

A&B Gets Much Applause For Spanish Language Adoption

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Prime Minister Gaston Browne (centre) along with Sir David Harrison, MP Michael Freeland, High Commissioner Karen-Mae Hill, Dr. Jonah Greene and others toured the Potters Sports Field Redevelopment Project on Thursday

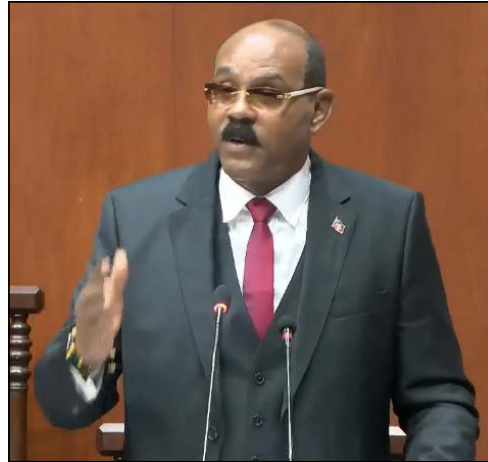
A&B Gets Much Applause For Spanish Language Adotion

Prime Minister Gaston Browne has reported to the Cabinet details of discussions he has had with the Spanish Ambassador to the Caribbean surrounding the government's decision to adopt Spanish as the country's official second language.

The discussions focused on Spain's willingness to provide technical assistance and support to Antigua and Barbuda as the Government advances its goal of making Spanish the nation's second language. Cabinet was informed that the initiative forms part of a broader strategy to strengthen Antigua and Barbuda's engagement with Latin America and to position citizens to take advantage of expanded opportunities in tourism, trade, education, and international business.

Among the areas of cooperation discussed were the provision of lecturers, teaching resources, teacher training programmes, software and educational tools, and the development of short courses in Spanish. Particular emphasis was placed on training for professionals working in sectors such as tourism, hospitality, airport services, seaport operations, security, and customs.

The Prime Minister also advised Cabinet that discussions included the possibility of establishing a Spanish language and cultural institute in Antigua and Barbuda, which would serve as a hub for language instruction, cultural



Prime Minister Gaston Browne

exchange, and educational collaboration.

Additional proposals under consideration include student exchange programmes with Spain, opportunities for Antiguan and Barbudan teachers to travel to Spain to teach English, and the provision of scholarships and other forms of technical cooperation designed to build national capacity in language education.

Cabinet was informed that Antigua and Barbuda will also explore opportunities for support from other Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America as part of a wider effort to strengthen Spanish language instruction and proficiency across the country.


Cabinet also highlighted its commitment to the initiative by leading from the front. Several senior government

officials and Cabinet members are already fluent Spanish speakers, including the Hon. E.P. Chet Greene, Cabinet Secretary Konata Lee, Hon. Maria Browne and the Hon. Dwayne George, demonstrating the value of multilingualism in public service and international engagement.

The Government recognizes that Spanish is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world and that increasing Spanish-language competency among citizens will enhance Antigua and Barbuda's competitiveness in tourism, commerce, diplomacy, and regional integration. Cabinet therefore welcomed the discussions and expressed support for continued engagement with Spain and other international partners to advance this important national objective.



The Government remains committed to equipping future generations with the linguistic skills necessary to thrive in an increasingly interconnected global economy while deepening Antigua and Barbuda's cultural and economic ties with the wider Spanish-speaking world.

Cabinet spokesman Maurice Merchant reported that Ambassador to the Organisation of American States, Sir Ronald Sanders, has informed the government of the positive feedback he has received from Latin American countries at the OAS and how they have welcomed the initiative.



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Barbuda Council Warned Land Leases Illegal, Unauthorised Structures Will Be Demolished

The Barbuda Council is being cautioned yet again that any attempt to lease, sell, or otherwise dispose of land on the sister isle is illegal and unauthorised structures erected on Crown lands could face demolition.

The latest warning came Thursday from Director General of Communications Maurice Merchant as he outlined the government's position on land ownership and the ongoing establishment of a Barbuda Land Registry. He said Cabinet remains convinced that the legal questions surrounding land ownership on Barbuda have already been settled and that efforts by the Barbuda Council to transfer interests in land are without legal standing.

"There has been a mad push by the council to provide lease to individuals on Barbuda, and there is where Cabinet says that it's illegal, it's against the law," Merchant said. "It has been proven in the highest courts. There is no other court that anyone can go to address the land issue in Barbuda anymore. The matter is closed."

"The lands on Antigua, the lands on Barbuda belong to the Crown, full stop," he stated. "Cabinet believes that any attempts by anyone, including the Barbuda Council, to divest lands, whether via lease, whether financially, for financial gain or just simply giving away the land, is illegal."

He added that the government is prepared to take decisive action to halt any such activities.

His comments came as Cabinet received an update from Attorney General and Minister for Legal Affairs Sir Steadroy Benjamin on the progress being made toward establishing and operationalising the Barbuda Land Registry and preparing for the sale of Crown lands on the island.

According to Cabinet, significant advances have been made in developing the legal and administrative frame-



Attorney General, Sir Steadroy Benjamin

work required to facilitate land registration and ownership transactions in Barbuda, and any purported transactions made by the council will not be

recognised or honoured by the Government of Antigua and Barbuda.

Merchant also issued a stern warning regarding structures being built without proper authorisation.

"If they are erecting structures illegally on Barbuda without adequate permission from the owners of the land, the owners being the Crown, then Cabinet says that the government reserves the right to demolish those illegal structures," he said.

"And Cabinet is very serious about it."

At the same time, the Director General of Communications moved to reassure long-time residents that the government's plans are not intended to displace Barbudans who have occupied land for generations.



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Fernandez Urges Tourism Stakeholders to Raise Standards as Antigua Positions for Cruise Growth



Tourism Minister Charles Fernandez has challenged stakeholders across Antigua and Barbuda’s tourism industry to elevate standards of professionalism and service excellence as the country seeks to strengthen its standing as one of the Caribbean’s premier cruise destinations.

Speaking at the 2025/2026 Cruise Season Review Workshop held at Dennis Beach Bar Restaurant and Conference Centre on Thursday, Fernan-

dez said the continued success of the cruise sector depends on the collective commitment of everyone involved in delivering the visitor experience.

The workshop brought together government officials, tourism professionals, cruise industry representatives, taxi operators, vendors, tour operators, and other stakeholders to review the recently concluded cruise season, assess performance, and identify opportunities for future growth.

“The success of the cruise industry does not rest with any one organization,” Fernandez told participants. “It is the result of the collective efforts of government agencies, Antigua Cruise Port, taxi operators, retailers, vendors, tour operators, excursion partners, security personnel, port workers and countless others who work tirelessly to ensure every visitor leaves our shores with a positive impression.”

The minister emphasized that while Antigua and Barbuda is international-

ly recognized for its beaches and natural beauty, the country’s greatest asset remains its people.

“There are countries with beaches almost as nice as Antigua’s, but what sets us apart is our people. We are more welcoming and we provide a better experience,” he said.

Fernandez praised Antigua Cruise Port and its parent company, Global Ports Holding, for helping to modernize and expand the country’s cruise tourism product through strategic investment, international expertise, and partnerships that have enhanced Antigua’s reputation within the industry.

He noted that Antigua and Barbuda’s success has become a model for other destinations in the region, pointing to a recently announced agreement between the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Global Ports Holding for the future development and operation of the Kingstown Cruise Port.

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Meanwhile, General Manager of Antigua Cruise Port, Gaspar George, reported another strong performance for the destination, citing steady growth in cruise calls and passenger arrivals over recent years.

According to George, cruise ship calls increased from 391 during the 2022-2023 season to 455 during the 2025-2026 season, while passenger arrivals reached approximately 850,000 during the latest season.

He also highlighted significant growth in Antigua's homeporting sector, noting that passenger numbers have more than doubled in recent years. The opening of the port's fifth berth, he said, has created additional capacity and generated increased interest from major cruise lines seeking expanded operations in Antigua.

The workshop also featured a presentation from Colin C. James, Chief Executive Officer of the Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority, who outlined emerging trends shaping the global cruise industry.

James pointed to the recent visit by internet personality IShowSpeed as an example of how younger travellers are increasingly seeking authentic and immersive experiences when choosing destinations.

"People want to hear our stories, experience our culture and engage with our communities," James said. "No one can tell Antigua and Barbuda's story better than Antiguan and Barbudans."

He noted that modern cruise passengers are increasingly interested in cultural experiences, culinary tourism, sustainability initiatives, and personal-

ized excursions rather than traditional sightseeing activities alone.

James also encouraged tourism stakeholders to embrace technological advancements, including digital payment systems, to meet the expectations of younger travellers who increasingly prefer seamless, cashless transactions and customized experiences.

