

INdependent

Reformer

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Political reform: Are they serious?

"To the victor goes the spoils." This ancient creed for war is what drove both conquering armies and marauding hordes of barbarians and bandits throughout the millennia.

Translated into our modern context, the "spoil system," as the political scientists call it, generally means the political party that wins an election in a particular country has the opportunity to loot the national coffers and through the tax system, its own citizens.

Such a system has existed in Belize for the past 25 years, ever since "Independence." The pillaging continues, no matter which party is elected to office, because there are few laws to prevent it. Those which do exist are not enforced.

The corruption presents itself in many forms. The most obvious manifestation is the bloated contracts given to high and unqualified bidders, instead of to the low and qualified bidders. The excess money is shared between the interested politicians and the country often receives an inferior job, which on some occasions has to be done over again.

Then there is the purchase of property from a party crony for an excessive amount. The reverse

"Free Stay In Belize" A Tourism Industry Protest?

By: **Meb Cutlack**

The Belize "free stay program offers free rooms in select hotels all over the country" That's from the BTIA's 'Media Release'. But, what they are not saying is that in fact their stay free program is a subtle way of hitting government in protest at high taxes and yet giving a free tax ride to the Shrimp industry.

"We were devastated to read that the first reading of the new Shrimp Act take all taxes off the shrimp industry, which is unsustainable against world competition even with

also occurred with the selling of Government businesses and land far below their appraised values. Was the difference in value split between politicians? Or did they obtain an undisclosed interest in the business or property?

Either way, and in so many other ways, corruption prevails as the order of the day.

But it does not have to be this way. There were efforts to change the spoils system. In June of 1997, under the auspices of the United Democratic Party (UDP), a joint Select Committee on Political Reform was established. Unfortunately, it was not productive because partisan politics prevented any progress.

During the campaigning for the 1998 national elections, both major parties addressed political reform as a major issue and made promises of reform.

Belizeans thought the winner of that election, the People's United Party, was serious when on January 13, 1999 Prime Minister Said Musa appointed his own Political Reform Commission.

On January 13, 1999 at the WASA conference room in Belize City he addressed their first meeting with

subsidies, but continues to tax tourism out of existence, "a BTIA member told me. (SEE SHRIMP STORY PAGE 3). She added: "The BTIA and BHA are reluctant to come right out and say it but free nights means no bed tax for four days and a financial 'clip on the ear' for government to start to listen to the problems the industry is facing." The beauty of this strike is that it is a weapon the hoteliers can use at any

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Prime Minister Said Musa (r) and Leader of the Opposition Dean Barrow inside Holy Redeemer Cathedral. *Praying for a miracle?*

a stirring speech. He urged the members to remember that:

"The people of Belize are depending on you to carry out fair and fearless consultations and deliberations and to make timely and worthy recommendations that

will enhance our democracy and give all our people a greater stake in their nation".

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Canon fires back



Canon Leroy Flowers, President of the Belize Council of Churches.

Belizeans often criticize their church leaders for shying away from social issues or failing to comment on serious national political or financial scandals.

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An audience with Her

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Editorial Note



Welcome readers, to the first edition of the INdependent Reformer."

No doubt you have already noticed several things about us which make us different from the other newspapers in Belize.

First, and perhaps most importantly, the Independent contains almost no "hard news." This is a conscious decision by the editorial board which believes there is more than enough reporting on the news of the day in Belize by the primary papers, radio and television stations.

For the most part, we will focus on opinion and editorial pieces and regional and international news that could have implications for Belize or represents significant worldwide trends or activities Belizeans would do well to consider.

In terms of politics, the atmosphere is already highly charged as we head into the election campaign. Few of us think the current administration will wait until 2008; in fact many are expecting an imminent announcement setting the date of the General Election.

Things will get hot and heavy. Sooner rather than later. But let us get one thing straight from the outset: while the Independent welcomes articles and press releases from all political parties and their supporters, (not to mention advertising!) those items which focus on reform have the greatest likelihood of being given space.

As long as what is being discussed is aimed at improving the political system, the lives of Belizeans, as well as how partisan politics as it is played out on the Belizean stage, we will consider it. Whoever writes it.

In fact, we feel so strongly about the need for reform we have decided to use the recommendations of the Political Reform Commission,

selected by Prime Minister Said Musa in 1999 and which published its report in 2000 after many group meetings and public consultations, as a blueprint for future issues.

There are so many well thought out recommendations, only a fraction of which were ever adopted by the government. The rest were shelved, perhaps never to be retrieved again.

This is a terrible disservice to the dedicated members of the Political Reform Commission and disrespectful to the citizens of this country.

We urge the Prime Minister and the cabinet to revisit the recommendations. They may find that a good many of them, had they been made into law, might have prevented many of the "mistakes" and messes the administration has made, which they must now try to correct and untangle.

Starting a newspaper in Belize is a risky venture. There are those who already stand poised to try and pull it down as Belizean crabs are prone to do, and political figures and partisan diehards who simply cannot comprehend anything that is not overtly blue or red. They will sit there scratching their heads trying to decide if we are pro-government or anti-government, pro-opposition or anti-opposition and come to their own conclusions no matter what we say or do not say.

That is the nature of some political animals. Paid and unpaid. For as we all know, in any election season, the party payroll swells to include many individuals who masquerade as private citizens.

Fortunately, Belizeans can see them coming from far.

Legitimate readers and citizens, such as yourselves, will make up your own minds whether or not to support this newspaper.

We hope you will not only read the INdependent Reformer interest, but share your copy with others. We invite you to contact the editor at karlavernon_belize@yahoo.com or write to the Independent at P.O. Box 2666, Belize City to share your views, submit letters to the editor or short articles.

While it is always preferable to attribute a particular article or letter to its true author and Belizeans (both born and naturalized) should feel free to sign their names, if you feel the need to preserve your anonymity we will respect that.

But perhaps you will find some strength, as we have, from reviewing a document far more important than the Political Reform Commission report. That is the Constitution of Belize. Here is an excerpt from the only entry which appears to address the fourth estate, the press:

12—(1) Except with his own consent, a person shall not be hindered in the enjoyment of his freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions without interference, freedom to receive ideas and information without interference, freedom to communicate ideas and information without interference (whether communication be to the public generally or to any person or class of persons) and freedom from interference with his correspondence.

Long live freedom of expression in Belize.

Thanks for reading.

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SHRIMP SCAMPI: Farmers lobby for Tax Free-Zones

By: Meb Cutlack

In the most extraordinary crony deal yet devised the Musa Government is poised to hand a tax free golden deal to Barry Bowen and the shrimp industry.

In a deal valued at millions government will take all taxes off the shrimp industry - export tax, import tax and every single tax related to growing and selling shrimp.

This is at a time when the international shrimp market has been hit by an unprecedented glut of Asian shrimp which has lowered the price of shrimp internationally to less than the price of chicken in many countries!

There is simply no way in the future that Belize, with high production, processing and labour costs, can possibly compete with the rising Asian shrimp industry.

