

## Comment

# Caribbean Covid spikes: what's next?

**C**ROWDS jostled at bus terminals and supermarkets on Wednesday as Hurricane Nana bore down on Belize. The price? We'll know in a week or two, when we see what that lapse in social distancing has done to Covid-19 infection rates.

For the first months of the pandemic, T&T, our Caricom neighbours, kept themselves remarkably virus-free. Since then, they've split into two groups.

A dozen small islands are still doing just fine, with at most one or two new infections in the past two weeks. That's the eastern Caribbean from Grenada up to St Kitts and beyond, plus Cayman, Curaçao and a few others.

But T&T, the Bahamas, Jamaica, Guyana, Belize and Suriname have been smacked hard with a recent spike. That's after sailing through March, April, May almost without trouble, and most of them also through June and July.

The Bahamas is now as risky as Brazil, and Belize is almost up there with the US. T&T and the others are less eye-catching, but also now have infection rates above the world average.

New Covid cases per million

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people seven-day average up to September 3:

Bahamas	190
Brazil	189
US	126
Belize	123
Suriname	104
Guyana	52
T&T	52
Jamaica	49
World	34
UK	21

For months, T&T had mainly imported cases. Then trouble hit from August. With a lag of a week or two for the incubation period, the election campaign may have contributed. But we're also looking at the porous sea border with Venezuela, whose shaky official numbers show an uptick starting in mid-July.

Jamaica's election was yesterday. Despite campaigning on Covid-19 rules, their infection rate has spiked tenfold in a little over two weeks, and is now close to T&T's.

Usain Bolt has tested positive, after an ill-advised birthday party. Less glamorously, so has Julian Robinson, general secretary of the opposition People's National Party. Veteran reggae performer Frederick Nathaniel "Toots" Hibbert is fighting for his life.

Jamaica re-opened its airports from

mid-June, with no immediate feedback to infections—and no miracle cure for the economy. Tourist arrivals are trickling at around 15 per cent of their normal flow, and hotels are in deep trouble. Yesterday's election winner will have to juggle energetically to keep the country afloat.

The Bahamas reopened to international flights from the start of July. Unlike Jamaica, Covid-19 cases started to spike two weeks later.

That looks like a direct link to tourism—plus the usual Bahamian to-and-fro hop to Miami. US flights were banned from July 22, since when the islands have been back under an on-off lockdown. The US official advice to potential tourists contemplating the Bahamas is: "Do not travel."

Belize was doing remarkably well until early August, despite its land borders with Guatemala and Mexico, where the virus raged through June and July.

Like T&T, they imposed a national lockdown, with heavy penalties for border-jumping. Inevitably, there were leakages. They depend economically on tourism, but bravely kept their airport closed.

A scheduled reopening from August 15 was pushed back indefinitely as the Covid-19 spike started. Now they have Nana. An election is expected for

November, though the constitutional deadline is not until February. With the government teetering on the edge of debt default, Belize looks like it's heading for big trouble.

Suriname's spike started earlier, at the end of May. It seems to have been linked to that month's election campaign, and possibly to one local government official who crossed illegally to Guyane Française (French Guiana) and came back infected.

Tourism is not a huge issue—the economy depends on gold mining. But for Chan Santokhi's new government, Covid-19 is one of many searing headaches.

Guyana can't blame its March election for a spike which started in late July. They look instead to their porous borders with Brazil, Venezuela, and indeed with Suriname. There, too, Covid-19 is a headache for a new government.

And the outlook? For now, it looks like we're working for damage limitation. More testing with faster results, more effective medical treatments—and on the horizon, vaccines.

T&T's current infection rates are worrying, but not exceptional, and the past week's tentative trend is downhill. Other countries, with hard work, have brought Covid-19 down from higher levels.

# Pan-Africanism: from London to Addis Ababa

**J**ULY 2020 marked the 120th anniversary of the first Pan-African Conference, held 15 years after the partition of Africa had been sealed at the notorious Berlin Conference.

Trinidadian lawyer Henry Sylvester Williams—who coined the terms "Pan-African" and "Pan-Africanism"—organised this meeting in London's Westminster Town Hall in 1900. The idea was to promote the political, socio-economic and cultural unity of Africa and its diaspora.

