneurship-Agriculture-Development (COLEAD), the CARICOM Private Sector Organization (CPSO), and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). Their collective contribution to the virtual trade missions helps to ensure that any company, from large corporations to micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), can benefit equally.

Ahead of the three-day trade mission, IICA convened three preparatory sensitization sessions to enhance participation across the region. The partners also facilitated capacity building to ensure that participating companies could better



**Hesma Tyson, Managing Director**  
Caribbean Speciality Foods Co. Ltd. | Trinidad and Tobago

ribbean- are targeting US\$1.5 million in new trade, potentially bolstering food security in our region and globally. This business intent arose during the 5th Edition of the Caribbean Virtual Agri-Food Trade Mission, held from 28th – 30th October 2025.

“With this flagship business activity having been held for the fifth consecutive year, we’re seeing growing interest from Caribbean companies, while expanding the range of potential buyers across our region and beyond. The virtual trade missions have helped to bridge a persistent gap that previously constrained Caribbean trade. We are very encouraged by the sustained interest in the missions and the business opportunities that have emerged as a result,” expressed Allister Glean, IICA Representative in Barbados.

By promoting buyer-seller connections across 19 agri-food sectors, this initiative fostered 193 meetings of entities from 29 countries. Most of the participants came from Trinidad and Tobago (25%), Guyana (15%), Jamaica (15%), and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (7%). Women-led businesses accounted for 58% of the participants in the virtual trade mission.

“This was my first experience, and the fair is a simple and



**Aditpersad Moensi, Managing Director**  
Triple A Organic Farm NV | Suriname

leverage the opportunities provided via the trade mission. In particular, the FAO and COLEAD join IICA on targeted initiatives throughout the year.

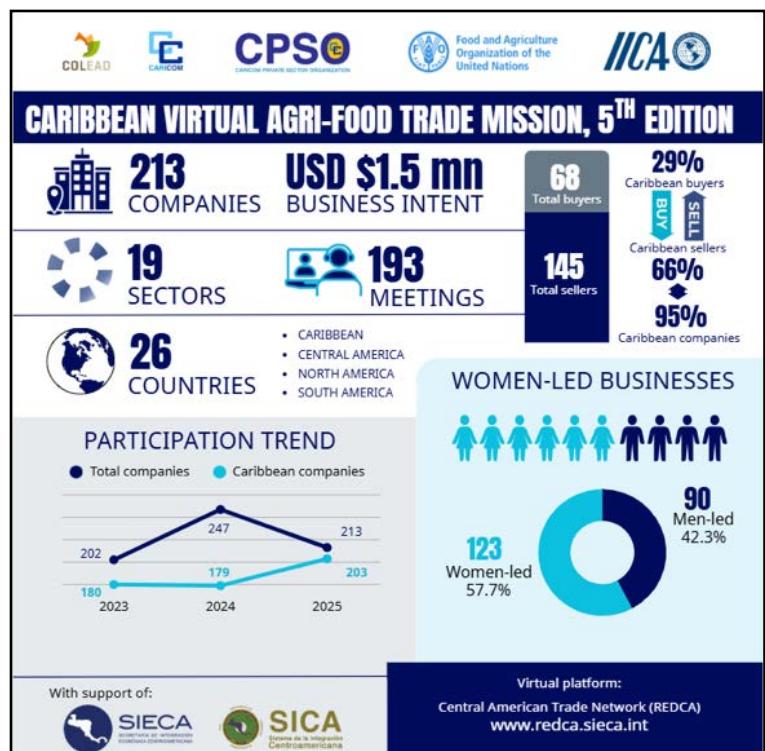
The virtual trade mission continues to hit the mark by fulfilling its intended purpose: facilitating trade of fresh and

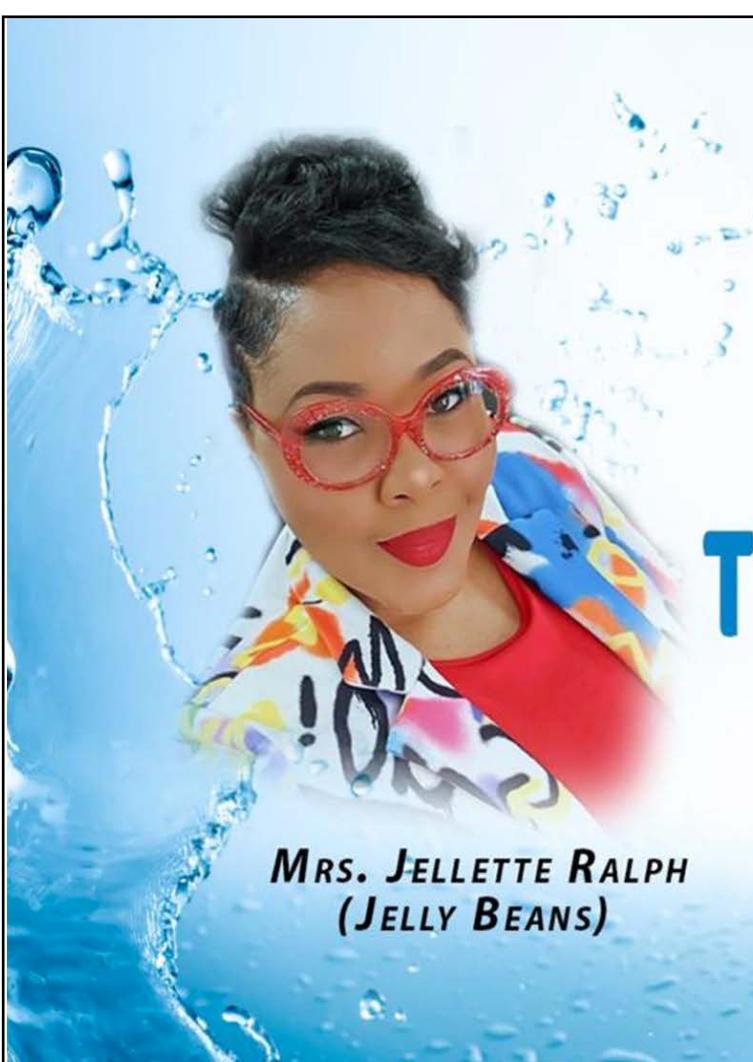
processed goods from the Caribbean's agricultural sector. Buyers and sellers were most interested in trading vegetables (18%), fruits (17%), sauces and condiments (13%), and food preparations used in processed products (11%). Some companies also explored opportunities for packaging and distribution arrangements.