The new Act will provide a straight forward subsidy to the few rich entrepreneurs who make up the ailing industry at the very time that local tourism, mostly Belizean-owned and once Belize's premier foreign exchange earner, is being bankrupted by excessive costs and taxes.

Just driving along the Northern and Western highways these days you see the carcasses of a hundred small Belizean-owned businesses which have been brought down by high operating costs, taxes and the new border fees.

According to a confidential cabinet document leaked to the media the shrimp industry will be allowed to revert to the 1990 EPZ Act under which:

*No import license needed for an EPZ business.

*All imports are exempt from customs duties, tariffs, consumption taxes, excise taxes, trade turnover taxes or other taxes. The exemptions apply to fuel as well.

*No quotas apply to imports into EPZs.

*No export licenses required for exports from EPZs.

*Exports are exempt from customs duties, tonnage taxes, consumption taxes, excise taxes, trade turnover taxes, foreign exchange taxes, or other taxes.

*Standard taxes and duties apply to exports of EPZs into Belize.

*No license needed for conducting an EPZ business.

*No price controls apply to products or services sold by an EPZ business.

*No rent controls apply.

*No regulations or restrictions or prohibitions apply regarding the sale or purchase of foreign currencies.

*EPZ businesses are free to maintain accounts in any currency.

*No import license needed for an EPZ business.

*No quotas apply to imports into EPZs.

*EPZ businesses are exempt from income tax, withholding tax, capital gains tax, and any new corporate tax for 20 years with option to extend.

The Act was revised in 2004 to curb abuses. The main changes introduced by this Act from a tax perspective were as follows:

a) Duty free fuel imported into EPZs was limited to "only such fuel ... as is required for energy generation purposes...."

b) Vehicle imported duty and tax free were restricted to "only service

vehicles together with spares for such vehicles".

c) Foreign exchange regulations applied to all foreign currency transactions.

d) Carry forward provision in respect of losses incurred during the first 20 years was limited to five years after expiration of tax holiday.

e)EPZs subject to Business Tax at the rate of 2%.

The Shrimp Growers Association now want these changes eliminated and want to revert to the 1990 Act.

Given even one quarter of these tax benefits and concessions, including the border tax, the locally-owned and run tourism industry could once more bloom, would once more not only be a major

foreign exchange earner but also allow to survive hundreds of small Belizean businesses that are dead or now dying.

It is almost as if the Musa government is Deliberately intent upon turning the clock back in Belize and building an oligarchy of the very rich to 'supervise' and rule all others - even to the extent of creating a new pool of the very 'poor'. These new Belizeans poor would service the rich and their enterprises, such as shrimp farming, and perhaps, by their thinking, even allow competition with the lowwages in Asia!

Alright, it is probably not a deliberate plan but it is a monstrosity!



World market flooded by Asian shrimps.

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Views & opinions

Magga Dawg

By: Karla Heusner Vernon

What were they like as little puppies? Were they eager to please, mischievous and playful? Were they affectionate and loving; impressing their handlers with their intelligence and readiness to obey commands, using different barks to communicate or warn their owners of attack?

Or were they born mean-spirited? Nipping at the hands feeding them, growling at small children, a wild, untamed look in their eyes?

Would these dogs have turned out differently if they had not been abused or trained to kill?

Perhaps in the beginning, or even for many years, they displayed an admirable loyalty to their political parties. Somewhere along the way they crossed the fanatic line.

Even if they wanted to, it is probably impossible for them to walk back over, to regain credibility lost. It is sad for them, but also for Belize.

Granted, a great many people say and do things during an election that they might not do and say otherwise. Tempers flare, hackles rise. All the whoopla can awaken a primitive need to belong to a clan, a dominant tribe, to be a member of a collective. The mob mentality can overcome anyone.

But why are some people able to regain their perspective and return to real life afterwards while others continue the campaign, mercilessly attacking anyone who criticizes their leaders. Even in peace time. Even when those leaders are admitting there is a need for reform?

Part of me despises these people. I change the station when I hear their voices, I turn the page when I see their letters and columns, I block my inbox so they cannot pollute my list serv, attempt to rent space in my brain, set a worm loose in my hard drive.

I wonder how others can tolerate their vile and venomous poison, even bait them into spilling forth more.

I can only surmise that are somehow fascinated by the rabid dog's foaming at the mouth, crazed look. But it is not a joke, they carry disease.

Then again, maybe watching the pot-lickers roaming the streets, desperate for scraps, makes the rest of the society feel better about their own pedigree.

Certainly it makes their superiors feel superior. Need a job done? Send in the canine corps. No need to handle a challenge man to man, woman to woman.

There is always someone willing to do the dirty work. As emaciated as

they are, the dogs of war always have the energy to rip someone to shreds, in exchange for a chance to mount some bitch in heat, or become her to get extra treats.

It is tempting to pity these canines. To image them differently, if things had gone differently and they had

made other choices, valued their own skills and intelligence and integrity more.

How high they might have limbed a corporate ladder in some other country, rather than sneaking into someone else's office through the brukup back stairs in Belize.

How their keen ears and eyes might have been a useful warning system, alerting us to the dangers of the night, the presence of evil strangers, instead of honing in friends just trying to cross the street in one piece.

Imagine if these dogs were not

standing guard in some rich man's yard, but protecting a loving family, proudly guarding a shop, riding atop the fire engine or sniffing out drugs at the borders. How much better off we all might have been.

But instead, we must now view them as a menace. No longer entertainers, but dangers.

The old people warned us, but we so seldom listen, "Sorry fi magga dawg, tun round bite you." Turn them off, shut them down, and do it now, before they infect us all.

Attention farmers!