Among the opportunities identified for future growth was the continued expansion of homeporting operations, which James said could generate increased hotel occupancy, transportation demand, employment opportunities, and broader economic activity across the country.

Also attending the workshop was Minister of State in the Ministry of Tourism, Michael Freeland.

The workshop concluded with interactive discussions focused on identifying practical solutions to enhance visitor experiences, strengthen collaboration among industry stakeholders, and ensure Antigua and Barbuda remains among the Caribbean's most competitive and desirable cruise destinations.



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Potters Sports Field Redevelopment Project Advances



Members of the Potters Sports Field Redevelopment Committee today welcomed Sir David Harrison, principal donor of the multi-million-dollar Potters Sports Field Redevelopment Project, on his third visit to the site. The Right Honourable Gaston Browne, Prime Minister, joined the visit and expressed sincere appreciation to Sir David for his significant investment in the development of the Potters community and the people of Antigua and Barbuda.

Earlier this week, High Commissioner Karen-Mae Hill, the visionary behind this redevelopment, invited the Honourable Michael Freeland, the Parliamentary Representative for St. George's, to conduct a walk-through and to update him on the plans and projected timelines for this project.

The redeveloped facility will feature state-of-the-art basketball, netball and volleyball courts, a dual-purpose cricket and football field, a Little League baseball diamond, a children's play area, a walking trail, and a half-sized Olympic swimming pool. The project is designed to create opportunities for youth development, sports excellence, recreation, and communi-



ty engagement while introducing new sporting pathways, including baseball, to young Antiguan and Barbudans.

The initiative has attracted support from several generous donors, including the late Sir Aziz Hadeed, in whose honour the cricket and football pavilion will be named the Aziz Fares Hadeed Pavilion. Additional contributions have been provided by Satellite Energy Ltd., Ophir Daniel and Ann

Chapman-Daniel, the Department of the Environment and Bonnie Floyd Ministries. Critical support and advice have also been received from the Governor General, Sir Rodney Williams, the Ministry of Works, the Board of Education, the Ministry of Sports, APUA, the Port Authority, Evron Zachariah from C.E.A.S Engineering, Cricket West Indies, the Survey Department and the National Solid Waste Management Authority.



Importantly, 80 per cent of the labour force engaged on the project has come directly from Potters Village, ensuring that the economic benefits of the redevelopment remain within the community while fostering local skills development and employment.

The technical team advised that construction will be completed in phases, with the hardcourt facilities scheduled

as the first major component to be delivered. Materials for the spectator stands have already been ordered and are expected to arrive by the end of July.

High Commissioner Hill noted that the project is ultimately about empowering the community that helped shape her. She emphasised that the facility will serve as a catalyst for physical

health, mental well-being, social cohesion, youth development, and entrepreneurship. Upon completion, the redeveloped sports complex will serve as a premier venue for community activities, school sports, and national events, while positioning Potters as a future host community for regional and international sporting activities, including the Commonwealth Games.






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Cabinet Questions Rise in Work Permits for Jobs Locals Can Fill



LABOUR DEPARTMENT ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

The Cabinet of Antigua and Barbuda has instructed the Labour Department and the One Stop Employment Centre (OSEC) to strengthen their efforts to publicise available jobs, amid concerns that too many work permit applications are being approved for positions that could be filled by Antiguan and Barbudans.

Speaking during Thursday's post-Cabinet press briefing, Director General of Communications Maurice Merchant said Cabinet members routinely review work permit applications submitted by Labour Minister Sir Steadroy Benjamin and have become increasingly concerned about the types of jobs for which foreign workers are being sought.

"Every Wednesday, the Minister for Labour brings to Cabinet a list of requests for work permits, and these requests are prepared by the Labour Department," Merchant explained. "They come with either recommendations, highly recommended, or for Cabinet to make considerations on whether or not to grant these requests."

Merchant said Cabinet has repeatedly observed applications from businesses seeking permission to import workers for positions that do not appear to require specialised skills. Those Cabinet members are of the opinion that "there is something drastically wrong with that process because they believe that locals can assume those positions". Such positions include cooks and nannies.



Director of Communications in the Office of the Prime Minister, Maurice Merchant

As a result, Cabinet believes more must be done to ensure that local workers are aware of available employment opportunities before employers turn to foreign labour.


"And so Cabinet says there needs to be more communication from the Labour Department advising the general public of the availability of jobs," Merchant stated. "Cabinet wants the

Labour Department, the OSEC, to improve on its footprint, improve on how it advertises available jobs in Antigua and Barbuda, so that Antiguan and Barbudans have first preference."

During its regular weekly meeting on Wednesday, the Cabinet heard from Labour Commissioner and the Manager of the One Stop Employment Centre Eltonia David on labour market conditions, employment trends, and the administration of work permit applications.

While she stated that employers are already required to advertise vacancies and provide evidence that efforts have been made to recruit locally, Cabinet concluded that stronger measures are needed.

Going forward, employers seeking work permits will be required to demonstrate that vacancies were advertised through a range of recognised media platforms, including print and digital outlets, in addition to OSEC's existing recruitment mechanisms.



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B – back

Always place babies on their back for every sleep - naps and at night. This position significantly reduces the risk of sleep-related incidents.

**C – crib
(or Safe Sleep Space)**

Babies should sleep in a crib, bassinet, or play pen that meets safety standards, with a firm mattress and a fitted sheet only.



Antigua and Barbuda Spotlighted At CTO's Caribbean Week in NYC



L-R Michelle Lightfoot, Consular Officer of the Antigua and Barbuda Consulate General in New York. Senator the Hon. Angelica O'Donoghue, Government Relations Manager in the Ministry of Tourism, Transportation, Civil Aviation and Investment, Dona Regis-Prosper is Secretary-General and Chief Executive Officer of the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO), The Hon. Charles H. Fernández, Minister of Tourism, Civil Aviation, Transportation and Investment and his wife, Jill Fernandez, Mrs. Charmaine Spencer, Chief Marketing Officer, the Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority. Credit: CTO



L-R Dean Fenton, Director of Tourism, Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority-USA The Hon. Charles H. Fernández, Minister of Tourism, Civil Aviation, Transportation and Investment Senator the Hon. Angelica O'Donoghue, Government Relations Manager in the Ministry of Tourism, Transportation, Civil Aviation and Investment, Carnival dancers from Tropical Fete and Antigua Steel Pan Drummer Johnny Gomes. Credit: Cessie Cerrato

The dynamic twin-island nation of Antigua and Barbuda was spotlighted this week at the Caribbean Tourism Organization's (CTO) Caribbean Week in New York, held from June 1–5 at the InterContinental New York Times Square. The Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority (ABTA) joined representatives from across the Caribbean under this year's theme, "One Caribbean: Infinite Experiences," playing an active role in showcasing the diversity, resilience, and future of Caribbean tourism.

The high-profile delegation from Antigua and Barbuda was led by Minister of Tourism, Charles H. Fernández. He was joined by:

- ▶ Senator Angelica O'Donoghue, Government Relations Manager in the Ministry of Tourism, Transportation, Civil Aviation and Investment
- ▶ Colin C. James, Chief Executive Officer, the Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority
- ▶ Dean Fenton, Director of Tourism, Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority-USA
- ▶ Charmaine Spencer, Chief Marketing Officer, the Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority
- ▶ Abena Merchant, Senior Digital Marketing Officer, the Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority

"Caribbean Week continues to be a powerful reminder of what makes our region so special," said Minister Fernández. "It is an opportunity for us to collaborate as Caribbean destinations, while also sharing the unique story of Antigua and Barbuda with one of our most important source markets. From our beaches and heritage to our cuisine, culture, and the unmatched energy of Antigua Carnival, we are proud to show travellers why our destination remains one of the Caribbean's most compelling."

The Antigua and Barbuda delegation made the most of their time in



L-R The Hon. Charles H. Fernández, Minister of Tourism, Civil Aviation, Transportation and Investment, Dean Fenton, Director of Tourism, Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority-USA, Senator Hon. Angelica O'Donoghue, Government Relations Manager in the Ministry of Tourism, Transportation, Civil Aviation and Investment, Ms. Abena Merchant, Senior Digital Marketing Officer, the Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority PIX 11 Hosts. Credit: Cessie Cerrato

New York through a robust schedule of ministerial forums, industry discussions, media engagements, and cultur-

al showcases. Minister Fernández participated in key CTO programming,

including the Council of Ministers' forum, where regional leaders exchanged insights on tourism growth, airlift, sustainability, marketing, and the continued competitiveness of the Caribbean.