A great majority of the companies that participated in the 5th Caribbean Virtual Agri-Food Trade Mission have already participated in previous missions. These events continue to strengthen business connections across the Caribbean as well as with other regions within the hemisphere, thereby helping to both consolidate and diversify export markets. Future iterations of the Caribbean Virtual Agri-Food Trade Mission could help to further expand the economical supply chain and stimulate foreign direct investment.

"IICA looks forward to continuing to build on the positive results achieved to date. We hope to host another edition of the Caribbean Virtual Agri-Food Trade Mission this year, contributing to the shared objective of CARICOM Ministers of Agriculture and Heads of Government to reduce the region's dependence on extra-regional imports. These business exchanges are even more vital in light of the emerging economic challenges currently facing the region," added

Daniel Rodriguez, Manager of the IICA International Trade and Regional Integration Program.





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# Regional News

## US gov't warns it will take action if Haitian politicians destabilise country

The US warned the transitional council in charge of Haiti against making changes to the troubled country's government late Wednesday, as pressure mounts for the unelected body to move toward elections for the first time in a decade.

In a statement posted on X, the U.S. Embassy in Haiti wrote that "The United States would consider that any person who supports such a destabilising initiative, which favours the gangs, would be acting against the interests of the United States, the region, and the Haitian people, and will take appropriate measures accordingly."

The US Embassy added that such a manoeuvre would undermine efforts

to establish "a minimal level of security and stability" in Haiti, where gang violence is surging and poverty deepening.

The statement came as some members of the council are at odds with Haitian Prime Minister Alix Didier Fils-Aimé, although it wasn't immediately clear why. The council met behind closed doors earlier Wednesday.

A spokesman for the prime minister's office said he could not comment on the situation.

The council's seven members with voting powers did not return messages asking for comment.

Meanwhile, Laurent Saint-Cyr, the

council's leader, said in a statement that he opposes any push to undermine government stability ahead of February 7, when the council is provisionally scheduled to step down.

"As major institutional deadlines for the Nation approach, any initiative likely to fuel instability, confusion or a breakdown of trust carries serious risks for the country," he wrote.

"Haiti cannot afford to make unilateral decisions or engage in short-sighted political calculations that would compromise the stability and continuity of the State, as well as the well-being of the already sorely tested population." (Jamaica Gleaner)

## Suriname monitoring increase cases of Chikungunya



Suriname has confirmed an outbreak of the mosquito-borne chikungunya virus, with none of the individuals who tested positive having travelled overseas in recent times.

The Ministry of Health said laboratory tests were conducted by the Central Laboratory of the Bureau for Public Health (BOG) and

the laboratory of the Academic Hospital Paramaribo, confirming eight cases.

The bureau is investigating the cases, tracing contacts, conducting additional testing, and has increased surveillance to prevent further spread.

Chikungunya is a viral infection transmitted by Aedes mosquitoes, which

is also responsible for the spread of dengue, Zika, and yellow fever.

The disease is accompanied by symptoms such as sudden fever, severe joint pain and swelling, headache, fatigue, and sometimes a rash.

Chikungunya is not transmitted directly from person to person and a past infection leads to lifelong immunity.

The ministry is advising people with fever and joint pain or swelling not to use aspirin or ibuprofen, but to take paracetamol for pain and fever.

They also recommend drinking plenty of fluids, resting, and seeking medical attention if symptoms worsen.

The ministry said that it will continue to provide the

public with timely, accurate, and transparent information as more information becomes available.

The first chikungunya outbreak in Suriname occurred in June 2014, when the virus was first identified locally in the country as part of the broader spread of chikungunya in the Caribbean and surrounding regions.

The authorities are urging people to actively contribute to mosquito control by removing breeding grounds in and around homes, workplaces, and recreational areas, such as stagnant water in buckets, tires, flowerpots, and other containers.

It is also recommended to wear protective clothing that covers arms and legs and use mosquito repellent. (Jamaica Gleaner)

## Jamaica seeks to expand overseas employment programmes in US

The Government of Jamaica is pressing ahead with efforts to expand the H-2A and H-2B United States work visa programmes.

Jamaica's Ambassador to the United States, Major General (Ret'd) Anthony Anderson, held discussions with Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, Colette Roberts Risdien, to examine the current state and future expansion of Jamaica's overseas employment programmes.

The meeting, held at the Embassy of Jamaica in Washington, DC, focused on the critical importance of the H-2A and H-2B visa programmes to Jamaica's economic stability and the livelihoods of rural communities across the island, programmes that have so far remained intact amid the broader immigration crackdown.

