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for the People

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CRAB POLITICS:

Democracy in Belize: A Regression Analysis

By: **Gus A. Perera**

I read with much curiosity, the commentary which makes reference to the NGO Consortium report of 1993 dealing with the old “*stratagem to recruit new voter at election time*” through the arbitrary granting of Belizean citizenship to Central American immigrants.

The commentary aroused curiosity not so much because of its content, but more so because it was this very same issue that ignited SPEAR’s Political Reform Campaign in 1994.

Deja Vu

In 1993, not only was the passport machinery “cranked up” but voter disillusionment was at an all time high. The Belizean voters were convinced

that irrespective of which party was in power, it was always business as usual – corruption, abuse of power, and cronyism. The Belizean people were desperately looking for a space that would give them more say in the running of the country’s affairs.

Project Democracy

Between 1994 and 1997 SPEAR, with the help of a Political Reform Advisory Committee (PRAC) lead a nationwide public consultation campaign under the banner “*The People’s Agenda.*”

The objectives of the campaign included creating an increased awareness of the workings of the political system, informing citizens of their rights and responsibilities in the po-

litical arena, collecting baseline data of the perceived failures of the present political system, and finally, finding out what changes the people most wanted to see as part of any political reform effort.

By the end of 1997, the documented concerns of Belizeans fell into three categories: excessive concentration of power resulting in abuse and leadership arrogance, lack of accountability on the part of elected ministers of government resulting in corruption, and the lack of people’s participation in the decision-making process resulting in political oppression.

Poli-triks Par Excellence

In 1998, and promising political reform and power to the people, the

PUP became the “power” in Belmopan. The PUP manifesto read in part: “*The UDP rulers have shown that they are bent on achieving absolute power, whether by hijacking the House of Representatives or by manipulating the judicial system. Ministers commit crimes, squander the country’s resources and ride roughshod over the people. Their administration has provided the strongest arguments for urgent political reform.*”

In 1999, one year of their 1998 general elections victory, the PUP appointed a Political Reform Commission to review the system of governance and make recommendations for improvement with a view to achieving greater democracy. In his speech to the commission, Prime Minister Musa said – “*regard no institution, no law, and no policy or practice as sacred.*” In 2000, the Political

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The “Lady for Ladyville” Gets Commoner Support

Ladyville’s Independent Seven led by Sharon Thurton has gained the support of Belize City-based Commoners’ organization. Patrick Rogers, spokesman for the Commoners and deputy Chairman of the VIP met with the candidate for Ladyville Chairlady on March 22.

Rogers, who ran as an independent candidate in the 2003 General Elections in the Lake Independence division told Independent Weekly, “Independent slates throughout Belize deserve our assistance with logistics. We are happy to help Ms Sharon and her team in any way we can.”

Sharon has lived in Ladyville for over 30 years and is a professional caterer who owns her own business. She has sponsored the Thurton Football Club for the past 5 years.

She says although both the UDP and PUP asked her to run on their slates she feels it is in the best interest to leave the red/blue politics out of the village council. Among her top priorities are expanding the new library’s services and opening hours, and to increase participation of villagers in sporting events.



Ladyville’s Independent Seven Chairlady candidate Sharon Thurton has the support of Belize City-based Commoners’ organization. Patrick Rogers, VIP deputy Chairman.

Independent Seven village council aspirants are well known residents Fernando Leal, Reginald Williams, Martin Jimenez, Hosni Thurton and two other ladies from Ladyville Odessa Gibson and Carolee Hecker.

Other “horses in the race” includes slate identifying itself as UDP led by Lucio Choc, incumbent village chair-

man, and a blue backgrounded, presumably PUP slate, lead by Herman Blease.

Voting takes place April First at the Community Center. It is the largest, single most important village council elections of the bunch so all eligible residents are encouraged to cast their ballots.

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Belize is in a State of Tyranny!

I write in support of the VIP to form our next government.

It was the latter part of 2005 that VIP placed on record its vision and position on issues affecting Belize. In the articles and public statements that followed, the VIP warned that Belize was well into the 5th stage of corruption, bordering on a state of tyranny. Today that we are able to see and hear under oath about THE POLICY OF GOVERNMENT 1998 THRU PRESENT, it is clear that our jewel is in the final stage of corruptio: tyranny. Make no mistake about this one. In order to get ourselves out of this state of affairs we will be forced to understand it.