A major highlight of the week was Antigua and Barbuda's appearance on WPIX-TV, where the destination brought the excitement of Antigua Carnival directly to New York viewers. This year's segment featured Antigua native Johnny Gomes on steel pan, along with Carnival models from Tropical Fete, placing the spotlight on Antigua Carnival 2026, scheduled for July 25–August 4 under the theme "Feel the Rhythm." The lively appearance showcased the colour, rhythm, music, movement, and pageantry that define Antigua and Barbuda's summer festival season and invited travellers to experience the Caribbean's Greatest Summer Festival first-hand.



L-R Mrs. Charmaine Spencer, Chief Marketing Officer, the Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority, Michelle Lightfoot, Consular Officer of the Antigua and Barbuda Consulate General in New York. Senator the Hon. Angelica O'Donoghue, Government Relations Manager in the Ministry of Tourism, Dean Fenton, Director of Tourism, Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority-USA, Antiguan mixologist Ralph and chef Claude Lewis. Credit: Cessie Cerrato

Specialised Services Sector Training Is Coming To Antigua and Barbuda



OECS

ORGANISATION OF EASTERN CARIBBEAN STATES

Antigua and Barbuda will host a Specialised Services Sector Training Programme in collaboration with the OECS Secretariat from June 29 to July 2, 2026, at the Customs and Excise Division Conference Room, Deep Water Harbour.

This initiative forms part of a regional consultancy titled “Technical Support to OECS Independent Protocol Member for Specialized Training to Strengthen and Enhance Knowledge Capacity, Policymaking and Negotiating Skills of Public and Private Sector Stakeholders in the Services Sector.”

The programme is being implemented under the framework of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), which comprises Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. The initiative supports the objectives of the Revised Treaty of Basseterre, which established the Eastern Caribbean Economic Union (ECEU) and promotes deeper economic integration, policy harmonisation, and the development of a single

economic space.

The programme comes at a critical time as OECS Member States seek to strengthen their resilience and competitiveness in global services markets, particularly in the face of ongoing economic challenges and the long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The programme is designed to strengthen the technical competencies of:

- Trade officials and public sector policymakers
- Business Support Organisations (BSOs)
- Private sector stakeholders in the services industry

Participants will benefit from a series of activities, including:

- Development of a Specialized Services Sector Training Plan tailored to national needs
- National Training Workshop to build practical policy and negotiation skills

□ A Stakeholder Sensitisation and Awareness Seminar focused on key issues such as:

- o Trends in services and non-traditional sectors
- o Trade in Services (TIS) obligations
- o Addressing barriers to services trade
- o Market intelligence tools for services development

The training will be delivered in a hybrid format to ensure broad participation from public and private sector stakeholders. This initiative enables Member States to better leverage trade agreements, modernise regulatory frameworks, and enhance competitiveness in global services markets. By strengthening institutional capacity and improving policy coherence, the programme aims to support sustainable economic growth, resilience, and increased participation in regional and international trade. Stakeholders in Antigua and Barbuda interested in participating are encouraged to contact the Ministry of Trade at 562-1532/562-8114 or MOT@ab.gov.ag for further information and registration details

Hope for the Future in Antigua and Barbuda Engages Community on Protecting Children from Unhealthy Food Marketing



Hope for the Future in Antigua and Barbuda, in collaboration with the Healthy Caribbean Coalition, Healthy Caribbean Youth, the Antigua and Barbuda Diabetes Association, the Antigua and Barbuda Heart and Stroke Foundation, Scrub Life Cares, and other local and regional partners, hosted a public engagement activity as part of the Make it Make Sense for Our Future / Hope for the Future 3.0 regional advocacy initiative.

The activity was held during the Scrub Life Cares Grow With the Flo Women & Girls Health Expo on May 23rd, 2026, providing an opportunity to engage children, youth, parents, caregivers, educators, health professionals, and community members in important conversations about children's health, school food environments, and the impact of unhealthy food and beverage marketing in and around schools. This event is also taking place in Barbados, Grenada, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, and Trinidad and Tobago.

Make it Make Sense for Our Fu-

ture builds on the regional Hope for the Future youth advocacy movement, which emerged from the 2024 meeting, *Caribbean Youth Voices in Health Advocacy Spaces – Healthy Food Policy Action*, hosted in Bridgetown, Barbados by the Healthy Caribbean Coalition and Healthy Caribbean Youth, in partnership with the Jamaica Youth Advocacy Network, the Heart Foundation of Jamaica, the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Barbados, and UNICEF Jamaica.

The 2024 meeting brought together more than 50 youth and young professionals from across the Caribbean to strengthen youth advocacy around healthy food policies, including front-of-package nutrition warning labels and stronger protections for children in school food environments. As an outcome of that meeting, youth advocates across the region committed to leading synchronized advocacy activities focused on improving and strengthening school nutrition policies.

For 2026, Hope for the Future 3.0

focuses on building public awareness and support for policies that restrict the marketing of ultra-processed products in and around schools. It aligns with the Healthy Caribbean Coalition and partners' digital campaign - Make it Make sense - which highlights the need to protect children from harmful marketing, sponsorship, and commercial influence that may shape food preferences, normalize unhealthy products, and undermine healthy school environments.

During the Antigua and Barbuda activation, community members were invited to reflect on questions such as whether schools should promote healthy choices for children and how they feel about soft drinks, fast food, or other ultra-processed product brands sponsoring school events. Through conversation, visual campaign materials, and photo advocacy, the activity encouraged the public to think critically about the messages children receive in and around school spaces.

The activity also gave community members an opportunity to show vis-

Local News



ible support for healthier school environments by adding their name in support for healthier food environments and taking photos with advocacy signs calling for stronger protection of children from unhealthy food marketing.

“Schools should be spaces where children are encouraged and supported to make healthy choices,” said one attendee at the event. “When unhealthy products are repeatedly promoted in and around schools, it can influence what children see as normal, desirable, or acceptable. This campaign is about helping our communities make sense of that issue and building support for policies that put children’s health first.”

The collaboration reflects a growing regional call for urgent action to address non-communicable diseases and improve food environments for children and young people. In Antigua and Barbuda and across the Caribbean, youth advocates and civil society organizations continue to play an important role in raising awareness, mobilizing communities, and encouraging policy action that supports healthier futures.

By bringing Make it Make Sense for Our Future into a community-centered space like the Grow With the Flo Health Expo, the Antigua and Barbuda activation helped connect the issue of food marketing to broader conversations around child health, family well-

ness, prevention, and equity.

“This is not only about what children eat,” said another attendee. “It is also about the environments that shape their choices. Protecting children from harmful marketing in schools is an important step toward creating healthier communities and a stronger future for Antigua and Barbuda.”

Hope for the Future in Antigua and Barbuda extends appreciation to all collaborating organizations, volunteers, youth advocates, and community members who supported the activity and added their voices to the call for healthier school environments.

Why the Commonwealth Matters Again



By Sir Ronald Sanders

Small and medium-sized states, from the most vulnerable island nations to more diversified middleincome economies, have always faced a difficult reality. They have to navigate a world in which power is unevenly distributed and in which the decisions of larger countries can have profound consequences for their security, prosperity, and independence.

For decades, however, there was a degree of predictability in international affairs. While powerful countries exercised greater influence, there remained broad acceptance of certain principles: that sovereignty should be respected, territorial integrity protected, disputes settled peacefully, and international agreements honoured. International institutions and rules did not eliminate inequalities of power, but they helped to moderate them.

Today, that environment is less certain.

Geopolitical rivalry is intensifying. Economic pressure is increasingly used as an instrument of policy. Long-standing assumptions about alliances, international obligations, and sov-

ereignty itself are being questioned more openly than at any time in recent memory.

For small and medium-sized states alike, these developments are especially significant—for the smallest because they magnify existing vulnerabilities, and for the medium-sized because they narrow the room for their, hitherto, independent initiative. They do not possess the military, economic, or political weight to shape international events on their own. Their prosperity depends upon stable international arrangements. Their security depends upon predictability. Their ability to pursue national objectives often rests on cooperation rather than coercion.

In a world where power is becoming more assertive and international rules less certain, the ability to build partnerships, form coalitions, and advance common interests through association may become one of the most important strategic assets for both small states and medium sized nations, such as Australia and Canada.

This is where the Commonwealth assumes renewed importance.

The Commonwealth – a voluntary association of fifty-six states from across the world - remains one of the few international organisations that brings together major developed economies, emerging powers, and small vulnerable states within a single framework. It includes countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and India alongside nations from Africa, the Caribbean, the Pacific, and Asia.

At a time when states need wider partnerships and greater influence, the Commonwealth offers something increasingly rare: a forum where countries of vastly different size and power engage one another regularly and directly.

Yet the Commonwealth should not be romanticised. The Commonwealth has

never been free of power imbalances within its own association. Larger and wealthier members have often exercised considerable influence over its priorities and decisions. The United Kingdom has historically played a central role in shaping the institution. Australia and New Zealand have long exercised significant influence in the Pacific. Canada, India, South Africa, and Nigeria each carry weight that smaller members cannot match.