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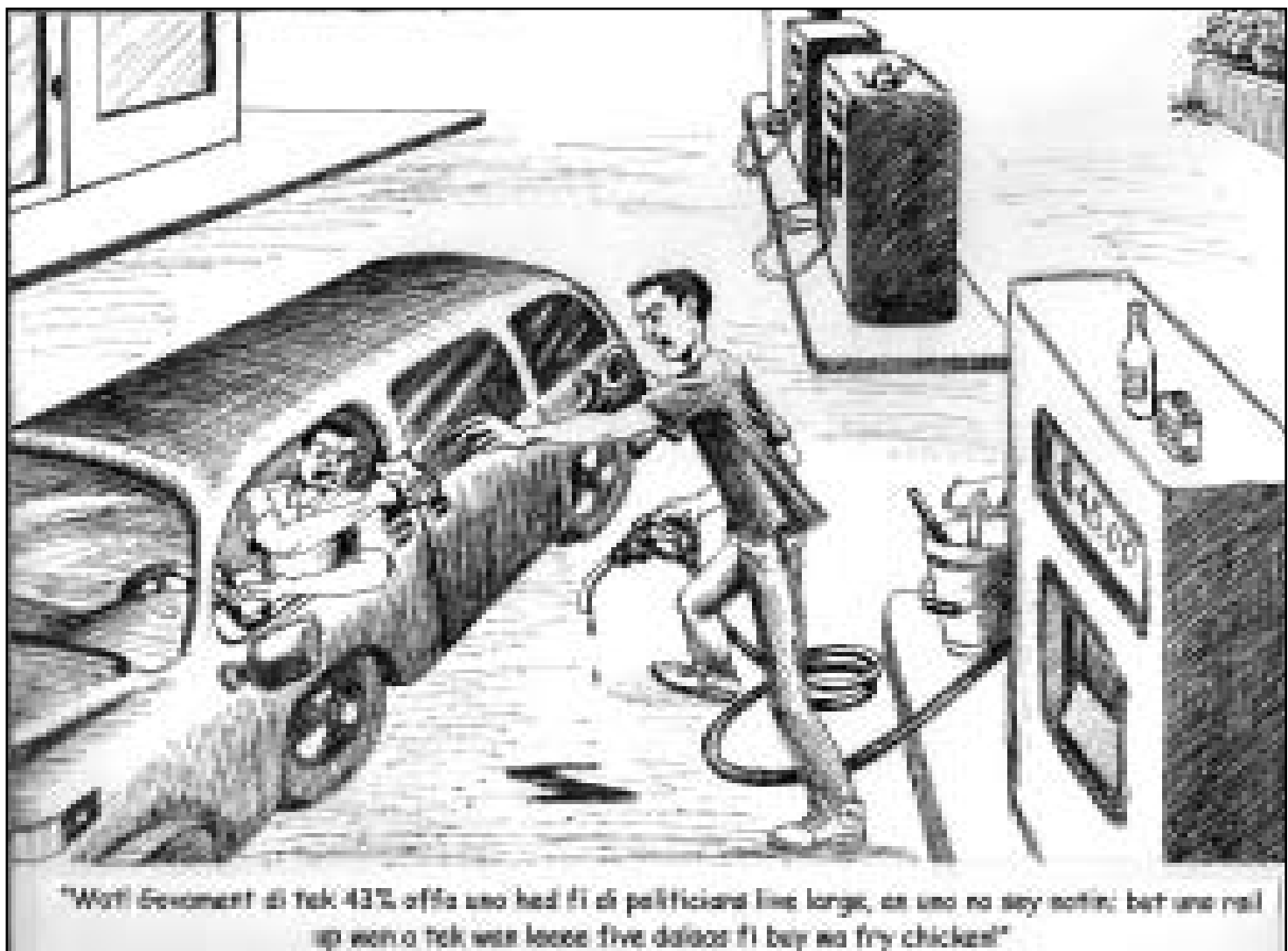


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"Wat Government di tek 43% offa uno had fi di politicians live large, an uno no sey notin; bat uno nail up wen a tek wen loose five dollars fi buy no fry chicken!"

The various anti-corruption conventions

By: Trevor Vernon



The first annual SP EAR (Belize) scientific poll confirms what

Transparency International Indices have been saying over the past decade: Belizeans no longer have confidence in the management of the country's economic affairs.

The TI Indices suggests that either the rest of the world is cleaning up their act, or GOB is getting better at "poverty alleviation," but only at the party level.

Back in 2000, when I heard World Bank President James D. Wolfensohn announce at the Bank's Annual Meeting that member governments must put every effort into fighting corruption if they intended to fight critical poverty, I almost fell out my chair. Prior to this truly earth shaking announcement, all the Bretton-Woods organizations had basically turned a blind eye to what everyone knew, or least strongly suspected, to be standard practice worldwide.

This was a heavy message to deliver to heads of state. Most were skeptical. How would they enforce this in the Heavily Indebted Poorer Countries, HIPC? Ridiculous! But, it stands to reason: the poorest countries have the worse marks in the perception of corruption Index.

Sure enough there followed an avalanche of Anti-Corruption Conventions before the various political bodies: UN, OAS, SICA, and soon enough we can probably expect one from CARICOM.

The OAS' Inter American Convention against Corruption was signed and ratified at the first opportunity, post haste and with much fanfare at the 2001 General Assembly by the Musa Government. Perhaps GOB officials suspected a more rigorous UN Convention was coming down the pipe and wanted to make a big statement with this relatively toothless one. Besides, given the new push by Wolfensohn, the OAS found it opportune to revive an earlier effort of 1996.

Interestingly, at that time, Belize's Foreign Minister,

Dean Barrow, refused to sign the original convention despite the fact that majority of the region's other countries (22 of the 34 OAS members) did. With political glee, the Musa government used this as an example to Washington that this PUP government was serious, indeed dedicated, to the fight against corruption, comparatively speaking. Barrow got egged in Washington again, the Musa administration looked good: it was master politics.

As for the Convention's ability to put an end to corruption; there was a huge legal escape hatch: the OAS required that the monitoring process involves only country self-assessments

based on a questionnaire and indicators. What's more, this data is published subject to the agreement of the country.

In other words, all the "information" on a country's level of corruption being fed back to the monitoring agency is supplied by its own government. All experts monitoring the government must be appointed by the government. Its impossible for the rational (wo)man not to agree that this convention could never be enforced.

More recently, the OAS has tried again. International news sources reported just days ago in Guatemala:

'OAS' esteemed Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza

attended the opening session of the 12th International Anti-Corruption Conference, in Guatemala starting Thursday, November 16, 2006 with the expected participation of Central American presidents. Belize delegation was headed by the Honorable Deputy Prime Minister, John Briceno."

We could assume Briceno signed off on the convention, although there was no local announcement. With that news report, we also have the Central American Anti-Corruption Initiative signed in Guatemala **"to make Central America a corruption free zone."**

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Excerpts Canon Flowers, Independence Sermon September

Cannon Leroy Flowers of the Anglican Church delivered a sermon at the Independence Ecumenical Service that got everyone's attention.

Two months later, Belizeans are still talking about his fiery reminder to us all that Belize is reaping the fruits of social, political and religious strife sown before Independence and that everyone, from parents to politicians to church leaders, has had a hand in our national downfall and must therefore play a role in our redemption. Independent Weekly has reproduced some excerpts for those who missed the presentation, or would like to review his main points once more.

"Amidst the beauty of our homeland we face many social, economic, political and spiritual challenges. My brothers and sisters, 25 years ago we gained Political Independence as a divided people...

There are many who continue to carry this resentment of bitterness, and in some instances, hatred to this day in their hearts. Listen to how they speak of Independent Belize and our leaders. Sad, but true, even among some who claim to be intellectuals of the society...

"Our people have a right to their political beliefs; but we should not allow our differences to stunt our growth or mar our progress. Disagree about policies, but put an end to personal attacks and character assassination that has become the buzz word in our political social discussion.

"Yes, we must acknowledge that Independence was a long struggle. Many were displaced socially and economically, due in large measure to the political reality of the times... Many were force to migrated; while others stayed and sought to undermine the very development of the nation. Some still do today and fail to acknowledge the reality of our progress 25 years hence...

Free to disagree. "It is sad that we seem to think that everyone is corrupt simply because they disagree with us, or we cannot have our way, or they think differently from us. Our democracy demands that we are governed by laws. How sad when we use our freedom to destroy each other by gossip and rumor! The courts of our land within the judicial system is given this responsibility to determine guilt or innocence—not the talk show hosts, nor the print media. If we do not like the laws, then work to have them changed. But in this

democracy there is a specific process where that can be done. We must all uphold the rule of law to make Belize great.