Williams had founded the African Association in London in 1897 to lobby the British parliament and public to oppose the violence of European colonial rule in Africa, the lynching of black men in America, and the economic exploitation of the Caribbean. By this time, Caribbean and African American churches were also inspiring Africa's Ethiopian Church movement to set up their own independent churches on the continent.

The 1900 conference was where African American scholar-activist WEB Du Bois uttered the remarkably prescient prophecy: "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line." The attendees at the conference from the US, the Caribbean, and Africa addressed a message to Queen Victoria, complaining about the ill treatment of blacks in South Africa and Rhodesia. They also far-sightedly called for reparations to be paid to Africans for slavery and colonialism, as well as for self-government and the recognition of the rights of women.

Between 1919 and 1945, five Pan-African Congresses were held,

with Du Bois as the moving spirit. The Western media mostly heaped derision on these efforts. The First Pan-African Congress was held in Paris in 1919, simultaneously with the Versailles Peace Conference after the First World War. Du Bois was the dominant figure in Paris, along with the Senegalese-born French parliamentarian, Blaise Diagne. Delegates also comprised African public office-holders in Paris and black American soldiers. The Congress called for the abolition of slave labour, the passing of laws to protect Africans, the right to education for Africans, and their participation in their own government.

The 1919 Paris Pan-African conference occurred at a time when Jamaica's Marcus Garvey—"the Black Moses" and one of Pan-Africanism's most charismatic and controversial figures—was mobilising huge crowds of black Americans in New York's Harlem and across the country with his "Back to Africa" movement and his evocative slogan of "Africa for the Africans".

Garvey, through his Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA-ACL), proclaimed himself to be the "Provisional President of a Racial Empire in Africa". He met with the Ku Klux Klan, and was jailed after money from his Black Star shipping line was misappropriated. He died in London in 1940 and, being blocked by European colonial powers, ironically never visited the Africa to which he had enthusiastically urged his followers to emigrate. In a remarkable act of national restitution, Jamaica transported Garvey's remains

back from London to Kingston in 1964, and gave him a befitting state funeral. He is now regarded as a national hero and has a huge following among Jamaica's Rastafarian movement. Garvey also inspired Kwame Nkrumah to use the colours of his Black Star shipping line to design Ghana's post-independence flag and to name its football team.

The Second Pan-African Congress took place simultaneously in London and Brussels in 1921, with the main demand made on behalf of the "Negro race" by "their thinking intelligent-sia" being "local self-government for backward groups". This language revealed the patronising mind-set of the movement's middle-class leaders. The Third Pan-African Congress occurred simultaneously in London and Lisbon in 1923. The meetings mainly called for Africans to "have a voice" in running their own affairs. The Fourth Pan-African Congress was held in New York in 1927. It was here that the towering intellectual prophet of Pan-Africanism, Trinidad's George Padmore, lambasted white communists for trying to discredit black Pan-African organisations that they could not control.

By the time of the Fifth Pan-African Congress in Manchester in October 1945, the movement had shifted its centre of gravity from the diaspora to Africa. The conference was now dominated by future African leaders like Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, Kenya's Jomo Kenyatta and Malawi's Hastings Banda, as well as Nigerians Obafemi Awolowo and Jaja Wachuku. Other Africans in



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Manchester included HO Davies and SL Akintola (Nigeria); Joe Appiah (Ghana); Wallace Johnson (Sierra Leone); Peter Abrahams and Mark Hlubi (South Africa); as well as the Caribbean's Padmore, CLR James, and Amy Ashwood Garvey.

Among the Pan-Africanists in Manchester for the first time were representatives of African trade unions, farmers, cooperative societies and students. Africans were now speaking directly for themselves in a Western idiom of self-determination, and their demands were unequivocal: immediate self-government and independence for African states, as well as the waging of armed struggles to liberate colonial territories.

A policy of non-alignment between East and West was declared, amidst calls for the total liberation of Africa and Asia. At Manchester, Du Bois symbolically passed the torch of Pan-Africanism to Nkrumah, and the movement returned to its ancestral home.

In May 1963, 32 African states met in Addis Ababa to create the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). A "Pan-Africanism of governments" had now replaced a "Pan-Africanism of peoples", and the connections with the original Pan-Africanists in the diaspora were largely severed. As Guinea's Diallo Telli, the first OAU secretary-general, lamented: Pan-Africanism had been born into an atmosphere of "complete alienation, physical exploitation and spiritual torment".