Recently it has been exposed that the Government of Belize is willing to see the rulings of our higher courts ignored. This is evident in the BTL/ PROSSER issue. The finances of social security and the government of Belize have not been audited for years. The DFC and Social Security coffers have been plundered into bankruptcy. Even more recently, there has been unjustified firing of BTL workers and to add insult to injury, a public lynching by way of job severance, of a lead trade union negotiator, during an ongoing industrial dispute. All this has been happening under the watch of our Director of Public Prosecutions who has the power to bring criminal charges against anyone he considers it “desirable so to do”. I feel that it is time for the DPP to act on behalf of the people and a good place to start is with criminal proceedings against those who have plundered the “poor man’s bank”.

The VIP warned in an earlier article that only the unarmed judiciary stands between the people and the armed

cabinet. You see Belizeans, our courts can rule on a matter but it is the will and force of the cabinet that implements those rulings. We see no move towards this kind of will today. So in effect we have done away with the RULE OF LAW. The cabinet now makes its own law and will force compliance.

The snubbing of our laws has lead to a cover up of loans, gifts and favors, given to the privilege within a rising Belizean oligarchy that missed its mark so far in the creation of this threatening dictatorship. This was exposed in the DFC COMMISSION OF INQUIRY HEARING. Further still, the contempt and disrespect displayed by those testifying, to the commission and in the face of Belizeans at large, exposes the true belief of those persons close to the building dictatorship.

According to the testimony from many at the heart of the near missed dictatorship, Government during the period 1998 thru present, advocated policies to create monopolies!

- 1) Novelos in transportation,
- 2) Universal Health Services in the health sector
- 3) BTL monopoly and an illegal change of its article of association.
- 4) A complete control of the consolidated revenue fund, where ministers and representatives along with senators, town councilors, and contract workers, take out more than they put into the development of the country. A recent calculation shows that the salaries of elected officials equals in some cases and surpasses that which is allocated to municipal bodies in any given year. All this done in secrecy and with the acquiescence of Her Majesty’s loyal opposition.

In understanding tyranny, Belizeans must know that elections do not equal democracy. Iraq under Sadaam had

elections, Iran has elections, and China has elections. Cuba has a form of elections but do any of those translate to true democracy or the brand of democracy we seek? The days of voting for a color must come to a quick stop if we are to get out of this looming dictatorship. As for me, I will work with the VIP especially to bring two critical changes to our system of representation.

1. To Amend the Referendum Act to allow the people to vote directly on local and national issues.
2. To Introduce a Recall Referendum to end the term of elected leaders who have lost the public trust.

Belizeans, it is time for us to wake up and act. The VIP represents a real chance for Belize to redirect our nation toward a real Belizean solution. They will work to bring to us National Unity, Productivity, Family life environment, Social Justice and Fair Representation.

Citizen Bub Sat

Beauty among debris

Dear Editor,

Now that the San Ignacio dump (sanitary land fill?) has spread out to the Western Highway, it affords easy bird watching right from your car.

There are not too many species for viewing, but the numbers of vultures are something to behold as they pick through the garbage and trash looking for choice tidbits of rotting meat.

And the lovely yellow flame created by burning hospital waste, abattoir waste, used pampers, chemical residue in plastic bottles, batteries and etc - oh yes, please include Bowen and Bowen’s “recycled” plastic bottles, is a wonder as you drive through the smog-filled night.

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Money Laundering in Belize

The U.S. Internal Revenue Service had been targeting Minnesota businessman John Priscella since at least 2003, when the agency concluded that he owed taxes on more than \$3.6 million in unreported income from 1995 to 2000.

But it was a money-laundering scheme that undercover IRS agents picked apart that finally resulted in criminal charges.

Last week, Priscella, 55, pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court to four counts of money laundering. He could face 20 years in federal prison and a fine of up to \$250,000.

His business associate, Amy Elizabeth Kirsch, a former Minnesota resident, pleaded guilty to a

single Count of tax evasion for not paying between \$30,000 and \$80,000 in tax on income of more than \$170,000 in 1998. She faces up to five years in prison and a fine of \$100,000.

IRS agents caught Priscella wiring \$35,000 to a bank in Belize, money that he believed had come from the sale of stolen vehicles, according to court documents.

Priscella had set up a “front” business, the Neighborhood Network Advisory, to funnel the money. The company provided software for people to download to get information on Amber Alerts for missing children, severe weather updates, criminals on the loose and issues of

national security, the court documents say.

Priscella told undercover agents that “no one would go after a business that supports missing children,” according to public records.

Priscella worked out of the basement of his pink, multi-level home in Crystal . In an affidavit submitted to the court, the IRS said Priscella previously had engaged in two fraudulent schemes in the state. In one, he created shell corporations and persuaded people to invest in them, selling them worthless stock in exchange for valuable possessions.

In the other, he approached private companies and convinced own-

ers that he could help take their firms public. He then gained control of company bank accounts and depleted them. According to court documents, Priscella bragged to undercover IRS agents that he was “an expert in offshore banking” and claimed to know a German businessman with “diplomatic status” who could take large amounts of cash outside of the country because he didn’t face the same security checks as others.