Roberts Risdien, who holds oversight responsibility for overseas employment programmes in the US and Canada, provided Anderson with a comprehensive update on emerging opportunities for Jamaican workers. Of particular note were new pathways for Jamaican commercial driver's licence holders and workers trained in heavy machinery and equipment operation, sectors where English proficiency requirements align favourably with Jamaica's workforce capabilities.

Anderson underscored the enduring significance of the bilateral labour partnership.

"Jamaica's overseas employment programmes continue to be a pillar of economic resilience for our Jamaican workers and rural communities. Through our long-standing partnership with the United States, the embassy remains committed to expanding safe, orderly, and mutual-



ly beneficial labour pathways, especially as we rebuild and create new opportunities in the aftermath of Hurricane Melissa," he said.

The discussions acknowledged the programme's deep historical roots, dating back to 1943 when the first cohort of Jamaican workers arrived in the US during World War II to address critical labour shortages. This partnership has evolved over eight decades into one of the most successful bilateral labour arrangements in the Western Hemisphere.

Recent programme statistics reflect the continued strength of this relationship. In the last programme year, approximately 5,000 Jamaican workers were employed seasonally in the US agricultural sector under the H-2A visa programme. Additionally, more than 12,000 Jamaican workers participated in the H-2B visa programme, contributing to the American hospitality and landscaping industries.

Beyond employment placement, the US has provided Jamaica with substantial technical assistance across

multiple areas critical to labour governance. This support has encompassed Labour Market Information Systems, child labour prevention initiatives, occupational safety and health protocols, and programmes addressing trafficking in persons.

The meeting took on added significance, given Jamaica's ongoing recovery efforts following the devastation caused by Hurricane Melissa. Both officials agreed that the overseas employment programmes represent a vital mechanism for economic recovery, providing Jamaican workers with income-earning opportunities that directly benefit families and communities affected by the natural disaster.

Roberts Risdien was accompanied by liaison officers Sheldon Brown and Karlene Brown, who provide direct support to Jamaican workers participating in the overseas employment programmes. Aliecia Taylor, minister counsellor for trade and economic affairs at the embassy, also attended the meeting. (Jamaica Gleaner)

## OECS debuts digital dashboard to manage partnerships

The Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Commission announced the launch of the OECS Partnership Dashboard on January 8, 2026.

This new digital tool aims to improve governance and accountability within the organization by providing a better way to monitor and manage its various partnerships across member states, shared an OECS release.

Designed to help the OECS Commission track partnerships, initiatives, and projects more systematically, the development of the dashboard was a joint effort with the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA). Its function is to clarify information about partnerships and make it more accessible, helping the organization to see who they are working with, where, and for what purpose.

At the launch event, the importance of the dashboard for the future operations of the OECS was emphasized.

Dr. Didacus Jules, Director General of the OECS, stated, "At its core, this platform is about clarity in a complex world. It brings together information that was once fragmented, makes partnerships visible, tracks initiatives, and allows us to see at a glance who we are working with, where, and to what end. In short, it helps us move from good intentions to measurable impact."

Dr. Manuel Otero, the outgoing Director-General of IICA, whose technical cooperation was key, expressed his satisfaction with the launch. He described the dashboard as a practical result of the ongoing



collaboration between the two organizations. Dr. Otero noted that the dashboard was designed to be adaptable and capable of evolving to meet changing needs.

"Through consultations, workshops, and rigorous discussions, we ensured that the dashboard responded to the practical and relevant needs of its users in the OECS. We approached its design with scalability in mind, envisioning it as a living tool that can evolve to support even more complex analyses and functions as the needs of the OECS grow and change...", he remarked.

During the event, the OECS Commission also took the opportunity to thank Dr. Otero for his dedicated service.

The organization expressed appreciation for his long-standing support and his personal commitment to regional cooperation.

In response, Dr. Otero thanked the OECS Commission, Dr. Jules, and the ministers for their support over

the years.

He highlighted the importance of working together, saying, "We have been able to achieve more when we worked together."

As per the release, the conclusion of the event, representatives from both organizations emphasized the significance of the partnership. Ms. Beverly Best, the Director of External and Institutional Relations at IICA, and Ms. Nadege Jn Baptiste, Head of Development Cooperation and Resource Mobilisation at the OECS, highlighted that the dashboard is a tangible example of how strategic partnerships can overcome language, geographic, and institutional barriers. They noted that collaboration with IICA has strengthened the OECS's internal capacity, promoted bilingual engagement, and demonstrated how sharing knowledge and working together can lead to more effective and inclusive development outcomes. (Dominica News Online)

## Two dead and several missing in New Zealand landslides

Two people have died and several are feared buried after landslides in New Zealand's North Island.

The deaths were reported at Welcome Bay, while rescue workers are still searching through rubble at a different site in a popular campground on Mount Maunganui.

There are no "signs of life", authorities said, adding that they have a "rough idea" of how many people are missing but are waiting for an exact figure. They provided no other details except that the group includes "at least one young girl".

The landslides were triggered by heavy rains over the last few days, which led to flooding and power outages across the North Island. One minister said the east coast resembled "a war zone".

New Zealand is "heavy with grief" after the "profound tragedy" caused by recent weather, Prime Minister Christopher Luxon said on X.

Footage from the campsite on Mount Maunganui, an extinct volcano, shows a huge slip near the base of the volcanic dome, as rescuers and sniffer dogs comb through crushed caravans and flattened tents.

