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***Celebrating the 40th anniversary of
the Canadian Hispanic Congress***

Federal Government Allocates \$7 Million for Asylum Seeker Reception Centre in Peel Region

The Canadian federal government is providing \$7 million to Peel Region to establish a reception centre near Toronto's Pearson International Airport, addressing the challenges posed by a surge in asylum seekers. Minister Kamal Khera, speaking in Brampton, emphasized the streamlined support and services the centre will offer. The facility, in collaboration with community organizations, includes a temporary shelter.

Brampton Mayor Patrick Brown, who called for federal assistance following a recent tragedy involving an asylum seeker, lauded the swift response. The new shelter, with 800 spaces, and two additional shelters offering 250 spaces each, are expected to significantly impact the homelessness crisis in the Greater Toronto Area.

Toronto Mayor Olivia Chow praised the initiative, citing its potential as a coordinated regional response for refugees. However, she stressed the need to address challenges faced by thousands of refugees in existing shelters.

The federal government had previously offered \$5 million to help open the Better Living Centre in Toronto for asylum seekers this winter. Khera confirmed the offer is still available, pending a formal request from the Ontario government regarding the use of federal armouries as emergency shelters.

This initiative represents a collaborative effort to provide immediate relief to asylum seekers and underscores the commitment to developing long-term, sustainable solutions.



Canada's Comprehensive Housing Plan: A Bold Step Towards Affordability



Responding to a mounting housing affordability crisis, Canada has launched a robust Housing Action Plan. The 2023 Fall Economic Statement outlines key initiatives to address the urgent need for affordable homes.

The plan includes a groundbreaking \$4 billion Housing Accelerator Fund to stimulate the construction of 100,000 new homes, along with over \$25 billion in low-cost financing for 71,000 rental homes and \$13 billion for 60,000 affordable homes. Removing the Goods and Services Tax from rental projects, a \$15 billion Apartment Construction Loan Program expansion, and a \$1 billion Affordable Housing Fund top-up aim to boost construction.

To curb short-term rentals impacting housing availability, the government plans to deny income tax deductions for non-compliant operators, supported by a \$50 million proposal for municipal enforcement.

Addressing rising interest rates, the Canadian Mortgage Charter offers tailored relief, including amortization extensions and fee waivers.

The Tax-Free First Home Savings Account, introduced in 2022, remains central, with over 250,000 Canadians benefiting from tax-deductible contributions and tax-free withdrawals for first home purchases.

For international students, a \$4 billion Indigenous Housing Strategy and enhanced verification tools ensure protection.

Canada's Housing Action Plan reflects a proactive, collaborative effort to secure affordable housing, addressing various aspects of the crisis for a sustainable and inclusive future.

Urgent Action Needed: Hate Crimes Soar in Canada as Israel-Hamas War Sparks Antisemitism and Islamophobia

In recent weeks, several Canadian cities have reported a surge in hate crimes, particularly antisemitic and Islamophobic incidents, following the Israel-Hamas conflict initiated on October 7. Cities with significant Jewish and Muslim populations, such as Toronto, Montreal, and Ottawa, witnessed an increase in reported hate crimes, with notable spikes in antisemitism and Islamophobia. Toronto Police reported more than double the hate crime reports for much of October compared to the same period in 2022. Montreal saw an increase in hate crimes against the Arab-Muslim and Jewish communities.

Police in Calgary noted a sustained rise in hate crimes related to the conflict, deviating from the usual pattern of short-lived spikes. The incidents include a rabbi's house vandalized with a swastika, a mosque smeared with feces, and antisemitic symbols painted in Toronto. Experts classify these as "reactive hate crimes" linked to global events, providing an outlet for individuals caught up in identitarian and nationalistic sentiments.

The Jewish community remains the most targeted group for hate crimes in Canada, with a steady rise in reported incidents over the years. A Senate report on Islamophobia emphasizes the urgent need for concrete actions to address the growing hatred towards Muslims in Canada. It reveals alarming statistics, such as one in four Canadians not trusting Muslims and Canada leading the G7 in targeted killings of Muslims driven by Islamophobia. The report recommends measures like mandatory training, a multimedia campaign, and legislative changes to combat online hate and enhance national security legislation.

Community leaders from both the Jewish and Muslim communities express deep concern about the escalating hate, emphasizing the need for unity and mutual support to create a more inclusive and tolerant society.



Environmental Victory in Panama: Closure of Largest Central American Copper Mine Sparks Legal Battle



Panama's Supreme Court has made a historic ruling, declaring unconstitutional a 20-year concession granted to a Canadian copper mine, which is the largest open-pit copper mine in Central America. The decision was met with celebration by activists who had argued that the mine would harm a forested coastal area and jeopardize water supplies. The court emphasized environmental and human rights concerns, citing violations of 25 articles of Panama's constitution, including the right to a pollution-free environment and the protection of the health of minors.