Priscella told the undercover agents that he had 17 offshore bank accounts, ranging from Belize to the Isle of Man, Gibraltar, Guernsey and Jersey.

story by Jackie Crosby, Star Tribune

CRAB POLITICS:

➡ (Continued From Page 1)
Reform Commission completed its task and presented to the Prime Minister 103 recommendations for political reform. Believing that the reform process had begun, the Political Reform Commission celebrated its achievement.

The Reality

Unfortunately, the assessment on political reform which was done by SPEAR in 2006 revealed the contrary – in reality, hardly any serious reform was undertaken and democracy, 25 years after Independence, remained illusive to the Belizean people.

The SPEAR Reform Assessment Report concludes by noting that political reform expectations were met with “*great disillusion and disappointment.*” It goes on to note that people’s high expectations were grossly unmet and that “*even when recommendations were made and accepted, there were no adequate human and financial resources for implementation of the recommendations.*”

“The constant reshuffling of Cabinet Ministers and the corresponding changes in staffing across the public service created instability and lack of continuity in implementation of recommendations from commissions, councils, and projects.”

Persons interviewed as part of the study expressed their view that the investigations into the Social Security and DFC scandals (and more) would yield no results, no arrests, no convictions, and that the politicians, knowing this, had, in popular Creole language “*no change fi change.*”

And so, almost 10 years after the promise of Political Reform, and 25 years after Independence, democracy in Belize has been, paradoxically speaking, “*progressively regressive.*”

And most ironically, the reality in 2007, is that our present “*rulers have shown that they are bent on achieving absolute power, whether by hijacking the house of representatives or by manipulat-*

ing the judicial system. Ministers commit crimes, squander the country’s resources and ride roughshod over the people.” **This**

administration has **once more** “*provided the strongest arguments for urgent political reform.*”

Belize fishing boat detained by Russians

YUZHNO-SAKHALINSK, March 23 (Itar-Tass) –

Russian coast guards detained the Bansei Maru fishing boat flying the Belize flag for violating the border regime.

The coast guard service said on Friday the vessel, which has not reported itself, was spotted on Thursday by a surveillance aircraft to the south of Sakhalin. It was intercepted by a coast guard ship and taken to the port of Nevelsk for investigation.



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Beer Belly Ache



By: Karla Heusner Vernon

I am standing in front of the cooler in the shop. Red Stripe, Miller, Heineken, Lighthouse, Belikin Premium and Regular. I have only a few dollars left over from the grocery shopping and man, do I deserve a cold beer after the week I had.

But like potato chips, how can you have just one?

Do you remember when we used to order a case of beer, stick six or so in the fridge to make sure they were good and cold, just IN CASE friends came by? Those were the days of house parties when people hardly ever asked you to BYOB, because everyone had enough disposable income to have house parties for no reason other than it was Friday. People would always bring extra liquor anyway or run out to get a quart of something when the supply was running low. Just to keep people at the party, stop them from drifting off to the discos.

I see a lot of people having truck parties these days. You know, standing around in front of someone’s house or outside a sporting field, drinking from the back of a pickup. Mostly contraband liquor.

It’s pretty open, not hidden at all. Contraband beer and liquor flow freely at almost every social event now from weddings to Christenings. Look out across the crowd at any sporting event and it’s a sea of Modelo, Corona Extra, Superior, Sol, MJD and Fosters, (from Airport Camp) and Heinekin in the bigger bottle (from the Free Zone), Miller Genuine Draft and Miller Light, Gallo et all. Sometimes I wonder if the only people drinking the “Beer of Belize” are the tourists.

Due to taxes and the high cost of fuel and doing business, the price of a case of Belikin beer seems like it has quadrupled in recent years. A lot of us only

buy it for special occasions now, not just to have on hand.

The price of a single beer ranges from \$2.75 to \$3 for a regular, \$3.50 for premium in shops or \$6 or more in a bar or restaurant or a dance.

It’s a shame, because right across the border you can get a Modelo for 6 pesos, about \$1.20, or 36 pesos for a six pack, or around \$7. So we can’t even get half a sick pack for the same amount of money.

Beer in Belize is not the common man or woman’s drink, as in other countries. It’s becoming more of a luxury item every day. Those of us who live in Ladyville, just a stone’s throw from the beer factory, feel particularly hurt that beer is so expensive. After all it’s a community industry that employs a lot of people. Of course, some enterprising employees are actually contrabanding Belikin and selling it for less than the factory charges. I am not sure how this is happening, but it is....imagine, smuggling **local** products. Now Bowen and Bowen not only has to worry about competition from the outside, but also on the inside.