Authorities said that the search would continue through the night. "This is a complex and high-risk environment, and our teams are working to achieve the best possible outcome while keeping everyone safe," said Megan Stiffler, the deputy national commander for the Urban Search and Rescue team,

The extinct volcano is a sacred Māori site and one of the most popular campgrounds in New Zealand, with a local holiday website describing it as a "slice of paradise". But it has been repeatedly hit by landslides in recent years.

"I heard this huge tree crack and all this dirt come off, and then I looked behind me and there's this huge landslide coming down," Australian tourist Sonny Worrall told local broadcaster TVNZ.



"I'm still shaking from it now... I turned around and had to jump out of my seat and just run," he added. He saw it happen while swimming in a hot pool.

Hiker Mark Tangney told the New Zealand Herald he heard people screaming from under the rubble. "So I just parked up and ran to help... We could hear people screaming: 'Help us, help us, get us out of here,'" he said.

Those calls persisted for about half an hour and then went silent, Tangney said.

A surf club in another part of Mount Maunganui has been evacuated following fears of more landslides.

A state of emergency has been declared in the Bay of Plenty where Mount Maunganui sits, and various parts of the North Island, including Northland, Coromandel, Tairāwhiti and Hauraki.

Several areas reported their wettest days on record on Thursday. Tauranga in the Bay of Plenty, for example, received three months worth of rain within a day, according to local media.

Some 8,000 people were without power as of Thursday morning, Radio New Zealand (RNZ) reported.

The wife of a man who was swept away in the Mahurangi River is holding out hope that he will survive.

"I know his personality is strong,

wise," she told RNZ, adding that he was a fisherman back home in Kiribati and knew how to swim and dive.

The man, 47, was driving to work with their nephew when the car they were in fell into the river.

He had pushed the nephew towards a branch so the nephew could hoist himself onto land; but the older man did not manage to get back up himself, according to the report.

"It's been a very big event for us as a country, really hitting almost our entire eastern seaboard of the North Island," said Minister for Emergency Management Mark Mitchell.

"The good news is that everyone responded really quickly, and there was time to get prepared. That helps to mitigate and create a very strong response," he told RNZ.

December to February are typically the sunnier months in New Zealand but in recent years heavy rains and storms have become more frequent.

In February 2023, parts of the island were devastated by Cyclone Gabrielle, which is to date the costliest cyclone to hit the Southern Hemisphere, with damage amounting to NZ\$13.5bn (\$7.9bn; £5.9bn).

This week's flooding has added to the toll for the local communities that are still rebuilding. (BBC)

## Three dead in shooting in Australia's New South Wales

Three people have died and another injured after a shooting in a small town in New South Wales, Australia, police have said.

Emergency services were called to a residential area in Lake Cargelligo at about 16:40 local time (05:40 GMT).

The suspect is still on the run and is believed to have fled in a vehicle, NSW police confirmed.

A man and woman were found shot dead in a vehicle, a second shooting soon afterwards killed a woman and left a man in a "critical condition" in hospital, police said.

The Sydney Morning Herald reports that the incident was a suspected domestic violence attack.

Andrew Holland, NSW police assistant commissioner, declined to comment on the relationship between the gunman and the victims.

The public has been urged to remain indoors and multiple crime scenes have been established, he told reporters.

"Any death in a small country town is confronting, but again, a scene where you have people shot by firearms is obviously going to make people very, very tense and very concerned," said Holland.

"The scene faced by the emergency services officers at that time would have been horrendous."

Lake Cargelligo is located in the centre of New South Wales and has a population of about 1,500 people.

The incident comes after last month's mass shooting at Sydney's Bondi Beach which killed 15 people. (BBC)



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3. Your full name, the school you represent, and age must be written at the bottom of the box.
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**JUDGING CRITERIA:**

- \* Creativity/Originality
- \* Appeal
- \* Color combination
- \* Nutrition Content:
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  2. No sugar sweetened beverages
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## Outrage after Indian man drowns in open pit after begging for help for hours

The death of a 27-year-old Indian IT professional after his car fell into an unmarked construction pit has raised questions around urban planning and road safety in India.

Last Friday, at around midnight, Yuvraj Mehta was driving home in Noida, a suburb of the capital Delhi, through dense winter fog when his car reportedly hit a low boundary wall and plunged into the deep pit full of water. The site had reportedly been dug up a few years ago before work was stalled.

Mehta, who didn't know how to swim, climbed on to the roof of his car as it began to sink and rang his father who rushed to the scene and alerted the emergency services. His father told reporters that Mehta remained there for close to two hours, flashing the torch on his phone and shouting for help.

Then, his cries stopped. By the time authorities recovered his body, almost five hours had passed since the accident, local media reported.

Mehta's tragic death has made national headlines, and the fact that it happened so close to the capital city has shocked and angered residents. Protests have been held at the accident site, with demonstrators accusing authorities of negligence and demanding accountability.

His death has also fuelled larger questions about the state of Indian roads and urban planning.

"Noida techie's [Mehta's] death is essentially a murder. Dreams shattered. Hard work gone in vain. Father's hopes buried. All because of a failed system," one user wrote on X.

"This tragedy raises deeper questions about the quality of infrastructure in even big cities like Noida," said another.

Some users shared their own experiences of accidents because of bad roads, lack of adequate signage and poor lighting after dark. Some also complained about open drains and



construction sites on roads close to their homes becoming death traps, especially for children and the elderly.

Since the accident, police in Noida have registered two cases against the real estate developers of the construction site where the pit was located following a complaint from Mehta's family.