The question, therefore, is not whether larger countries possess greater influence. They plainly do. The more important question is whether the Commonwealth provides opportunities for smaller states to be heard, build coalitions, and affect outcomes in ways that would be far more difficult outside the association; and, also, provides support for medium-sized nations that they now need.

The international system remains largely hierarchical. The Commonwealth, by contrast, functions primarily through relationships, consultation, and consensus. That distinction matters.

Within the association all states possess something they would otherwise lack: regular access, established networks, coalitionbuilding opportunities, and channels through which ideas and concerns can be advanced directly to decisionmakers.

While that does not create equality of influence, it provides opportunities for smaller states to amplify their voice and advance their interests. Small states have frequently exercised influence disproportionate to their size through collective action, whether on climate change, debt vulnerability, ocean governance, or broader questions of international development.

But there is another reason the Commonwealth matters today. For many years, concerns about sovereignty, territorial integrity, and vulnerability to

Commentary

external pressure were viewed primarily as a small states' problem. Smaller nations understood instinctively the importance of international law because they lacked the power to rely on anything else. Now, medium-sized states need to embrace it too.

The international environment is less predictable. Assumptions that once appeared secure are being questioned more openly. Longstanding understandings about borders, alliances, and international obligations can no longer be taken for granted.

The Commonwealth's commitment to sovereign equality, peaceful dispute settlement, and respect for international law therefore serves the interests of large and small members alike.

Historically, support within the Commonwealth was often viewed as flowing primarily from larger countries to smaller ones. Increasingly, however, larger members may also see value in the collective support that smaller states can provide in defence of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, and international law.

The Commonwealth is becoming more than a forum in which stronger states assist weaker ones. It is increasingly a community in which countries of all sizes have a shared interest in preserving an international order based on rules, cooperation, and mutual respect.

Therefore, the Commonwealth's significance extends beyond development programmes, technical cooperation, or historical ties. It remains one of the few associations through which states of very different size and influence can strengthen their voice, reinforce their resilience, and work together in support of an international order in which sovereignty remains meaningful.

The Commonwealth has historically achieved its greatest successes when it has combined principle with pragmatism. The same approach is needed today.

As the international environment becomes less predictable, countries of

all sizes have a renewed interest in strengthening sovereignty, peaceful dispute settlement, and international cooperation. The Commonwealth remains one of the few forums in which those interests can be pursued collectively despite disparities of power.

The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Antigua and Barbuda this November offers an opportunity to demonstrate that relevance

in practical ways and to help make the Commonwealth matter again.

(The writer was a member of the 2011 Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group that produced the Report "A Commonwealth of the People: Time for Urgent Reform". He is Antigua and Barbuda's Ambassador to the US and the OAS and Chancellor of the University of Guyana. The views expressed are his own)



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The Largest IPO in History

What SpaceX Is Actually Selling

By Professor C. Justin Robinson

Pro Vice-Chancellor and Principal, The UWI Five Islands Campus



When trading opens on the Nasdaq on 12 June under the ticker SPCX, investors will be asked to value Space Exploration Technologies at roughly US\$1.75 trillion. At a target of about US\$135 a share for some 556 million shares, the offering aims to raise close to US\$75 billion, comfortably the largest initial public offering (IPO), where a company offers its shares for sale to the public for the first time) ever attempted, dwarfing Saudi Aramco's US\$29 billion debut in 2019.

The numbers invite awe, and a good deal of the commentary has obliged. But an IPO is not a coronation, it is a transaction. The newly filed prospectus gives the public its first audited look inside a company that has spent twenty-four years as one of the most consequential and most opaque enterprises in the world. It rewards careful reading, because what SpaceX is selling is more complicated than the rockets suggest.

Three companies wearing one logo

It is tempting to think of SpaceX as a rocket company. It is more accurate to think of it as three businesses bolted together, each at a very different stage of life.

The first is **Space**, the launch business that built the brand. It flies satel-

lites and cargo, carries astronauts for NASA, and holds national-security contracts with the U.S. government. In 2025 it generated roughly US\$4 billion in revenue. It also lost money, to the tune of about US\$657 million, as the company poured cash into developing Starship, its next-generation vehicle.

The second is **Connectivity**, essentially Starlink, the low-Earth-orbit satellite internet network that began commercial service in 2019. This is the part that pays the bills. Starlink produced about US\$11.4 billion in revenue in 2025, around 61 percent of the company's total, and roughly US\$4.4 billion in operating profit. It was the only segment that made money. By the end of March 2026 it served 10.3 million subscribers, up from 2.3 million just three years earlier, over a constellation of more than 10,000 satellites.

The third, and newest, is **AI**, the xAI business (including the Grok assistant and the former Twitter, now X), folded into SpaceX through a merger. It generated about US\$3.2 billion in revenue in 2025 and lost some US\$6.35 billion. This is the segment that turns an otherwise profitable enterprise into a loss-making one, and it is the segment a prospective shareholder must scrutinize most closely.

From near-bankruptcy to near-monopoly

The historical record is genuinely remarkable, and it explains the faith the market is extending. Founded in 2002, SpaceX nearly died in its infancy. There were three consecutive failures of its small Falcon 1 rocket between 2006 and 2008 which brought it within days of insolvency. The fourth flight, in September 2008, reached orbit, the first privately funded liquid-fuelled rocket to do so, and a US\$1.6 billion

NASA resupply contract that December kept the lights on.

What followed reshaped an industry. The Falcon 9 first flew in 2010. In 2012 the Dragon capsule became the first commercial spacecraft to reach the International Space Station. In December 2015 SpaceX landed an orbital-class booster upright for the first time, and in 2017 it reflown a recovered one and the breakthroughs in reusability that collapsed launch costs and made the rest possible. By 2020 it was flying NASA astronauts and by 2025 it accounted for more than 80 percent of all mass humanity put into orbit.

This is the positive case, or in financial market speak, the bull case in a single sentence. SpaceX is a company that has repeatedly done what established aerospace said was impossible, and that now dominates a market it has largely created.

What the prospectus actually shows

The current picture is more textured. Consolidated revenue reached US\$18.7 billion in 2025, up about 33 percent on the prior year, strong growth at considerable scale. Yet the company reported a loss from operations of roughly US\$2.6 billion and a net loss of about US\$4.9 billion.

This is the central tension a buyer must contemplate. The core launch-and-Starlink machine is a cash-generative, market-leading franchise. Bolted onto it is an AI venture burning capital at a rate that, for now, overwhelms those profits. The company also carries some US\$29 billion in debt, including a US\$20 billion bridge loan used to retire xAI's obligations, and is committing to enormous future spending such as a semiconductor joint venture with Tesla alone contemplates capital expenditure that could run into the tens of billions.



There are softer signals worth noting too. Starlink's growth, while still impressive, is maturing. Revenue per user has fallen roughly 18 percent over two years as the company has traded price for volume, and consolidated revenue growth slowed to about 15 percent in the first quarter of 2026. Elon Musk himself has reportedly warned of a "genuine risk of bankruptcy" should Starship fail to reach a sustainable flight cadence.

The price of the ticket and the absence of a vote

Two further issues deserve any serious reader's attention.

The first is **valuation**. A roughly US\$1.75 trillion price tag implies a multiple of earnings that sits far above established public peers, and rests

heavily on a forecast, chiefly that the AI segment will, in time, become a profit centre rather than a drain. The company's own filing cites a total addressable market it values at US\$28.5 trillion, most of it in AI. Such figures describe an opportunity, not a guarantee. Where there is this much enthusiasm, there is also the risk that price has run ahead of fundamentals. One prominent commentator has mused that shares could open at a US\$4 trillion valuation in a "1999-style" frenzy, a comparison that should reassure no one.

The second is **control**. After the offering, Musk is expected to hold roughly 42 percent of the economic interest but about 85 percent of the voting power, having recently been granted a billion

performance-based shares. In plain terms, public shareholders would buy exposure to the company's fortunes while ceding almost any say over its direction. For investors who believe Musk's judgement is the company's single greatest asset, that is a positive feature. For those uneasy about key-man risk and the concentration of power in one person across several entangled ventures, it is a material concern. Both views can be held honestly.

A measured conclusion

None of this is an argument against SpaceX, and none of it is advice to buy or to avoid. It is an argument for clear eyes. The company is, by almost any operational measure, an extraordinary success, a genuine engineering and commercial achievement that has changed what is possible. It is also being brought to market at a historic price, carrying a loss-making AI bet, significant debt, and a governance structure that asks shareholders to trust rather than to vote.