This is our heritage.

On Families. "Our families are in disarray. Too many of our men continue to simply impregnate without taking on their responsibilities. Too many parents have given up on their children. Domestic violence and child abuse is too frequent and is destroying innocence for too many of our children and women, as well as the family unit. We are in a crisis, economically, morally, and spiritually. There are too many broken homes, unwanted

Too many of us in authority are arrogant and filled with pride. We do not know how

pregnancy, and teenage pregnancies. Too many men continue to support two, three families. This is financially impossible. Abortion, though illegal, continues to be used by some in the medical profession as the means of birth control, despite the psychological and spiritual decay this brings to so many of our women.

Poverty. "Poverty is breathing hopelessness and despair for too many of our citizens. Gambling for so many is now the sport of choice, with casinos opening all over the place thus bringing more pain and hopelessness to countless families.

On Disrespect and Arrogance. "Disrespect for each other is

the norm - characters are destroyed behind the telephone on talk shows with little regard for respecting the rights of others. Too many of us in authority are arrogant and filled with pride. We do not know how to serve, and the power of service as Jesus showed us in humility and love for the least among us as the most powerful means of service, seem to escape many of us in government, private sector and the church.

The Way Forward "We need to remind ourselves that more than 1/2 of this nation's population was born after Independence. This is a great challenge and a grave responsibility for us as a nation. As Belizeans we have the responsibility to make this (Please Turn To Page 7)



TOPICAL TIDBITS

Name those holes

A lesson for Belize: In Costa Rica, to bring attention to their pothole situation, a group of residents of the Comunidad de las Mansiones, in San Rafael de Montes de Oca, San Pedro, have dedicated each pothole to a government minister, including the president himself.

The residents erected signs with the names of Óscar Arias and the entire cabinet, including Karla González, the Minister of Public Works & Transport. By the giving of names to the potholes it is hoped draw attention of the powers that be to repair their road.

Even a bus company and taxis have stopped using some streets and taxis, won't come on the street, affecting the residents.

The problem in Belize, particularly along the Northern highway and in San Ignacio is that the sheer number of signs would block traffic!

Here's a tip from Atlantic Bank

Recently an Atlantic Bank customer complained that he was being charged a percentage by stores for using his

Atlantic credit card. It's not legal and the bank advised this customer to keep his receipt with the charge listed and they would discount the amount from the stores account and credit it to the customer! Good One!



BDF spotted tífing

An alert citizen noted, twice in a row, a BDF member drawing gas from the tank of one of the new BTB sponsored BDF expensive patrol vehicles for another vehicle!



Mask them



Government ministers and civil servants should perhaps wear masks when hanging out at the Casino. A former senior official in southern China has been sentenced to 20 years in jail for gambling away some 14 million US dollars in public money in Macau and Hong Kong.

Li lost most of the money during 257 visits to Macau and Hong Kong

, autonomous Chinese territories between 2000 and 2004. He was also found guilty of taking 216,000 dollars in bribes.

And the frontiers

Talking of cheating, all our border towns are now oozing contraband! It is part of a growing 'black economy' which makes a mockery of the Government's ever increasing tax burden. It also means that there is a whole new crew of crooked C & I officers making a lot, a lot of money indeed, for looking the wrong way. They are caught in the same trap - cheat or go under with normal wages no longer able to sustain decent life.

'Home coming shock'

A young couple, owners of a small lodge in Cayo, returned from their hoiddays a week ago to once more assume management from their caretakers. Two days later, before they had even unpacked, a police 'squad' raided them after a "tip off" looking for "a gun".

They found no gun but did find a

tiny quantity of weed and the raiders suggested that this little problem could be easily "solved". The couple, who knew nothing about the weed which could have been the property of any number of tourists to their lodge, were then surprised when the police, who had searched every inch of the property including the couples yet unpacked bags, took all the young lady's jewelery! Police still have it and would not even sign a note acknowledging that they had taken it! Behaviour like this is a great pity - especially just when the BDF police in Cayo seemed to be working so well together!

Expired products which are resold

Watch carefully what happens when you return a weevil filled packet of biscuits, bread or cornflakes etc., to the local Chinese for replacement. They usually put it straight back on the shelf - with a small slick of cello tape to hide the intrusion! It's not only a sign of petty crookedness but also a sign of this Government's tax

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INdependent ECO-WATCH



This week: Ara Macao Statement From Peninsula Citizens for Sustainable Development

So many questions remain unanswered about this huge development that may irreparably damage the Placencia Peninsula

For example, does the design of the proposed Ara Macao marina greatly increase the chance that the Peninsula will be split by a major tropical storm or just a Category 1 hurricane? Is there enough water for another 7,000-13,000 people on the Peninsula from the same aquifer that currently provides water to Placencia, Seine Bight, Independence/Mango Creek and Big Creek? How will run-off from the millions of cubic yards of fill from Ara Macao affect nearby coral heads, seagrass beds, and lobster and conch fisheries that currently provide Riversdale residents with most of their incomes? Will the marina groins stop sand from reaching the rest of the Peninsula and destroy its beaches? How much money will actually filter into the local economy from this gated, all-inclusive resort? Will local people really be welcome there? What happens to the 66 foot beach reserve after they cut into the shore to make the canals for their marina? Where will the money for extra police protection, schools and

medical care come from?

Although the developers submitted an EIA, these questions still have not been answered – at least not to the satisfaction of international experts who offered their professional expertise in evaluating the Ara Macao EIA free of charge – simply because of their professional concern about our very fragile and very unique Peninsula and its environmentally sensitive eco-systems.

Jobs seems to be the holy mantra for Ara Macao supporters. But, what good are new jobs if the *new* jobs just replace *existing* jobs at all the small local Peninsula businesses that fail because of beach erosion, lack of good water, or simply the presence of a huge gated resort that drives away the backbone of the Peninsula's already successful tourism industry – the independent travelers who come to the Placencia area to get away from the Ara Macao's of the world.

The developers stand to make hundreds of millions of US dollars from this development. If we're going to give investors (foreign or domestic) the chance to make those kinds of bucks off of precious natural resources that belong to all of us, shouldn't we demand that they be

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Aries

Karma works on its own unpredictable schedule, so if you're wondering when you'll be paid back for all the points you've been racking up, you're wasting your time. Just like a watched pot never boils, a watched karma account never pays off. You have to stop looking for payback. Getting benefits from good behavior is merely icing on the cake. Get back to doing the right things for the right reasons.

Taurus

Some controversy will pop up early today — stand up for what you believe, even if your peers totally disagree. You will find that you and a big-time power broker have a common goal, which means that might will be on your side. Are you prepared for your plans to come to fruition? Let's hope so, because you just may make a very valuable friend today. This is a cause for celebration! Why not pop out this weekend and buy yourself something lavish and unnecessary?

Gemini

If you've been dreaming about making a change, today is the day to make that dream come true. All you have to do is make the initial step. Don't make the mistake of expecting major transformations to happen overnight. If you need to end a relationship, you don't have to say good-bye today. Just set up a time to meet and talk. If you're working on a physical change, take each day as it comes. Time is the missing ingredient that will help you accomplish your goal.