On Sunday, the government of Uttar Pradesh state, where Noida is located, removed a senior official from the township's governing authority and ordered an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the rescue operation and site safety.

Since then, police have arrested Abhay Kumar, one of the owners of the construction site, for alleged culpable homicide due to negligence under India's criminal code. Kumar is in custody and has not commented on the allegations.

Police have said that further investigations are under way and that more arrests are likely in the coming days.

In media interviews, Mehta's father Rajkumar has said that he received a call from his son soon after the accident happened. He rushed to the spot but said that the site was pitch dark and shrouded in fog, and that his son was barely visible in the murky waters.

He alerted the police and the fire brigade and said that rescue teams arrived at the site shortly after. But he alleged that his son remained stranded

for hours because they did not have the resources to pull him out.

He added that his son's life could have been saved if trained divers were sent to retrieve him, but that did not happen.

"He was constantly saying, 'Papa mujhe bacha lo' [Papa save me] during his last hours," Rajkumar Mehta told NDTV news channel.

Moninder, who goes by one name and is a delivery worker for an e-commerce platform, was passing by and reportedly made a brave attempt to save Mehta. He tied a rope around his waist and jumped into the freezing water to pull him out, he told Hindustan Times newspaper..

He added that he searched for Mehta for 30-40 minutes but couldn't locate him. He also alleged that emergency responders weren't willing to step inside the water, saying that it was too cold and that there were iron rods inside the pit.

Noida's additional commissioner of police Rajeev Narain Mishra told the media that the incident was "unfortunate" but denied negligence.

"Police and fire department teams made efforts to save the youth. A fire department crane, ladder, makeshift boat and searchlights were used, but there was zero visibility at the time," he told Times of India newspaper and added that further investigation was under way.

Hemant Upadhyay, assistant commissioner of police for Noida, told British newspaper The Independent that no-one was sent into the pit because officers were concerned about further casualties if untrained personnel were sent in.

"The water was very deep, visibility was poor and there were concerns about submerged debris," he said. (BBC)

## Vampire film Sinners breaks Oscar nominations record

Vampire horror film *Sinners* has broken the record for the most Oscar nominations received by a single film, after being nominated for 16 of Hollywood's most coveted honours.

The film beat the previous record of 14 nominations, and emerged ahead of its nearest rival this year, Leonardo DiCaprio's thriller *One Battle After Another*, which is up for 13 awards.

*Sinners*' contenders include its star Michael B Jordan and his British co-stars Wunmi Mosaku and Delroy Lindo.

Other big names up for trophies include Timothée Chalamet, who is hoping for third time lucky after two previous nominations, and Irish actress Jessie Buckley, who is the frontrunner to win best actress for *Hamnet*.

However, there was no space for her co-star Paul Mescal, who starred opposite Buckley as William Shakespeare in *Hamnet*; while *Wicked: For Good* and its stars Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande missed out completely.

The winners will be announced at a ceremony in Hollywood on 15 March.

The leading films:

*Sinners* - 16

*One Battle After Another* - 13

*Marty Supreme* - 9

*Frankenstein* - 9

*Sentimental Value* - 9

*Hamnet* - 8

*Sinners* has exceeded expectations and bucked the trend that normally



means horror films don't perform well at award ceremonies.

Michael B Jordan is nominated for best actor for playing twin brothers who return home to Mississippi in the 1930s to set up a juke joint, which is set upon by blood-sucking vampires.

Other *Sinners* cast members to be nominated include British-Nigerian actress Wunmi Mosaku and co-star Delroy Lindo, who grew up in London, and the pair are carrying Britain's hopes for acting awards this year.

Ryan Coogler is nominated for directing, writing and producing *Sinners*, with the film also shortlisted for the Oscars' top prize, best picture.

BBC Radio 1 film critic Ali Plumb said: "The last time anything to do with a horror won best picture was *The Silence of the Lambs* in the early 1990s. That is a long time ago."

He said it was good to see *Sinners* get "this broad a series of accolades and thumbs up from across the whole industry".

It is "more than just a horror", he added. "Although obviously vampires are obviously involved, there's so much more to it."

BBC culture editor Katie Razzall said: "It is to my mind the perfect blend of revenge thriller and sexy, decadent, musical journey through America's race issues, good against evil, the power of music - and redemption."

"Who knew that combining vampires, KKK racists, ex-gangster twins (both played by Michael B Jordan), Mississippi delta folklore and blues history would pay off so spectacularly?"

The previous record total of 14 nominations was achieved by *All About Eve* in 1951, *Titanic* in 1998 and *La La Land* in 2018. (BBC)



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# Sports News

## Wins for PMS, CHSS and AGS get in school basketball league

Princess Margaret School (PMS), Clare Hall Secondary School (CHSS), and the Antigua Grammar School (AGS) recorded wins in the Cool and Smooth Inter-School Basketball League at the JSC Sports Complex on Wednesday.

Princess Margaret School coasted to a 76-45 victory against St. Anthony's Secondary School in the Senior Boys Division.

Gabriel De Suza shot a game-high 31 points, Noah Massiah sank 23 points, and Elijah Charles scored 17 points for Princess Margaret School.

Israel Clarke converted 16 points, Kemar Mason sank 12 points, and Zende Dorsette chipped in with 11 points for St. Anthony's Secondary School.

Clare Hall Secondary also pulled off a 65-53 victory against the Antigua and Barbuda College of Advanced Studies (ABCAS) in another Senior Boys Division affair.

Tajahron Davis shot a game-high 38 points, and Richard Santana scored 12 points for Clare Hall Secondary School.