The rocket and the satellite business are real, profitable and dominant. The valuation and the AI ambitions are a wager on a future that has not yet arrived. A prudent reader of the prospectus will separate the two, decide for themselves what each is worth, and resist the gravitational pull of the headline number. The largest IPO in history deserves at least that much skepticism and that much respect. Maybe SpaceX will not hold that title for long as Open AI (ChatGPT) and Anthropic (Claude), the mega AI companies, are also expected to launch IPOs in 2026.



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Marco Rubio and his criminal crusade against Cuba.



By Sergio Martínez. Ambassador of the Republic of Cuba in Antigua and Barbuda.

On Thursday, June 11, the US government took another step in its criminal war of economic strangulation and total suffocation against the Cuban people. Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced the inclusion of the company CUBAPETROLEO, commonly known as CUPET, on the list of sanctioned Cuban entities. CUPET is the Cuban company responsible for importing oil and its derivatives into the country, as well as for domestic oil and gas production (it produces 100% of the gas that Cuban families use for their daily cooking). With this new measure, the fascist US Secretary of State is not only trying to prevent a single drop of oil from entering Cuba, but is also seeking to obstruct at all costs, the country's ability to extract and produce even a small portion of the fuel it needs for its survival from its own natural resources.

It is no coincidence that this new attack was announced after Cuba revealed that its scientists and oil industry workers had developed a



novel technology that allows for the refining of its high-density, high-sulfur crude oil, to produce lighter fuels and derivatives, which can be used more efficiently for electricity generation. At the same time, CUPET has signing new contracts with major foreign companies, that present the possibility for Cuba to increase its currently very limited domestic oil production. Therefore, this measure seeks to obstruct any possibility of Cuba surviving the genocidal energy blockade imposed by the United States.

As usual, Marco Rubio doesn't hold back in launching all sorts of lies and outlandish arguments to try to justify this new aggression against the Cuban people. His objective continues to cause the greatest possible suffering and hardship to the entire population, to force us to surrender, to accept a return to the colonial and neocolonial past of total dependence and subordination to the interests of our powerful neighbor to the north. The Secretary of State himself acknowledged this criminal intention

when he cynically stated recently that "in the summer, Cubans will not be able to alleviate the heat and high temperatures; they will have no way to store their food or cook it."

The US government is using every means possible to promote a scenario of total collapse in the economic and social living standards of the Cuban population, in a way that the White House can be able to sustain their slanderous campaign of portraying Cuba as a failed state, and to justify a military aggression as a supposed "humanitarian and liberating action."

We want to reiterate our calls upon the governments and peoples of the world to raise their voices in a sovereign manner and denounce the attempts by the US government to try to subjugate a small nation through genocidal policies of economic and social strangulation, and to unequivocally reject the threats to impose its imperial interests of domination by the use of military force.



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Police flag rise in coordinated gun attacks

Senior law enforcement sources have described an alarming rise in coordinated gun attacks involving heavily armed groups moving with military-like precision across several parishes.

The concern follows a spate of shootings and murders over the past eight months in which four or more gunmen reportedly travelled in motor vehicles, launched targeted attacks, and fled before law enforcement could respond.

Speaking on condition of anonymity after the fatal police shooting of five men in the Bog Walk Gorge on Tuesday, senior investigators told *The Gleaner* that a disturbing pattern is emerging in major crimes across the island.

“Over the past eight months, there were at least 40 shooting incidents resulting in the killing of citizens where four or more gunmen were involved,” a source disclosed.

The attacks, they say, often follow similar operational methods.

“The criminals drive to the location, exit a motor vehicle, shoot the victims and leave in the vehicle. Sometimes they enter on foot, shoot the victims, and exit in a waiting vehicle,” a source explained.

Investigators believe the attacks are linked to organised criminal networks and reprisals, many of which have escalated into multiple murders in communities already plagued by gang violence.

Among the incidents highlighted were the October 2025 mass shooting in Commodore, Linstead, where nine people were shot and five killed; a series of attacks in March Pen, Spanish Town, between November 2025 and June that left seven people dead and seven others hospitalised; and multiple deadly shootings across Manchester, including in Farm, New Forest, Old England and Barnstable, where at



least seven people were killed between December 2025 and June this year.

Sources also pointed to attacks in Crescent Road in St Andrew South, where a soldier was killed and a police officer injured, as well as shootings in Adventist Close and Waterford in St Catherine South, Red Hills Road in St Andrew North, Williams Street in Spanish Town, and a double murder involving two women in Kingston East earlier this year.

Taken together, officials say, the incidents suggest a shifting criminal landscape in which gunmen are more coordinated and increasingly willing to engage security forces. At the same time, they noted that the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) has strengthened its operational capacity through expanded tactical training, increased manpower, and more intensive policing.

“The JCF is getting better cooperation from citizens. The majority of decent, law-abiding Jamaicans here and in the diaspora are supporting the police.”

The *Gleaner*'s sources, which include senior investigators, further suggested that amendments to the Firearms Act — which introduced mandatory minimum sentences for possession of prohibited weapons — may be influenc-

ing the behaviour of armed offenders.

“Since the amendment to the Firearms Act, more criminals choose to confront the police. More confrontations will lead to more fatal shootings,” the sources stated.

The comments come amid ongoing debate over fatal police encounters and the aggressive anti-crime measures employed by law enforcement. Police insist that, despite the rise in violent reprisals and coordinated attacks, recent operational successes show that security forces are gaining ground against criminal networks.

“Jamaica is at a turning point where crime is concerned. The few criminals will not be allowed to reverse the progress being made,” a source declared.

The five men killed in Tuesday's reported gun battle with police in the Bog Walk Gorge, along with a sixth man who escaped but was later cornered by officers near the GC Foster College of Physical Education and Sport, were said to be linked to several violent crimes under active investigation.

The Independent Commission of Investigations is expected to examine the fatal shooting, in keeping with established procedures governing police killings. (*Jamaica Gleaner*)

BVI to scrap visas for work permit holders

The British Virgin Islands has announced plans to remove visa requirements for work permit holders in the coming weeks as part of efforts to improve the territory's investment climate and help businesses fill vacancies more quickly.

The country's Premier Dr Natalio Wheatley announced the move during his 2026 State of the Territory Address earlier this week, describing it as one of several reforms expected to support economic growth and improve the ease of doing business in the territory.

"In the coming weeks, we will also be removing visas for work permit holders, giving relief to businesses who cannot onboard staff quickly enough to support their operations," Wheatley said.

The announcement came as part of a number of initiatives centred on economic diversification, labour market improvements and investment reforms.

According to the Premier, the government has already introduced digital improvements to work permit processing, increased labour outreach efforts and expanded workplace rights education. He said stronger partnerships with employers have also helped improve efficiency and service delivery.

Wheatley said his government is also preparing to expand the programme to include sectors such as hospitality, agriculture and fisheries, marine industries and skilled trades.

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He added that the initiative would complement the government's wider employment policies and help strengthen workforce participation.

The planned visa reform comes as employers across several sectors continue to report challenges in recruiting and onboarding workers. In recent years, government officials have acknowledged concerns from businesses about delays associated with labour and immigration processes.

The government has already implemented a number of digital reforms to modernise work permit administration

and reduce processing times. Previous initiatives have included online application systems and efforts to streamline interactions between employers and government agencies.

"Government is also advancing reforms to improve the investment climate, including the proposed Investment Act, establishment of a trade and investment promotion agency to provide a one-stop shop for local and foreign investors," Wheatley stated.

"My government is 100 per cent committed to creating a business-friendly environment that will facilitate the expansion of our economy."

No specific implementation date for the removal of visa requirements was announced. (CMC)



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Williams gives breakdown of \$67-billion Hurricane Melissa allocation to ministries

MINISTER of Finance and Public Service Fayval Williams gave a breakdown Wednesday of the \$67 billion that was allocated by the Government to various ministries to revive crucial local sectors following devastation caused to parts of the island by Hurricane Melissa on October 28 last year.

The minister explained the spend during a post-Cabinet press briefing at Jamaica House in St Andrew.

“I am here to just walk through, pretty quickly, where that went to and what ministries and how it got there. During the last fiscal year, we did a third and a fourth supplementary in order to allocate funds to ministries,” Williams said.

According to the minister, in the third supplementary, \$189 million was allocated to the Office of the Prime Minister. The Ministry of Tourism was allocated \$3.4 billion to support the

tourism sector. Williams pointed out that the funds that went to tourism were used to repair infrastructure that was damaged and to assist workers in the sector.

The Ministry of Economic Growth and Infrastructure Development received \$7.5 billion for road repairs and clearing of debris, Williams said.

Only \$57 million was allocated to the Ministry of Finance and Public Service. The Ministry of Water, Environment and Climate Change was allocated \$3.2 billion.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Security got \$1.2 billion altogether, Williams shared. The Ministry of Education received \$2.3 billion. The finance minister further shared that \$1.965 billion went to the Ministry of Health, with a special allocation of \$35 million going to Bellevue Hospital in Kingston. The allocation for the

Ministry of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sports was \$280 million.