Cancer

Your normal 'roll with it' philosophy might not be enough to get you through the trials and tribulations that this active day has in store for you. Get a grip on a more aggressive philosophy in order to make your point and get yourself noticed today. You need to be careful not to step on anyone's toes, but you don't have to worry about hurting anyone's feelings. Your built-in sensitivities will take care of that for you. Embrace a more powerful way of doing things.

Leo

Hopefully, you don't have any major shopping plans for today, because now is not a good day for financial dealings with others. This isn't a situation where you should mistrust anyone — rather, it's a time to be more considerate in how you handle your money. Your generosity is something you should value, but are you too focused on immediate gratification? Put off buying yourself a reward for a few more days, and it will feel all the more rewarding.

Virgo

Getting involved in new projects or relationships isn't the best use of your time, so say no to any invitations today, even if the opportunity seems promising. You just won't be able to devote the energy you need to ensure its success, and you won't end up making yourself proud. Stick to what is already on your plate, and to what you know you can do well. Peer pressure will get under your skin more than usual today — the best way to deal with it might be to isolate yourself from the herd.

Libra

There could be a clash of the titans today, so keep your head down and mind your own business. Getting caught up in a power struggle between two giant personalities would not be a good move. Even if you try to stay objective, it simply won't be possible — at some point, you'll end up with your back up against the wall. If someone asks you to get involved, you should say no and accept the consequences.

Scorpio

The line between your real life and fantasy life will blur today, when some amazing coincidences lead you to believe that the hands of fate are pushing you in a very particular direction. This will create a building sense of energy, and your job today is to give it someplace to go! Get involved in a project — the more artistic the better — and let your creativity take advantage of all the exciting feelings that are starting to blossom inside you.

Sagittarius

There are many distractions around you right now, and they represent many tantalizing options for self-promotion. Let yourself explore these many ideas, but try not to let go of your grasp on reality! Harmless yet slightly annoying wrinkles, such as losing things or forgetting where you're going when you're halfway out the door, could result. Strive for balance — focus on the fun things your future may hold, and on the satisfying things that are already in your life.

Capricorn

Even if you don't finalize all the details you wanted to finalize today, you are making headway toward a great goal. As you advance on this project, think of other people who either will benefit from what you are doing or can get involved and help

you get to the finish line faster. Today is a day to rally the troops and remember what you are doing all of this for. Keep your eyes on the prize.

Aquarius

Don't assume that the money you think you have in your account in actually in your account. If you have any automatic payments set up, are waiting for a transfer, or share your account with someone else, there could be recent withdrawals or fee payments that you are not aware of. Consequently, hold off on making any big (or even midsize) purchases today. There is no rush to get these things, and the risk just isn't worth it.

Pisces

Right now, experimentation is the key to finding a new formula for happiness in your life — so put on your lab coat and dust off your mental microscope! You have to try out new ideas or projects today, and urge yourself to step a bit

CLASSI-

LIQUOR LICENSE NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that **Dalmy Ramirez** of San Ignacio is hereby applying for a **Restaurant Liquor License** for **Delmy Restaurant** in Kontiki Area of San Ignacio, for the year 2007 under the Intoxicating Liquor License Ordinance, 1980.

LIQUOR LICENSE NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that **Rosa Maritza Galeano** of Santa Elena is hereby applying for a **Restaurant Liquor License** for **Cozy Inn** on Carillo Puerto Avenue, Sant Elena, for the year 2007 under the Intoxicating Liquor License Ordinance, 1980.

LIQUOR LICENSE NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that **Doroteo Chan** of Bullet Tree Falls, Cayo, is hereby applying for a **Restaurant Liquor License** for **Andrea's Restaurant** in Bullet Tree Falls, Cayo, for the year 2007 under the Intoxicating Liquor License Ordinance, 1980.

LIQUOR LICENSE NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that **Tarcito Coc** of San Antonio, Cayo, is hereby applying for a **Malt and Cider License** for **Cool Spot Bar** in San Antonio, Cayo, for the year 2007 under the Intoxicating Liquor License Ordinance, 1980.

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New Listings

Ambergris Bay (B48) Second row lot measuring approximately 57' x 100' on the west coast of Ambergris Cays. Great price. Only \$16,500.00 US or \$33,000.00 BZ.

Ambergris Bay (N19) Second row lots together measuring approximately 95' x 90' on the west coast of Ambergris Cays. Great price. Only \$60,000.00 US.

Ambergris Bay (G12) Nice beachfront parcel on the west coast of Ambergris Cays. Measuring approx. 50' of beach frontage x 95' depth. \$65,000.00 US.

San Pedro Lagoon (G38) Large water front parcel on San Pedro Lagoon. One acre only \$70,000.00 US.

Commercial/Condos/Homes

Downtown Commercial Property (B47) Best commercial location on the market right now. Corner property on "Front Street" in down town San Pedro. The property presently contains three businesses and two private residences, but has the perfect location for ocean view hotel, office building or condos. Seller may accept Belize Dollars. Price \$994,500.00 US.

Holloman Shores - Located 3.5 miles north of San Pedro Town Center - beautiful resort - great investment! All units fully furnished. (B45) Unit 518. \$220,000.00 US.

Caribe Island Resort - located approx 4 miles south of town. (M56) 1st floor 1 bed/1 bath, ocean front junior suite. \$185,000.00 US.

Upscale & Secluded Villa (A23) Custom, unique architecture, beachfront villa, 5 bedrooms, 3 1/2 baths, three story solid concrete building, totally furnished. Nothing compares in class, style or quality. Call for further details. \$1,669,000.00 US. Cash.

Back Street Home (B38) 2 story, wooden home. Lower level-3bedrms, 1 bath, open living, kitchen & dining area. Upper level-3bedms, 2 baths & 2 kitchens. \$250,000.00US.

Residential and Rental property in San Juan! (A21) 50' x 75' lot, two story concrete house with (7) rental rooms and two bedrooms/one bath owners apartment. Very fairly priced at only \$350,000.00 BZ or \$175,000.00 US.

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E-Mail: chrissey@cheersrestaurant.bz

Excerpts Canon Flowers, Independence Sermon September 2006

(Continued From Page 6)

land better than we found it.

What we can do:

1. **“We must develop personal responsibility and self esteem...** We find it impossible to love Belize or our opponents because we do not love ourselves. We belittle ourselves too much... We find it difficult to praise and honor each other as a gift and self expression due to hatred, fear and lack of the holy spirit within us.....EVEN among **SOME** Church members.

...It seems unless the politician affirms us we are nothing and have no contribution to make to build Belize...This nation belongs to **NO** politician...This nation is ours...Awake from your slumber....Belizeans... The United Kingdom will help us... but cannot and will not save us... Only we as Belizeans can do that with the help of God, by working together.

2. All Belizeans need to **honor the value of work.** We all need to develop a positive work ethic and culture. Employers must also seek to treat their employees with dignity and respect. As they demand a fair day's work for a fair days wage from the domestic worker to the CEO. Each worker must be validated.