Gladstone Joseph Jr. converted 16 points, Najee Simons sank 13 points, and Kadeem Simon scored 12 points for ABCAS.

There was success for Antigua Grammar School, which romped to a crushing 81-12 victory against All Saints Secondary School in the Junior Boys Division.

Derick Perez produced 20 points, and Dajon George scored 10 points for Antigua Grammar School, while Elijah Barton converted eight points for All Saints Secondary School.



Players of the Clare Hall Secondary School (blue uniform) compete against the Antigua and Barbuda College of Advanced Studies (ABCAS) in the Senior Boys' Division in the Cool and Smooth Inter-School Basketball League at the JSC Sports Complex on Wednesday, January 21, 2026. (Photo courtesy of the school basketball league)

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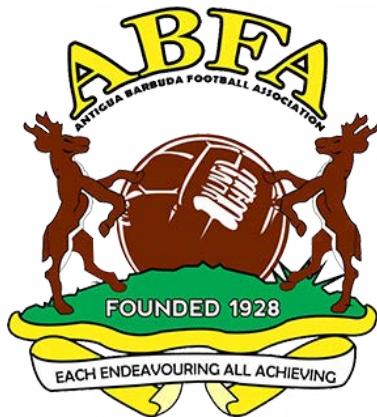
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# Sports News

## Antiguans to contest CONCACAF Women's Under-17 Qualifiers



The Antigua and Barbuda national team is among the teams from 29 member associations that will be launching their campaigns in the opening round of the 2026 CONCACAF Women's Under-17 Qualifiers this weekend.

The teams are divided into six groups and will be contesting the first phase of the qualification process for the

2026 FIFA Under-17 Women's World Cup from January 24 to February 2.

The first-round matches will take place in four countries. Aruba will host Group D, Bermuda will host Group B, Curacao will host Groups F and C, and Nicaragua will host Groups A and E.

Antigua and Barbuda will compete in Group C alongside Haiti, Guatemala, the Cayman Islands, and St. Lucia.

Antigua and Barbuda will face Haiti in their opening game at the FFK Stadium in Willemstad in Curacao on Sunday, January 25.

The Antiguans will meet Guatemala on Tuesday, January 27, will tackle the Cayman Islands on Thursday, January 29, and will play their final match against St. Lucia on Saturday, January 31.

After the round-robin group stage

play, the six group winners and the two best second-place finishers will advance to the final round.

They will be joining the four top-ranked teams in the region, which received a bye to the final round. They are Canada, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and the United States of America (USA).

The 2026 CONCACAF Under-17 Women's Qualifiers will be the second edition of the event to be played under the current two-round format, following its introduction in 2025.

In the previous edition of the CONCACAF Women's Under-17 Qualifiers, played under the same format, Canada, Costa Rica, Mexico, and the United States topped their respective groups to secure qualification for the 2025 FIFA Under-17 Women's World Cup in Morocco.

## West beat Afghanistan to claim consolation win in T20 series

The West Indies claimed a consolation win against Afghanistan in the third and final game of their three-match Twenty20 International (T20I) in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, on Thursday.

Shamar Springer claimed a hat trick and produced a man-of-the-match performance to lead the West Indies to a consolation 13-run victory after losing the first two matches in a 2-1 series defeat.

The West Indies were restricted to 151 for seven off their 20 overs after being sent in to bat. In reply, Afghanistan was restricted to 138 for eight off their 20 overs.

Captain Brandon King led the West Indies batting, in which most of the batsmen failed to convert good starts into big scores.

King cracked 47 off 35 balls, including three sixes and two fours. Matthew Forde slammed 27 off 11 balls, and Springer made 16 not out.

Captain and leg-spinner Rashid Khan



**West Indies pacer Shamar Springer bowls during the third T20 International in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, on Thursday, January 22, 2026. (Getty Images)**

bagged two for 13, right-arm fast bowler Abdullah Ahmadzai claimed two for 30, and fellow pacer Zia Sharifi captured two for 45.

Most Afghanistan batsmen struggled in their run chase, with only openers

Rahmanullah Gurbaz and Ibrahim Zadran managing to reach double figures.

Gurbaz hit 73 off 58 balls, including eight fours and a six, and Zadran made 28 off 27 balls. Springer snapped up four for 20 in his four overs.

## ABCA clubs get players from LI Hurricanes and WI Academy

Clubs participating in the Antigua and Barbuda Cricket Association's (ABCA) domestic programme are allowed to utilize players from the Leeward Islands Hurricanes and the West Indies Cricket Academy.

The Leeward Islands Hurricanes are based at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium, while the West Indies Academy is based at the Cricket West Indies headquarters at the Coolidge Cricket Grounds. (CCG).

The players from the Leeward Islands Hurricanes and the West Indies Academy are now residing in Antigua, and the ABCA reached agreements with the two regional teams to allow their players to represent the Antiguan clubs in the domestic competitions.

Leeward Islands Hurricanes players Rahkeem Cornwall, Kari-ma Gore, Kofi James, and Javier Spencer will continue to represent PIC Insurance Liberta Black Hawks. Giovinte Depizza and Rivaldo Clarke of the West Indies Academy are also attached to the Black Hawks.

Kadeem Henry and Jewel Andrew of the LI Hurricanes will remain with the Pigotts Crushers. They are joined by Carlon Bowen-Tuckett of the West Indies Academy.

Cameron Pennyfeather of the LI Hurricanes and Zishan Motara of the West Indies Academy will represent the New Winthorpes Lions. Mikyle Louis and Dimitri Adams of the LI Hurricanes and Jediah Blades of the West Indies



Johanne Layne



Jediah Blades

Academy will represent the Bolans Blasters.

