

The Caribbean's Top Newsmakers Of 2010

Caribbean news and Haiti stands out as the top newsmaker for 2010

The Caribbean nation took over the headlines following the devastating earthquake of January 12th and has dominated it since – from the after effects, to Haiti's tent cities and floods to the cholera epidemic and a controversial election, Haiti remains in the news as we end the year.

And so does its own Wyclef Jean, who began the year by becoming the face of fundraising for his nation and is ending 2010 on the same note, despite a failed Presidential bid that created a media frenzy globally.

Were one to count the inches and time allotted to covering Jean in 2010, then he is without a doubt the top newsmaker of the year, right along with his beleaguered country.

Along with Jean, the other top newsmaker for 2010 has got to be Jamaica – from its Prime Minister to accused drug Lord Christopher Dudos Coke and of course its reggae star Buju Banton.

Jamaica's capital of Kingston turned into a war zone in May as the country's security forces tried to find accused drug lord and West Kingston Don, Dudos. The international spotlight shone on the country as security forces clashed with Dudos loyalists bent on protecting their don from extradition to the U.S.

The showdown came months after the Prime Minister, Bruce Golding, fought off signing the order and his party contracted the services of a U.S. law firm, Manatt, Phelps and Phillips, to lobby against the extradition.

But as news broke of the Golding/JLP involvement in the law firm's hiring and the PM was forced to defend his post and decision, he signed the order, throwing Coke to the wolves. Some 76 people died in battles between drug gangs and authorities after Golding agreed to the Coke extradition, nine months after fighting the U.S. request.

Coke was eventually arrested, dressed in drag, and brought to the U.S. where he pleaded not guilty on drug charges and is awaiting a trial in a New York jail.

While Coke's extradition and arrest stopped the showdown in Kingston and calm resumed, the fall out continues to haunt the PM and his government. A commission of inquiry is slated to begin into the law firm's hiring even as U.S. cables leaked by WikiLeaks claims that the mayor of the country's capital, Kingston Mayor Desmond McKenzie, told a U.S. Embassy officer that his administration collaborated for years with accused drug lord Christopher 'Dudos' Coke to fight crime, especially in the don's stronghold of West Kingston, the home constituency of Golding.

Leaked cables also claim Golding's wife, Lorna Golding asserted that New York Representative Charles Rangel was a sympathizer of the opposition People's National Party and was 'whispering in Secretary Clinton's ear' to hobble her husband's government. It is alleged in the cable that Mrs. Golding made the 'rambling comments and penchant for

sharing conspiracy theories` during a tea with an embassy officer.

Jamaica was further forced into the spotlight as one time celebrated businessman and OLINT chief, David Smith, was charged on Aug. 18th in U.S. District Court in Florida with fraud and money laundering in a \$200 million Ponzi scheme he allegedly operated from the Turks and Caicos Islands, Jamaica and Florida. On September 23rd, he was convicted on fraud charges in the Turks and Caicos Islands but was last month extradited to the U.S. to face fraud charges here.

He waived his right to be indicted by a grand jury, allowing the U.S. Attorney for the Middle District of Florida in Orlando to charge him with four counts of wire fraud, one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering, and 18 counts of money laundering. Smith now sits in jail awaiting trial in April.

The island's reggae industry also took a hit. Reggae's Buju Banton was put on trial in a drug case this year even as several top dancehall artists, including Bennie Man and Movado, had their U.S. visas yanked. Banton's trial ended in a mistrial and the singer was able to walk out this month on bail in time to celebrate the holidays with his family. But he faces a New Year re-trial even as he's celebrating another Grammy nomination and a court order that allows him to perform at a January concert.

Trinidad and Tobago also cracked the headlines this year after it elected its first female Prime Minister, Kamla Persad Bissessar, who subsequently dominated the news as she put her foot in her mouth on two occasions regarding Caribbean outreach and unity and for her disorganized visit to New York.

2010 marked a sad year for Barbados, as nationals had to cope with news of their beloved Prime Minister, David Thompson's diagnosis of cancer, and his passing in October.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines's Ralph Gonsalves survived an election to hold on to his post while Grenada PM, Tillman Thomas, managed to steady his government after three upstart ministers threatened his strong hold.

St. Vincent, Barbados and St. Lucia also survived the wrath of Hurricane Tomas, which caused tremendous damage to all three islands, especially St. Lucia.

For the Diaspora, Caribbean Americans participation in the Census, thanks in large part to a push from Carib ID's Felicia Persaud, which started in 2008, also stands out as news makers as does the election of the First Caribbean-born Lt. Gov. of Florida, Jennifer Carroll.

Caribbean Americans also made the news for their generous help in donating to Haiti in 2010.

Other top newsmakers for 2010:

- Yendi Phillips – for making the cut and becoming the first runner-up in the 2010 Miss Universe pageant, a proud moment for the Caribbean and Jamaica.

- Former Jamaica PM, P.J. Patterson – for continuing to speak up for Haiti.

- Nicki Minaj – for taking the rap world by storm.
- Rihanna – continuing to dominate the charts globally.
- Sweet Mickey – for proving that musicians can also chart a political agenda for a country based on something as simple as care and social empowerment.
- Canada Governor General Michaëlle Jean – for leading with grace, dignity and pride.