3. **“Collectively this nation needs healing.** We need to seek to forgive each other for the past hurt in building this nation...Our political leaders must remove the personal attacks and find common ground for the good of our people, while religious leaders must set the tone and lead our people to God... but more specifically call on our members who are fanatical in their politics to put God first and to repent and not preach to their aching ears...

4. **“We need to become a compassionate people,** across political, ethnic, social and religious barriers. With 40% of our people living in poverty, there is much work to be done for more of our citizens to enjoy the fruits of an Independent Belize. The Jesus of the Gospel is truly the man for others. He demonstrates throughout his ministry the importance of taking seriously the poor, the marginalized, the suffering, the hopeless, the homeless, the broken, the unlettered, and the despised. In other words, the way compassion is not simply a device for dealing with the pain of the world, it is more significantly the way of Salvation for the world.

5. **Cherish the children.** “Too many children have no sense of

identity. Fathers need to gather their children to them, become more responsible. Extended family members need to play a more positive role in the lives of our children, rather than seeking to undermine their children's homes. Our children need to grow up in secure, caring loving environment where they are loved and can be children.”

6. **Religious leaders must lead,** “not only show up in crisis, but work daily to challenge and change the society in breaking the cycle of sin that is engulfing our people and the way of life. More importantly, the church must remain the prophetic voice of the Living God in practical, loving caring ways as our Lord himself did. Remember, He lived under Roman domination. He came to change men's hearts.... to live as God intended...WE must therefore embody the transforming presence of the living Christ...

7. **Educational/Textbook reforms.** “The church - state partnership has served this nation faithfully in the past. The church must be willing to be transparent and open with the public purse funds and willing to become more accountable, as we demand of the Government. .. How sad that after 25 years we still face a crisis with simple

text books causing so many vulnerable children to drop out of school or not to go to school at all, or if they do, fail for lack of materials that are so basic and which we have control over. .. Are our church schools governed by the principles of love, care, and forgiveness? Why are so many of our poor children disenfranchised by the education system largely run by churches? ..Why so many of our children and parents literally afraid of Principals / Managers / Teachers?

The church partners, unions and the Political directorate need to come to the table today and resolve the inadequacy of the funding of secondary education for Belize. There can be no sacred cows with tax payers money. Why are some children treated more equal than others? This is morally repugnant. Each child has the same right to education.

We owe it to Belize, and to Our God, to meaningfully address these problem before the next school year.

8. **Ethnic diversity** “We must seek to cherish and advance our ethnic and cultural diversity... We need not be afraid of any ethnic group. This is the tapestry that will make us strong and proud. As a people and nation, with common values and goals to build a Belize where justice

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Regional & International News

Why Belizeans should pay attention

Costa Rica to Compete For Regional Refinery

The Minister of the Environment and Energy, Roberto Dobles, announced that Costa Rica will compete with Guatemala and Panama in a bid to become the headquarters for a regional refinery that is worth some us\$7 billion dollars in revenue.

Dobles said that the Costa Rican proposal is to construct the industrial centre in Barranca, Puntarenas and that is Costa Rican wins the contest, construction could start as early as 2008.

The minister explained that the location is close to the three area ports on the Pacific and the Caribbean ports can be accessed by a oil pipe that already crosses the country.

The refinery will be built of 900 hectares, refining Mexican crude for export to California

as its main market. The project is waiting on the decision of the Mexican Institute of Petroleum and the Mesoamerican Energy Integration Program (PIEM, its Spanish acronym) to give out the contract for the refinery and the selection of the country will follow.

Costa Rica is one of 11 countries in the contest. However, the strongest candidates for the project are Guatemala, Panama and Costa

US-Guatemala Deportations on Rise

The increase of deportations from the United States brought about concern in Guatemala where 569 repatriates arrived last week.

"An average of 400 people are deported every week", declared to Prensa Latina Marta Altolaguirre, the deputy foreign minister of Immigration.

The foreign ministry also revealed that some had been

living in the US for over 10 years without criminal records and working permanently.

Early in this month representatives of the Union of Guatemalan Immigrants (UGE) denounced to the Congress of the Republic the existence of a plan to repatriate about 30 thousand fellow citizens in a short period of time.

Mexico gets 'parallel' president

Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the defeated candidate in Mexico's presidential elections, has been "sworn in" as an alternative president.

He wore a red-white-and-green sash like those of Mexico's presidents as he told his supporters in Mexico City on Monday that his "legitimate government" would work for the poor.

López Obrador, a left-winger, lost the presidential election in July to Felipe Calderón, a conservative, by less than one per cent and contests the result.

"There are millions of Mexicans who are not willing to accept more abuses," he said during the ceremony in Zócalo Square.

López Obrador said of Calderon in an interview in *La Jornada* newspaper on Monday: "He knows that he didn't win, that he is the product of an electoral fraud. That can not give him

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The political reforms that never took place

(Continued From Page 1)

In addition, the Prime Minister admonished the Commission to do everything possible to afford any Belizean “the opportunity to present his or her views”.

The Commission followed his instructions. They held public forums and published and distributed booklets that were utilized to solicit the views of the public on twenty different issues.

Public consultations played a major role in shaping the final report; in many areas it reflected the views of the citizens and set forth specific reforms Belizean citizens requested.

Mismanagement of public funds and bloated contracts were key concerns for the people. So was the illegal voting by Guatemalans, lack of accountability by politicians and the need for those who steal the people’s money to be held criminally responsible.

Contributions to political parties

and election financing was such a major issue the members of the commission said legislation to limit contributions **MUST** into effect **BEFORE** the next general election in 2003.

They didn’t. And they still are not law as we head towards the next General Election in 2008.

While some of the more minor recommendations **were** passed by the National Assembly, by and large, those which could have had the most far reaching and meaningful changes, were ignored by the PUP, and never followed up on by the members of the Opposition UDP.

Why? Because the leaders of the parties have **total power** and they want to keep it that way.

The spoils are indeed going to the victors, and this practice is spoiling the economy. As the Minister of National Development, Mark Espot, recently asked, “Why is Belize so rich and our people poor?”

Much of the poverty, corruption

and financial problems Belize is now facing could have been prevented if all the recommendations of the Political Reform Commission had been adopted.

But six years after the Political Reform Commission presented its recommendations, it will be hard to convince party officials to pick up the document and look at it again.

There are those who cringe when they think of laws that would make them criminally responsible for their acts. They want prison for the poor but not for themselves. They seem to lack the courage to stand up for what is right and have used the ineffective laws to loot the Country.

What the people want doesn’t seem to matter. Greed continues to control their actions.

And what of Prime Minister Musa’s initial enthusiasm after he reviewed the Commission’s Recommendations back in 2000?

Has his loyalty to his inner circle overshadowed and obliterated any

love he may have had for Belize and its citizens?

We can only speculate as to what went wrong. But it is the view of this contributor to the Independent Reformer that without legislation on campaign contributions before the **next** general election, a fair and honest election cannot be held in Belize.