Jeremiah Louis of the LI Hurricanes and Ranieco Smith of the West Indies Academy are attached to the All Saints Pythons, while Daniel Doram of the LI Hurricanes and Ryan Bandoo of the West Indies Academy will represent WES Rising Sun Spartans.

Micah McKenzie and Chamiqueko Landerfort of the LI Hurricanes and Nathan Edward and Maven-dra Dindyal of the West Indies Academy are attached to Empire Nation.

Oshane Thomas of the LI Hurricanes and Amari Goodridge of the West Indies Academy will represent the Jennings Tigers, while Jahmar Hamilton of the LI Hurricanes and Kelvin Pitman and Mbeki Joseph of the West Indies Academy are attached to the CUB Bethesda Golden Eagles.

Johanne Layne and Damel Evelyn of the West Indies Academy will represent Tertiary Institution and Schools.

Some of these players will be in action this weekend during the second round of matches in the ABCA Two-Day Championship.

Defending champions Liberta Blackhawks will entertain Tertiary Institution and Schools at Ball Beef in Liberta in one of the five matches that are slated to commence on Saturday at 10 am.

The Bethesda Golden Eagles will host the All Saints Pythons at Bethesda, while the Bolans Blasters will take on the Rising Sun Spartans at Bolans.

Pigotts Crushers and New Winthorpes Lions will clash at Pigotts, and Empire Nation will meet the Jennings Tigers at Jennings.

## Letter To the Editor



I write this letter with deep pain, anger, and disappointment—but also with love for the sport that raised many of us and kept countless youths off the streets. What I witnessed and personally experienced at a recent Second Division match between Earthquake FC and Old Road Second Team was not football. It was chaos, incompetence, and abuse disguised as officiating.

The officiating in that match was among the worst I have seen in my lifetime. It was not merely poor—it was dangerous.

Within the first five minutes, a separation between two players resulted in a yellow card being issued to only one of them. In the first 35 minutes, eight yellow cards were shown, yet serious infringements that directly led to two goals went unpunished. Players were lifted, shoved, and fouled blatantly, with decisions repeatedly going the wrong way.

At one point, Earthquake FC's right back was lifted completely off the ground by an opposing player, yet the foul was inexplicably awarded against Earthquake. I personally cleared a ball from inside the 18-yard box and was stamped on by the attacker, resulting in a fractured small toe. Instead of protecting the injured player, the referee called a foul against me and issued a yellow card—until the crowd reacted and exposed the absurdity of the decision. The referee then attempted to withdraw the card

and issue it to another player.

Compounding the problem, the assistant referee repeatedly ran ahead of the defensive line, loudly shouting, “one of your players behind,” while incorrectly judging offsides throughout the match. Not once was our defensive line assessed correctly. It was, to say the least, atrocious.

That moment alone should alarm every football administrator in this country.

This is not about gender. It is about competence, training, neutrality, and accountability. Referees exist to control and protect the game, not inflame it, bias it, or endanger players. When officials appear emotionally involved or influenced by familiarity, location, or favoritism, the integrity of football collapses.

Because of the conditions and the complete loss of control, I was forced to call my team off the field. In real time (Senegal vs Morocco) has shown that walking away is sometimes the only way to prevent violence. Even at the international level, teams have taken similar action when officiating becomes intolerable.

What makes this even more troubling is that ABFA Congress is scheduled for this Thursday. Yet year after year, clubs raise the same concerns—and nothing changes. In 2026, we are still playing 4:20 p.m. matches, and clubs continue to accept conditions that work against players. When we previously called for later kickoff times, concerns about security and lighting were raised—yet other leagues manage this successfully. The question must be asked: who are we really serving?

Referees are not properly supported, trained, or monitored. They are underpaid and eventually quit. Players are unpaid, unprotected, and disrespected. Clubs are owed money. FIFA directives are ignored. Academ

mies struggle. Decisions that should be made before seasons begin are made halfway through. Clubs that attempt to operate honestly are sidelined, while manipulation and favoritism are rewarded.

Meanwhile, our youth are watching. Young players see this dysfunction and learn nothing positive from it. Those with talent are lured away by false promises, politics, and national setups that fail to reinvest in their communities. Standards are not raised—only egos and titles.

Our football is suffering.

Our athletes are suffering.

And sadly, this sickness mirrors what we see in politics, churches, and other institutions meant to guide society.

I am seeking medical treatment, and the medical bill will be forwarded to the ABFA. When players are injured due to negligence, someone must be held accountable.

People will say, “Don’t talk.”

But silence is what allowed this rot to spread.

Losing a match is honorable.

Being targeted, disrespected, and endangered is not.

No one attends football matches to watch referees run up and down the field. They come to see players compete fairly and safely. When officials fail to control matches professionally, they become the very cause of fights, crowd interference, and bans—problems clubs are then unfairly punished for.

I love this sport. That is why I speak. Antigua and Barbuda football cannot continue like this.

Only God knows how much longer our athletes will endure before they walk away completely.

Arnold James

Player / Club Representative

Antigua and Barbuda

January 22, 2026

## Leewards stay unbeaten in women's T20 Blaze

The Leeward Islands Stormers maintained their perfect run in the 2026 Cricket West Indies (CWI) Women's T20 Blaze at Arnos Vale in St. Vincent and the Grenadines on Wednesday night.