Recent research from Monash University reveals a strong connection between light exposure and mental health.

The mine, operated by Canada's First Quantum Minerals through its local subsidiary Minera Panama, will now be closed. While the mine has been a significant economic driver for Panama, it triggered massive protests that paralyzed the nation for over a month, involving a diverse range of stakeholders, including Indigenous communities.

The ruling is expected to lead to arbitration between the Panamanian government and the mining company at the World Bank's international center for arbitration of investment disputes. Analysts suggest that pursuing a new agreement is unlikely due to widespread public opposition. The closure of the mine raises concerns about the thousands of jobs it generates and potential economic consequences for Panama's public coffers.

The mining company, First Quantum Minerals, has the option to seek compensation through international arbitration based on commercial treaties between Panama and Canada. The Panamanian government and the mining company seem headed for a legal dispute, with the company claiming it operated transparently and adhered to Panamanian legislation. The closure is expected to impact Panama's GDP and public finances, with the government expressing concern about the economic fallout.

Christmas Traditions in Canada and Spanish-Speaking Countries

Christmas, a time of joy and celebration, is marked by diverse traditions that vary across the globe. In Canada, the winter wonderland takes on a magical charm with snowy landscapes and festive decorations. Families gather to exchange gifts and indulge in a hearty Christmas feast featuring classic dishes like roast turkey and tourtière, a savory meat pie. Canadians often embrace winter sports like ice skating and hockey, creating a unique blend of outdoor activities and cozy indoor festivities.

Meanwhile, in many Spanish-speaking countries, the most important celebration takes place on December 24, as it is the birth of the baby Jesus, the very reason for the celebration of Christmas is a vibrant holiday full of cultural richness. In Mexico, the celebration begins with Las Posadas, a re-enactment of Mary and Joseph's search for shelter. Families gather for festive meals of tamales and bacalao.

Central American countries such as El Salvador toast Christmas with fireworks on 24 and 25 December. Children celebrate with small firecrackers called volcancitos and estrellitas, while older children prefer the larger varieties and Roman candles.

In Spain, the festive season extends beyond Christmas Day to include Three Kings Day on 6 January, when parades and colourful processions mark the arrival of the Three Kings.

Despite the geographical and cultural differences, the spirit of Christmas unites both Canadian and Spanish-speaking communities. Both cherish time spent with loved ones, the exchange of heartfelt gifts, and the joy of festive traditions. Whether it's sipping hot cocoa by the fireplace in Canada or enjoying a lively Nochebuena in Spain, the holiday season brings people together, celebrating the warmth of shared traditions and the universal message of love and goodwill.



Message from the president

Dear friend of the Canadian Hispanic Congress,

The members of Canadian Hispanic Congress are very excited to have shared another year with you. We hope that this has been a positive and successful year for each of you. As we are also on the eve of the holiday season, we wish you a very happy holiday season.

The Christmas season is a time for celebrating with friends and being a part of family gatherings. For some, it can be a time of sadness and longing for loved ones who have left great memories. It is also a time when, if we are fortunate enough to share it as a family, we also remember those who for whatever reason are in need of our support and generosity. Inviting one more person to share our table is one more way of expressing gratitude to God for our own situation.

The Christmas holidays also signal the imminent arrival of the New Year. Those who have had a year of good health and prosperity, as well as those who have had to overcome loss of health and other losses, begin to prepare mentally for the arrival of the new year. This always results in moments of reflection about where we are and where we want to be. It is often a time for setting new goals for ourselves and perhaps for those in our nuclear families. It is an ideal time for inner dialogue, as well as dialogue with those with whom we share our lives. It is important to pay attention to the individual dreams, goals and objectives of our partners, children, and anyone else who shares our days. Why not ask them about their own dreams and aspirations?

Despite this being the age of knowledge and communications, we seem to connect less than when we had fewer forms of communication at our fingertips. Today more than ever we depend on each other to feel empowered. Perhaps it would be of great benefit to make a resolution to avoid being hypnotized and anaesthetised by our electronic devices. Some families who have done this successfully, recommend the idea of negotiating family pacts, where before sitting down at the dinner table, all electronic devices are turned off and put away in a drawer away from the dinner table for the short dinner hour. This is to encourage more conversation and better understanding with those who mean so much to us. An important measure even for individuals living alone. This short break from technology gives us the opportunity to think and reason, free from the interruptions and influences of the messages we receive through our technology.

Change is not easy for anyone, but someone has said that success is nothing more than the sum of small efforts repeated day after day. Whatever your goals for the year ahead, on behalf of the Canadian Hispanic Congress team, I wish you every success with whatever you set out to do. Happy New Year 2024. We sincerely wish you a year of good health, prosperity and many happy moments.

Monique Forster

President

Canadian Hispanic Congress



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