The Ministry of Agriculture received \$3 billion while \$20 million went to the Ministry of Industry and Commerce. The energy ministry was allocated \$1.5 billion while the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development got \$4.6 billion.

“That is a total of \$29.4 billion and then you add the \$25 billion that was loaned to the Jamaica Public Service Company, and that brings it to \$53.6 billion in the third supplementary. In the fourth supplementary, there was \$3 billion at the Ministry of Finance. At the Ministry of Labour, \$10 billion was for the Restoration of Owner or Occupant Family Shelters programme, and the Ministry of Health and Wellness, \$400 million. When you add the numbers, it is \$67 billion,” Williams said. (Jamaica Observer)



SVG govt under fire for mass dismissal of public workers



Opposition Leader Ralph Gonsalves has strongly condemned the ruling New Democratic Party (NDP) government, alleging severe political discrimination following the abrupt dismissal of 28 public workers.

Gonsalves claims that the government unconstitutionally fired 28 mobilizers and coordinators from the YES program, replacing them with known supporters of the NDP.

According to Gonsalves, these dismissals were executed in a “crash, cruel, illegal manner” without any formal assessment of the workers’ competencies. Instead of receiving formal termination letters detailing the reasons for their dismissal, many of the workers were reportedly fired via telephone calls or brief face-to-face conversations with mid-level public servants.

Gonsalves noted that only two

coordinators for the entire country—located in Central and East Kingstown—were retained, allegedly at the specific request of NDP officials.

Furthermore, Gonsalves asserts that these dismissed employees have been stripped of basic labor rights and standard severance benefits. Despite some having worked for the government for up to 23 years, the workers have reportedly not received their April salaries, a month’s pay in lieu of notice, payment for untaken holidays, or the standard compassionate gratuity typically awarded to non-pensionable government employees.

“You can’t discriminate against somebody on political grounds in relation to their job,” Gonsalves stated, arguing that the firings are a direct violation of Section 13 of the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Constitution. He emphasized that the directive for these mass firings

could not have originated from mid-level staff, but rather represents a calculated political decision made at the highest levels by the political directorate, specifically pointing to the Cabinet and the Minister of Youth.

In response to the dismissals, Gonsalves recently met with 10 of the affected workers and announced that legal action is being prepared. He confirmed that a legal team is drafting the appropriate letters and warned that he would personally serve as a lawyer in a constitutional challenge against the government if the matter is not resolved.

Gonsalves is demanding that the government immediately issue proper termination letters, pay all outstanding salaries and severance benefits, and compensate the workers with damages for political discrimination. (St Vincent Times)

Britain's defence secretary Healey quits over defence spending

Britain's defence secretary says he has resigned over a disagreement with the prime minister about defence spending.

In a letter addressed to Keir Starmer and posted on X on Thursday, John Healey accused the prime minister of failing to commit the resources needed to defend the country.

"You have been unable, and the Treasury has been unwilling, to commit the resources that the nation needs to defend the country at this time of rising threats," he wrote.

Britain's defence and finance ministries have been locked in talks for months over how to meet rising demands to expand military spending, delaying the country's Defence Investment Plan since last year.

Healey said the financial settlement he received on Monday "falls well short of what is required for defence and the country at this dangerous time," rising only to 2.68 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2030 at a time when he argued a firm 3 percent headmark by that year was essential.

Healey invoked Starmer's own words against him, saying "there could be an attack by Russia on Nato as soon as 2030".

He added: "You know what defence needs. You made the argument for this powerfully in your speech at the Munich Security Conference back in February."

The resignation comes as Britain juggles an expanding set of military commitments: leading a multinational Strait of Hormuz mission amid the conflict with Iran, heading NATO's Arctic Sentry mission in the High North, and facing increased Russian activity towards the UK and NATO allies alongside escalating attacks in



Ukraine.

Without adequate funding, Healey said: "I am being forced to make decisions that would reduce the readiness of our Forces and increase the risk to personnel on operations, and could make the country less safe."

The departure lands at a particularly precarious moment for Starmer.

At least 95 Labour MPs had already called on the prime minister to resign or set out a departure timetable by mid-May. Healey is the sixth minister to step down in the past month.

Health Secretary Wes Streeting left his post on May 14. He said it was clear Starmer would not lead Labour into the next general election, criticising his government's "drift" and lack of "vision".

Starmer's government popularity has collapsed just two years after a landslide general election victory. The delay to the Defence Investment Plan has also frustrated Britain's defence industry, which says it cannot commit to long-term programmes at a time of huge geopolitical volatility.

"This is the latest in a string of high-profile resignations that have beset the Starmer government, and it is yet another blow for the Starmer premiership," Al Jazeera's Camille Nedelec, reporting from London, said of Healey's decision.

"John Healey is a well-respected politician with a long career. He has clout, and he was a real significant figure within the government. His resignation has opened up a new frontier of criticism aimed at Keir Starmer, because up until now the crux of the criticism has been focused around the Peter Mandelson scandal," she said.

Starmer has faced questions over his judgement amid revelations that Mandelson, who the prime minister appointed as ambassador to the US, had close ties to late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

"[The resignation] also raises the question of whether or not John Healey could be preparing his own leadership bid," Nedelec added. (Al Jazeera English)

Vance says Israeli PM Netanyahu 'has got some things wrong'

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has “certainly gotten some things wrong”, US Vice-President JD Vance has said, as ties between the two partners in the war against Iran appear to have become strained in recent weeks.

While Vance would not provide examples, he told CBS News, the BBC’s US partner, that Netanyahu “aggressively asserts the interests of his country” but that they were not always aligned with those of the US.

His comments mark a further public admission that relations between the two allies have come under pressure of late.

Recently, US President Donald Trump reportedly clashed with the Israeli leader over military action in Lebanon that brought renewed strikes and threatened peace talks with Tehran.

The US and Iran exchanged strikes for a second consecutive day overnight, straining a ceasefire between the two nations that has remained in place since April.

It came after Trump said Tehran had taken “too long to make a deal” to end the war, though the renewed hostilities were triggered by events in Lebanon, where Israel has continued an operation aimed at the Iranian-backed armed group Hezbollah.

Last week, Trump told an Axios journalist that he had called Netanyahu “effing crazy” in a phone conversation, saying he had been “a little bit perturbed at his constantly fighting with Lebanon”.

In an interview due to air on Sunday, Vance said: “Prime Minister Netanyahu, look, he governs a country that has obviously been a very close partner of the United States.

“But, even when we’ve been close



partners, sometimes we have interests that are perfectly aligned and sometimes we have interests that are misaligned.

“And what I’ve seen with the prime minister is that he aggressively asserts the interests of his country – sometimes that means we’re on the same page, sometimes it means we’re not.”

The US vice-president went on to say that it was the job of the Trump administration to focus on what was in America’s best interests, “and where that diverges, we - unfortunately for the Israelis - have to choose the side of the American people”.

Asked for examples of instances in which Netanyahu had got things wrong, Vance said “those conversations sometimes are better left in private”.

Trump has typically been an ardent proponent of Israel during both his terms in the White House - but his attempts to extricate himself from a potentially drawn-out and increasingly costly conflict in the Middle East have been frustrated by Israel’s ongoing operation in Lebanon.

Tehran is demanding that any peace agreement also cover Lebanon, which Israel has argued was not part of the ceasefire struck two months ago - and threatened to suspend peace talks be-

fore the renewed strikes began.

Israel has conducted strikes across Lebanon and occupied a significant portion of the south of the country in a bid to beat back Hezbollah fighters, who launched strikes on northern Israel shortly after the Iran war began in retaliation for an Israeli strike that killed Iran’s supreme leader.

At least 3,696 people have been killed in the conflict, according to Lebanon’s health ministry, while Israeli authorities say 30 soldiers and four civilians have been killed on both sides of the border.

Trump is seeking a deal that would reopen the Strait of Hormuz - ending a global energy crisis caused by an Iranian blockade - and limit Iran’s nuclear programme, a long-held ambition of the US president.

The souring of relations reflects sentiments in the US: opinion polling suggests the Iran war is increasingly unpopular among Americans, who will vote in Midterm elections this November and who are taking a dimmer view of Israel.

Netanyahu, too, faces elections this year, in which he will have to convince Israeli voters that he is winning the war with Iran and its regional proxies.

Netanyahu, for his part, has sought to downplay any rift with the Trump administration.

“Sometimes we have, as in the best of families, you have these tactical disagreements,” he told CNBC last week. “We always find a way to work them out, and we do so as great friends.” (BBC)

El Niño under way and threatens weather extremes, scientists say



El Niño - the natural Pacific weather pattern that pushes up global temperatures - has officially begun, US scientists say.