Future articles will analyze and report on the Recommendations of the Political Reform Commission, tackling not only the issue of corruption and accountability, but also excessive centralization of powers, regulation of campaign financing, the House and Senate as a rubber stamp, dictatorship of the Cabinet, making the system work for the poor, protecting the rights of citizens to a basic education, decreasing official waste and considering the Village Council Act and the rights being denied to the Village Councils and

Thank you for reading this edition of the INdependent

The various anti-corruption...

Mexico gets ‘parallel’ president

(Continue From Page 8)

peace of mind. No matter how cynical he is, he can not feel secure. Calderon is the lowly servant of the white-collar criminals.”

Police barricades

Federal police have already set up barricades around the chamber of deputies to prevent López Obrador’s supporters from setting up new protest camps before Calderon’s inauguration ceremony on December 1.

Followers of López Obrador’s Democratic Revolutionary Party have threatened to disrupt the ceremony, saying that the election was won by fraud and that the president-elect “is undeserving of any respect or consideration”.

The launch of the opposition government was timed to coincide with the anniversary of the 1910 Mexican revolution, when Francisco Madero,

Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa took up arms against conservatives to found modern Mexico.

The former mayor of Mexico City has encouraged supporters to donate to his alternative administration on his website.

Since Calderón was announced the winner, López Obrador and his supporters have carried out a number of demonstrations to protest against the decision but much of his support has faded since the courts refused to overturn the result.

A poll in the *Reforma* newspaper on Monday indicated that 56 per cent of those questioned opposed his decision to name himself “legitimate president” while 19 per cent supported him.

(Continued From Page 5)

This is a Central American Integration System (SICA) Secretariat initiative. I have not read the document yet, but strongly suspect that, while some members of the Musa Government have cause for concern, this too is toothless. But with Belize set to take the Chairmanship of SICA shortly again, it would have been difficult not to sign.

Finally, we take a quick look at The United Nations’s Anti-Corruption Convention which Belize’s government has been dragging its feet in signing.

“The Convention was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 31 October 2003 at United Nations Headquarters in New York. It shall be open to all States for signature from 9 to 11 December 2003 in Merida, Mexico, and thereafter at United Nations Headquarters in New York until 9 December 2005, in accordance with article 67 (1) of the Convention. The Convention shall also be open for signature by regional economic integration organizations provided that at least one member State of such organization has signed this Convention in accordance with its article 67 (2).”

So far, the Government of Belize has excused itself from signing this convention. Has the window closed on the Musa government to become

a signatory? Perhaps. The missed opportunity, some might say, was deliberate and calculated.

The best comparative analysis that clearly delineates the differences among the various anti-corruption conventions can be found at <http://www.u4.no/themes/conventions/convpoliticalcorruption.cfm>

But what exactly are they, these various anti-corruption conventions? According to Transparency International...

“Anti-corruption conventions are written international agreements signed by state parties [Governments] which establish international frameworks of agreed rules and standards for countering corruption, in addition to serving as an expression of high level political commitment. These conventions are intended to produce better policies and practices in and among member states in the prevention, detection, investigation, and sanctioning of acts of corruption.”

If this is what they are, who can blame the Musa Government for not wanting to sign on to the UN’s version? He has nothing really to gain at home, since the natives are no longer restless and nothing to gain abroad, after the showtime signing of the Inter American Convention at the 2001 OAS General Assembly.

Comments?

Suggestions? or want to share your thoughts

Email us at

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Is there more to the Perpetually Missing Passport Reports?

Contributed

There are at least two aspects to the recent missing passport fiasco since retired Police Commissioner Zetina took over as Immigration Director. On the one hand, we have the pesky political fundraiser issue and the other that is not so obvious. In focusing on the other angle, we have to look at the Zetina timeframe because it coincides with a rather public USA Federal Government initiative that GOB (driven by Mr. Results) signed on to.

It was called the machine readable passport initiative.

The USA, post-9/11/01, clamored to get better information on people traveling to and thru the USA. So it convinced as many countries as it could to imbed in its passports information that US INS/HS equipment could read. They offered equipment & training to these countries who "expressed an interest" in cooperating and to fund the transition. The equipment sits in boxes, the new passports received, and the training remains spotty.

Now a few countries, including Belize, which hadn't already had the machine readable passports, began to waiver and basically backed off the initial agreement realizing that many of its nationals whose background were suspect would be targeted and they couldn't have that.

Now, it is well established fact that a sizable number of prominent as well as not-so-prominent [but well heeled all the same] Belizeans "haven't traveled outside Belize" for a very long time. Some of them cannot get a USA visa or have had it revoked, or in a few instances have the visa but know what awaits them in Miami. To travel anywhere outside the SICA countries and Cuba, most Belizeans have to first "transit" the USA... unless you own and/or control your own little airline company.

Given the heightened alerts on travel since 9-11, the USA would love to have the opportunity to converse with a few people a little more more, including some of our well-heeled Belizeans.

Therefore, if Belize

were to rush to comply with the USA's machine readable passport initiative, many in Belize who travel frequently to the Middle & Far East could come under a lot of scrutiny. As well, many outgoing officials may come under a lot of scrutiny after the next general elections. These pesky little machine readable things would leave a telltale trail.

So, my argument is that GOB is stone-walling the implementation of the machine readable passports and seeking to justify this delay by pointing out that those machines are not secure. Two were found in use in China, as Zetina was quick to point out. If they can be altered then they must not be effective as a USA security tool. In other words, we'd love to help you but this thing is just not secure and is causing us no end

of troubles.

You may have noticed that Belizean Embassies are no longer issuing new passports as was the practice, pre-9/11. They will only stamp in renewal/extensions on the validity of an old passport. If you live in London, for example, and your passport is fully used and needs replacement, sorry, you get one from Belize. Visit one website to verify: www.embassyofbelize.org.

The disappearance of Belizean passports from immigration offices is just another of those high-end games that usually escapes the general public and the local media's attention. The government can't explain it all to you publicly, you see, or America might get upset. So you have to read between the lines.

Sadly, foreign affairs and

international relations are not the strong suit of our media houses, so the public cannot rely on them to get the sense. And, those officials only answer the questions they are asked and offer no new meaningful information...for national security purposes, of course. Meanwhile US Embassy is mum on what must be a super-sensitive bilateral issue.

Finally, you will note the comment made by no less than Belize's highly honorable Foreign Minister on the matter: No terrorists have our [missing and presumed stolen] passports... or words to that effect. Cleverly chosen words. (See www.lovefm.com for Friday, September 30, 2006, for the exact quote.) His statements were meant for Foggy Bottom and not for you, Belize.