The Leewards women notched up their fifth win in as many games with a seven-wicket victory via the Duckworth/Lewis/Stern method against the Windward Islands to finish at the top of the standings at the end of the preliminary rounds.

Chasing a revised victory target in 14 overs, the Leewards women, who had already qualified for Friday's final, reached the required 59 runs for three wickets with 32 balls to spare.

Jahzara Claxton hit an unbeaten 23, and Reniece Boyce struck 14 not out, while leg-spinner Afy Fletcher captured two for 23.

The Windwards women were restricted to 69 for nine off their allotted 20 overs after winning the toss and opting to bat.

Abini St. Jean topscored with 16, while Holly Charles made 15 and Ashlene Edward got 10. Antiguan pacer Shawnisha Hector grabbed three wickets for five runs in her four overs.

Fellow right-arm medium pacer Jahzara Claxton picked up three for 20, and off-spinner Davronique Maynard captured two for 15.

Captain Aaliyah Alleyne played a starring role with both bat and ball to carry Barbados Women into the final of the T20 Blaze with a resounding 22-run victory



Jahzara Claxton

over defending champs Guyana Women in their fifth-round match.

Playing in a must-win game, Alleyne led from the front in an unbeaten knock of 38 off 36 balls, which rescued her side from the precarious position of 32 for four and got them up to 92 for eight from their 20 overs.

Alleyne then returned to grab two wickets as Guyana were bundled out for 70 in 19.4 overs.

With the win, Barbados secured a second-place finish in the standings to qualify for the final against the Leeward Islands women on Friday and ensure a new champion will be crowned in this year's tournament.

Jamaica women played spoiler in the final preliminary round of the T20 Blaze, defeating Trinidad and Tobago Women by three wickets via the Duckworth/Lewis/Stern method to end any hopes the Trinis had of qualifying for Friday's

final.

In a match reduced to 17 overs per side due to persistent showers, T&T could only muster 76 for eight after being sent in to bat. Set a revised total of 79, Jamaica lost five wickets for just 15 runs before eventually reaching 79 for seven in 15.2 overs.

It was only Jamaica's second win of the tournament and erased T&T's chances of lifting the title. T&T needed to defeat Jamaica and hope that Guyana Women beat Barbados Women to give them any chance of joining Leeward Islands Women in the final.

The Leewards and Barbados will clash in the final at Arnos Vale on Friday at 7 pm. It will be preceded by a clash for third place between Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana at 2:30 pm and the playoff for fifth place between the Windwards and Jamaica at 9:30 am.

# Sports

FRIDAY 23RD JANUARY 2026

POINT EXPRESS  
ANTIGUA & BARBUDA  
TRUSTED NEWS AND RESPECTED VIEWS

## West Indies beat South Africa at U-19 Men's World Cup

The West Indies recorded their second win at the ICC Men's Under-19 World Cup in Namibia on Thursday.

The West Indies rebounded from their disappointing loss to Afghanistan to pull off a 55-run victory against South Africa in their last Group D match at the High Performance Oval in Windhoek.

Opener Zachary Carter slammed a century and pacer Shaquan Belle picked up six wickets for the Windies to secure their second win after their opening Group D victory against Tanzania.

Carter struck 114-run to guide the West Indies to 234 in 47.5 overs after winning the toss and electing to bat. JJ Basson claimed five for 23 in 10 overs. Belle picked up six wickets for 40 runs in his quota of 10 overs for the Caribbean team as South Africa was dismissed for 179 runs in 37.4 overs, with Jason Rowles getting 46.

The West Indies decision to bat first paid early dividends. Despite losing opener Tanez Francis in the seventh over, they continued to pile on the runs with Carter leading the charge at the top.

The game-changing moment came in the 22nd over when JJ Basson struck thrice in the space of four deliveries, swinging the momentum South Africa's way.

Carter however, continued ticking the scoreboard, and went on to complete a masterful century, scoring 114 runs off 104 balls to anchor the West Indies innings.

He was eventually dismissed by Paul James, and just three overs later, Jonathan van Lange (29) was dismissed, falling to Michael Kruiskamp.

JJ Basson completed an outstanding five-wicket haul as Jason Rowles claimed two for 44 as the West Indies



*The West Indies players celebrate the dismissal of a South African batsman during their ICC Men's Under-19 World Cup Group D match at the High Performance Oval in Windhoek, Namibia, on Thursday, January 22, 2026. (Getty Images)*



*West Indies opener Zachary Carter celebrates his hundred against South Africa in their ICC Men's Under-19 World Cup Group D match at the High Performance Oval in Windhoek, Namibia, on Thursday, January 22, 2026.*

failed to find a late flourish.

Chasing 235 to win, South Africa were put under early pressure as Belle removed opener Adnaan Lagadie before Jorich van Schalkwyk and Muhammad Bulbulia were dismissed off consecutive deliveries, leaving South Africa struggling at 41 for three at the end of the powerplay.

Jason Rowles then led the rebuild alongside Armaan Manack, with the pair adding a valuable 42-run partnership.

The stand was broken when Manack fell for 17. South Africa suffered another setback soon after as left-arm wrist spinner Vitel Lawes claimed the crucial wicket of the well-set Rowles, who scored 46 off 40 balls. His dismissal left South Africa in further trouble at 115 for five.

Belle then produced a spectacular spell, picking up four wickets to break all South African resistance and, in the process, completing a stunning six-wicket haul.

South Africa lost their final five wickets for just 57 runs as West Indies sealed a dominant victory. Despite suffering their second loss in three games, South Africa joined the West Indies and Afghanistan in the second round as qualifiers from Group D.