The US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has declared that El Niño conditions are now under way in the tropical Pacific, with sea surface temperatures having risen sharply in recent months.

Many forecasts suggest this could end up as a so-called “super” El Niño, and even be among the strongest ever recorded.

Coming on top of decades of human-caused warming, it could bring another record-hot year - most likely in 2027 - with disruption to weather, food supplies and economies running well into that year.

This announcement by NOAA is not a surprise as forecasters have expected this warming phase, after the cooler “sister” pattern, La Niña, ended earlier this year.

Sea surface temperatures in the central and tropical Pacific have now passed the 0.5C-above-average threshold that US scientists use to define an El Niño event.

“El Niño conditions developed over

the past month, as shown by above-average sea surface temperatures (SSTs) across the central to eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean,” the agency said.

NOAA has also seen the winds above the equatorial Pacific begin to shift - a sign that the atmosphere is now responding to the warmer ocean, not just the ocean warming on its own.

What has surprised the researchers is how confident the computer models already are about its strength.

El Niño’s intensity is measured by how far sea surface temperatures rise above average in a key zone of the Pacific.

A strong event is defined as more than 1.5C above average; a very strong one above 2C.

According to NOAA’s June outlook, “there is a 63% chance of a very strong El Niño during November-January, that would rank among the largest El Niño events in the historical record going back to 1950,” the agency said.

The three strongest events since then have been in 1982/83, 1997/98 and 2015/16.

Some of the latest US and European (ECMWF) models go further, showing temperatures in the tropical Pacific po-

tentially climbing more than 3C above average by the end of the year.

But the US agency urged some caution on what their strength prediction implies.

“Even very strong El Niño events do not lead to the expected impact everywhere, but stronger events can more significantly tilt the odds in favour of expected outcomes.”

The bigger concern is that all this is happening on an already much hotter planet.

“We do need to worry about the impacts,” said Prof Adam Scaife, head of monthly to decadal prediction at the UK Met Office.

“The current El Niño is... riding on top of a substantial amount of global warming.

“This means that the actual temperatures in affected regions could well be unprecedented, as the warming from El Niño is being topped up by climate change.”

A very strong El Niño typically lifts global air temperatures by around 0.2C, releasing heat stored in the ocean into the atmosphere. That extra blast now lands on a world that is already setting records.

The year 2024 - the warmest on record - was boosted by an El Niño that was not even especially strong.

And despite the cooling drag of a La Niña event, 2025 still came in as the third warmest year on record, hotter even than the super El Niño year of 2016.

Line graph showing monthly global temperatures since 1975 compared with pre-industrial levels of the late 19th Century. Temperatures show a long-term rising trend - the result of climate change. But temperatures tend to spike in El Niño periods, shown in red, and fall in La Niña periods, shown

in blue.

“At the end of this year and into 2027, we’re likely to see very high temperatures globally,” Prof Scaife said.

“In 2027, we’re likely to see excess heat on top of the global warming we’ve already got, and that could easily lead to another year above 1.5 degrees [of warming above late-19th-Century levels].”

A farmer in Zambia shows a small ear of corn grown in a field impacted by drought during a previous El Niño event.

No two El Niños are alike, but the disruption is felt most sharply in the tropics.

Flooding is common in northern Peru and southern Ecuador, and can reach parts of East Africa, Central Asia and the southern United States.

At the same time, the risk of drought and wildfire rises across much of Australia, Indonesia and northern South America - hitting agriculture and global food stocks.

El Niño also tends to suppress Atlantic hurricanes, and forecasters already expect a quieter-than-average season.

“While that sounds like a good thing, for Central America that leads to a lot less rainfall and potentially drought conditions,” said Liz Stephens, professor of climate risk and resilience at the University of Reading.

Even the UK feels it, if faintly: El Niño can tilt the odds towards a mild start and cold end to winter, though the links are loose.

For many, the forecast is far from abstract.

“An El Niño declaration is not just another weather forecast - for millions of people it is a deadly siren to be feared,” said Mohamed Adow, director of campaign group Power Shift Africa.

“It means failed rains, dying crops, rising food prices, and families pushed to the edge yet again. In East Africa especially, this will land on communities already battered by droughts and

floods in recent years.”

Japan’s Meteorological Agency (JMA) takes a similar view to NOAA, judging that El Niño conditions are present. It adds it is all but certain to last into the autumn.


Not every agency is ready to call it, though. Australia’s Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) uses a stricter criterion, requiring sea surface temperatures to exceed 0.8C above average.

This week it said the tropical Pacific was “approaching El Niño conditions”, with central Pacific temperatures already crossing its thresholds, but it stopped short of formally declaring the event had begun.

It expects El Niño to develop later this year, and says it could be strong.

El Niño occurs every two to seven years and usually lasts about a year.

There is still no conclusive proof that climate change is making these events stronger or more frequent - but a warming world can supercharge their effects. (BBC)



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Car hits a school group in the Netherlands, killing 2 kids and a chaperone

Two children and an adult were killed Thursday in the rural southern Netherlands when a car struck a group of cyclists who were on a school camping trip, local emergency services said.

Four more children were seriously injured in the incident. They were taken to hospitals in the Netherlands and nearby Belgium for treatment. The dead and injured were part of a group of 14 schoolchildren and two chaperones, the Zeeland Security Region organization said in a statement.

Police are investigating the cause of the incident on a provincial road that runs between farmers' fields near the small town of Vogelwaard, some 200 kilometers (125 miles) south of Amsterdam.

There was no immediate word from authorities on the driver of the car. A photo displayed on Dutch media showed a car, with its windshield smashed and hood damaged, in a field



next to the road.

Such incidents involving multiple cyclists are rare in the Netherlands, where bicycle riding is woven into ev-

eryday life and almost all roads have dedicated cycle lanes.

No further details were immediately available. (AP)



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Browne to chase more success in ABCF Individual Time Trial

Teenager Tahje Browne will be seeking to continue his dominance of the 2026 Antigua and Barbuda Cycling Federation (ABCF) domestic season this weekend.

Browne, who has already won four of the five races this season, will be defending his title in the ABCF Individual Time Trial Road Race on Sunday morning.

The Antigua and Barbuda Cycling Federation is inviting all cyclists to contest the upcoming individual time trial race. The race is seen as the purest test in cycling, with no drafting, no hiding, and no excuses. Just rider, machine, road, and time.

The race will start at 7 am outside the Police Recreation Grounds on the Factory Road.

The cyclists will travel eastward up to the Pares Main Road, the Seatons Junction, and into Willikies Village and turn around near the Indian Town Road Junction before returning via the same route to finish outside the Police Recreation Grounds on Factory Road.

Registration will take place prior to the start of the race. The registration fee is EC\$20 per cyclist. Sunday's individual time trial is being supported by APUA Inet and Gatorade.



Tahje Browne



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More overseas-players return for CONCACAF U-20 Championship

Two additional overseas-based players have officially joined the Antigua and Barbuda Under-20 Men's National Team training camp at the Antigua and Barbuda Football Association's (ABFA) Technical Center.

United States of America (USA)-based defender Zidaan Williams and midfielder Brenden Skilling touched down at the V.C. Bird International Airport, both arriving from Miami to join in the national team's preparations for the 2026 CONCACAF Under-20 Championship in Mexico this summer from July 24 to August 9.

Three other overseas-based members of the Antigua and Barbuda national football team arrived home on Tuesday.

Captain Keyonte George and Conroy Browne, both Germany-based, along with UK-based Marco Michael, flew home on Tuesday afternoon and were greeted by the recently appointed Antigua and Barbuda Football Association's (ABFA) General Secretary Zorol Barthley.

Upon their arrival in Antigua on Tuesday, the three young players met with Syrian-born, Saudi Arabian-based football star Omar Al Somah at the airport.

Somah and Antiguan



US-based national under-20 players Zidaan Williams, left, and Brenden Skilling arrive at the V.C. Bird International Airport in Antigua on Wednesday, June 10, 2026. (Photo courtesy the ABFA)

sports psychologist Launee Richards spent some time interacting with the national under-20 players during Wednesday's session at the training camp in Paynters.

Richards also held a motivational talk with the players as part of the ABFA's holistic programme for the team as they prepare for the CONCACAF Under-20 Championship in Puebla, México, this summer.

The overseas-based

players are joining their teammates in training in Antigua as the full squad assembles ahead of their departure for the tournament on July 2.

Antigua and Barbuda's under-20 national team is one of only 12 nations to have qualified for the 2026 CONCACAF Under-20 Championship and the sole representative of the OECS in the tournament.

Of the Caribbean nations present, only Jamaica and Haiti stand alongside Anti-

gua and Barbuda.

Antigua and Barbuda will contest group stage matches at the Estadio Cuauhtemoc in Puebla, Mexico, against hosts Mexico on July 24. The young Benna Boys will face Guatemala on July 27 and tackle Costa Rica in their final group stage match on July 30.