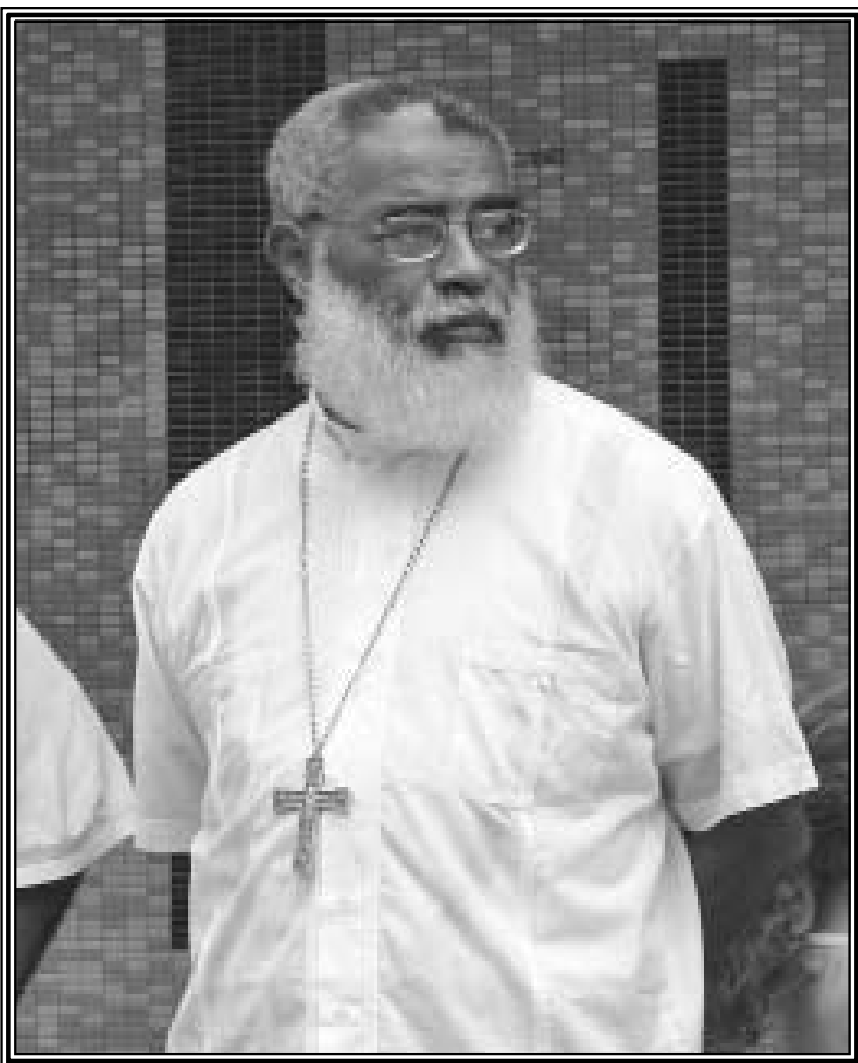
This is just analysis, mind you.



Social Page



Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II meets Belize new High Commissioner to the UK, H.E. Lawrence Sylvester and his wife Pauline.



Father Dorrick Wright has been named by Pope Benedict XVI to replace Bishop O.P Martin as Bishop of the Roman Catholic Church who retires later this year.

(Photo courtesy Manolo Romero)

“Free Stay In Belize”

➡ (Continue From Page 1)
time they WISH unless government now sits up and listens to their complaints.

The other pure plus for the industry is the huge amount of publicity it is engendering aboard with world wide write ups, which include newspaper coverage in Seattle and Washington and at least one international business TV team coming to cover the four day event ‘The ‘strike’ could in itself also turn out to be one of the most potent and far reaching promotion campaigns ever carried out in Belize.

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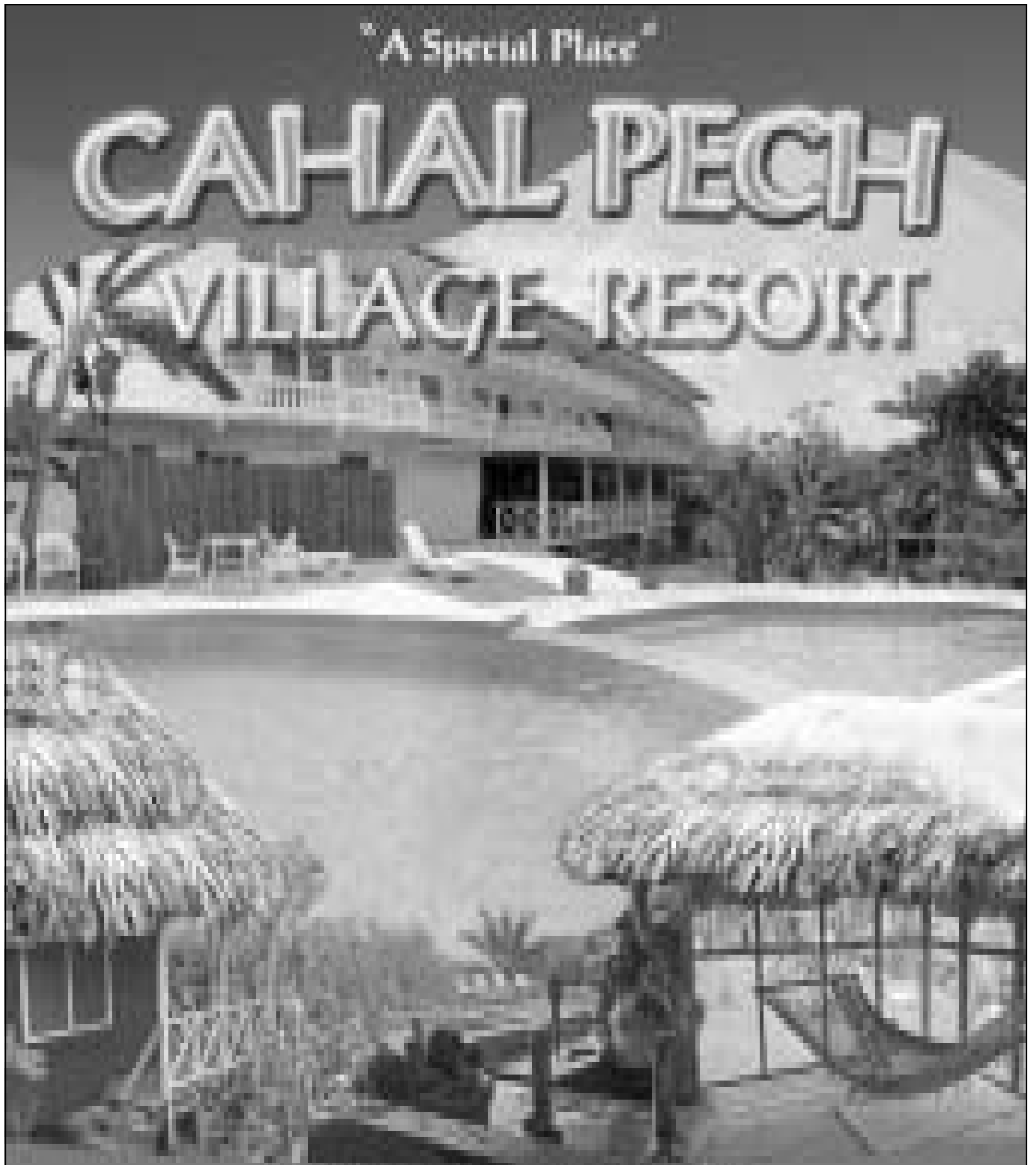


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