The tournament is a qualifier to the FIFA Under-20 World Cup, which will be jointly hosted by Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan in 2027.

The full national under-20 squad will depart Antigua on Thursday, July 2, as part of a 43-day programme that takes them through St. Lucia, Panama, and Mexico City before arriving in Puebla, Mexico, for the CONCACAF tournament.

Meanwhile, former national player Derrick "Pretty Boy" Edwards has been added to the coaching staff of the Antigua and Barbuda under-20 team.

Edwards, who is also a former senior national team head coach, joined their under-20 staff as an assistant coach. Former national player Schyan Jeffers is the team's head coach, and he is also being supported by assistant coaches Gayson "Bubbler" Gregory and Donovan Peart as well as goalkeeper coach Janiel "Board" Simon.

Teams advance to semi-finals of Girls' Primary School Cup



Four teams have advanced to the semi-finals of the Ministry of Sports Cool & Smooth/JOMA Caribbean Girls' Primary School Football Cup Championships.

JT Ambrose, New Winthorpes, Buckley's, and Bendals secured their spots in the semis after recording wins in their respective matches in the quarter-finals at the Golden Grove playing

field on Wednesday.

Arissa Hector had a double conversion, and Alison Lewis scored once to give JT Ambrose Primary a 3-1 victory against Five Islands Primary.

New Winthorpes Primary snatched a one-nil victory against Old Road Primary in their encounter.

Buckley's Primary advanced to the

semis with a 4-0 drubbing of Jennings Primary. Sapphire Thomas, Faith Bennet, N'fias Colbourne, and Dana Charles each converted once for Buckley's Primary.

Bendals Primary completes the semi-finals lineup by coasting to a 6-1 victory against Pigotts Primary in the other quarter-finals affair.

Iresha Mason, Phyana Peters, and Rosalie Graham each converted twice for Bendals Primary.

Meanwhile, eight teams will continue their battle for supremacy in the Boys' Primary School Cup in the quarter-finals at Buckley's on Friday.

Five Islands will face Parham at 3:30 pm, and Old Road will tackle JT. Ambrose Primary at 4:30 pm.

In the other matches at Golden Grove, T.N. Kirnon will meet Villa Primary at 3:30 pm, and defending champions St. Peter's Academy will clash with New Winthorpes Primary at 4:30 pm.



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Knicks complete record rally to beat Spurs in NBA Finals



New York Knicks center Mitchell Robinson (23) and guard Josh Hart (3) celebrate after Game 4 of the NBA Finals basketball series against the San Antonio Spurs in New York, Wednesday, June 10, 2026. (AP)

NEW YORK (AP) — A record-breaking comeback, capped off by what could go down as a legendary play. The long road back to the top of the NBA is almost complete for the New York Knicks, and the step they took Wednesday night was unforgettable.

The Knicks came from 29 points down and moved to the brink of their first championship since 1973 by beating the San Antonio Spurs 107-106 in Game 4 of the finals on OG Anunoby's tip-in with 1.2 seconds remaining.

"That has to be the most iconic shot in the history of New York basketball," Knicks coach Mike Brown said.

It's certainly high on the list — as high as Anunoby leaped when Jalen Brunson's long 3-point shot bounced off the front of the rim, with his right hand stretching high to softly flick it in. "Right hand from God," Knicks center Karl-Anthony Towns said.

The Knicks, who have just two titles in their 80-year history and hadn't even been to the NBA Finals since 1999, have a 3-1 lead and three chances to win the best-of-seven series — starting with Game 5 on Saturday night in San Antonio.

It looked impossible early, when the Spurs rolled to a 27-point halftime lead. But Brunson helped bring the Knicks back with 36 points and Anunoby finished with 33.

No team had come from more than 24 points down in a finals game, when Boston did it against the Lakers in 2008, since the NBA began keeping detailed play-by-play for all four quarters in 1997. The Spurs led 81-52 in the third quarter.

The only bigger comeback on record in any playoff game was 31 points by the Los Angeles Clippers against Golden State in Game 2 of a first-round series in 2019.

The Knicks had their 13-game winning streak snapped in Game 3 and

seemed headed for a second straight defeat throughout the first half, when Victor Wembanyama and the Spurs opened the biggest halftime lead by a visiting team in the finals.

But the young Spurs, who made 11 of their first 16 3-pointers, went cold in the second half, going 3 for 17 behind the arc as the Knicks outscored them 58-30.

Delirious fans inside Madison Square Garden sang along to Journey's "Don't Stop Believin'" a few minutes after watching something that seemed almost impossible.

Wembanyama had 24 points and 13 rebounds but shot just 9 for 25 from the field. Road teams had won the first three games, only the second time that had happened in the finals. San Antonio was well on its way to making it 4 for 4.

But the Knicks gave themselves a chance by limiting the Spurs to 14 points on 4-for-20 shooting in the third quarter, using a 13-0 run to get back in it and cutting it to 90-75 heading to the fourth.

These Knicks, who erased a 22-point deficit in the fourth quarter against Cleveland in Game 1 of the Eastern Conference finals, just don't quit.

Even when the comeback seemed for naught when Stephon Castle was fouled after the Knicks had taken the lead and made two free throws to put San Antonio back ahead with 30 seconds left, the Knicks had one more rally in them.

Dylan Harper scored 21 points and De'Aaron Fox and Devin Vassell each had 18 for the Spurs, who will try to regroup and send the series back to New York for Game 6 next Tuesday. Only one team — Cleveland in 2016 — has recovered from a 3-1 deficit in the finals.

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Mexico opens World Cup with passion, parties and protests

MEXICO CITY (Reuters) - Mexico City opened the World Cup on Thursday at the famous Azteca stadium with a ceremony celebrating pre-Hispanic culture, as the ground rocked ahead of the tournament's first match between Mexico and South Africa that kicks off against a backdrop of protests around the capital.

Fans in Mariachi costumes, with sombreros and trumpets, formed a sea of dark green support as Shakira and Burna Boy performed the 2026 World Cup anthem and pyrotechnics filled the ground.

Alejandro Garcia, 50, decked out in a sombrero and carrying a replica trophy, said he was proud that Mexico was hosting another World Cup. He was a young kid when the country last hosted the tournament in 1986.

"This is our temple," he said on the concourse around the Azteca. "It's going to be a great World Cup, all of the protests will now be forgotten."

But outside the ground, the city of 9 million people remained deeply divided. The run-up to the tournament in Mexico, which the country is co-hosting with the USA and Canada, has been marked by social unrest in the capital as various groups -- from teachers to families of those missing in the



Performers on the pitch during the opening ceremony before the start of the World Cup Group A soccer match between Mexico and South Africa in Mexico City, Thursday, June 11, 2026. (AP)

drug war -- have marched in attempts to leverage the international spotlight to advance their cause.

At least six protests were planned on Thursday, with the city a contradiction of celebration and opposition. Freshly painted murals, new trains and a revamped stadium aimed at welcoming tourists for the games contrasted with steel barricades mounted by businesses to protect themselves from rioters along the capital's main avenue.

About three miles from the Azteca, thousands of disgruntled teachers from around the country began marching towards the stadium ahead of the match.

Avelina Cruz Miguel, who has taught elementary school for 22 years, travelled from Oaxaca to protest for better pay. She said the

protests offered an opportunity for the teachers to make their demands known at "an international level." "There is no support for education" in Mexico, she said.

Teachers had also camped outside the central Zocalo square for days leading up to the start of the tournament.

The encampment forced authorities to barricade the entrance to the Zocalo on the eve of the competition opener and raised fears the area would be closed to fans who had planned to amass in the square to watch on a big screen.

On Thursday, tents lined the streets for multiple blocks surrounding the square but authorities confirmed the fan zone would be open.

Mario Martinez, 30, from Tijuana, was one of the first

fans to enter with his girlfriend. He said they had come to the fan zone because stadium tickets were too expensive and had been worried the event would be cancelled. "Thank God it all worked out."

In the Zocalo, organisers said the fan zone was at capacity with over 50,000 packed into the square to watch the game.

Many residents have complained money was being spent to beautify the city for visitors without addressing underlying infrastructure issues. Thursday was declared an official holiday in Mexico City, in part to alleviate transport concerns.

Other Chilangos, as Mexico City locals are known, complained of prohibitively high ticket prices that had kept them from seeing the spectacle live in their home town.

For the opening match between Mexico and South Africa some fans interviewed by Reuters said they had paid US\$3,000 or more, way out of reach for most Mexicans. FIFA has defended its pricing saying the cost of tickets is on a par with other major sporting events.

"FIFA is only interested in profit," said Jonathan Cordoba, 33, as he stood in a long queue to enter the stadium. But he said he had no regrets: "It's the passion!"