Imported beers, I mean those brought in legitimately and on which all the customs duties and excise taxes are paid, are also in trouble. One of the merchant houses told me their sales are down 30% or more and they see Mexican products with the same label at many bars and clubs.

What can they do? People want beer and they will get it and not pay any more than they have to. Call the police and customs? That’s a good one. If I told you how many people tell me they buy the contraband from men in uniform you’d fall over backwards.

Anyway, I have had this cooler door open long enough, I have to pick a beer and leave. Do I spend a little extra for an imported lager, or pay far more than I should to support the local brew?

Or do I close the door, leave the shop and make a phone call to another supplier and get a whole case of something delivered to my door no questions asked, as long as I don’t ask any questions either?

Oh Mon, I give up. I’ll save my money on this one and spend it on three of four beers in the next time I am in Chet. Duty free, guilt free, yes, practically for free.

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Journalists under attack... as General Elections draw nearer



By: Trevor Vernon

The citizenry of the entire country of Belize has moved from just becoming restless to collectively developing a resolve to rid ourselves of the lowliness of the political directorate, (of which the leader of the opposition apparently plays some role). Things done in the dark are coming to light, for the most part thanks to the demands of the unions and the leaking of documents to the media. The politicians are now blaming everyone but themselves for their own improper conduct, including the misappropriation of public funds.

The media which was so earnestly wooed by the ruling party is now branded yellow journalists or "attack media." One particularly notorious politician went as far as calling a central media personality by a Hitler-era name. Reporters have become the scapegoats for the crimes of chief crony & his minions...as if journalists are fabricating the raping and pillaging the treasury and the natural assets of this our country, writing fictitious stories of their all-too-true dark side self-enrichment from public resources.

The people, including traditional party supporters, are increasingly disillusioned with what they are seeing and hearing of the activities of BOTH red & blue leadership. And here we **do** lump the red with the blue. When the Opposition leader can repeatedly go to court to defend the interests of the untouchable Lord Ashcroft and then brag about how well he gets paid for doing so, ultimately at the public's expense; when he

can sit beside his archrival Senator Dickie Bradley, in court and defend alleged master predators for obscene sums of monies. Then yes, the voting public will form perceptions that are not too flattering of the Hon Leader of the Opposition, and his leadership.

With outmost respect for the Hon Henry Young, I say this paper is merely reflecting widespread, and growing, public opinion. Opinions formed not as a result of any judicial review or hearings but by the public's observations from the evening news and the live broadcast of both the Senate hearing and the recently concluded DFC Commission hearing. What this paper has been saying is simply this: the opposition is perceived as having been too accommodating to the robber barons and a corrupt government, in fact he seems a primary player at many levels. The people are asking: how can you protect us, yet who set out to hurt us at the same time?

The public is now demanding more in when it comes to personal ethics of our politicians — all our politicians. The people want to see a more articulate and active integrity commission. They are demanding a less elastic, rubber stamp role from the offices of the Ombudsman, the Auditor General, the Contractor General, and, yes, the Governor General himself. The people see these oversight offices as having been reduced to simpering "yes men". People are abused, their rights violated, land and property taken away, killed through police brutality or highway repair negligence and all we get is silence, evasive comments or musical instruments for the schools. The very people who have the constitutional power to protect us from those who would exploit us, have sold out. Nothing personal to any of them, but this is what Belizeans now believe.

The media, including Independent Reformer Weekly, has an obligation to (Please Turn To Page 8)



The PoPuLaTing of Bel ize

By Richard Harrison

In the past 50-60 years, has Belize become more of a cosmopolitan society?

WIKIPEDIA describes cosmopolitan in the following way: “describing an environment where many cultures from around the world coexist; or a person whose perspective reflects exposure to a variety of cultures. It may also have the weaker senses of “worldly” or “sophisticated”.

The word derives from Greek *cosmos* (the Universe) and *polis* (city). Its sense overlaps to some extent with being a universal citizen, implying identification with a world community rather than with only a particular state, nation or people. Indeed, its first recorded usage was by Diogenes the Cynic, who described himself as a “*kosmopolites*”, i.e. “a citizen of the world”; and as such he would seek attachments beyond the local ones, disregarding the importance given to ‘accidentally’ obtained concepts of gender, place of birth, place of residence and so on.

The word is sometimes misused to mean only “the global”, either as a person who is seasoned in ways of the world, or as an adjective, to describe something with a far-reaching impact. However, it is argued by many scholars that a multicultural context, multiculturalism, is a necessity for people to develop a cosmopolitan identity.

Cosmopolitan identity would, as all other identities, be contextual and situated. This might mean that while feeling quite cosmopolitan in a situation, a person could act, for example, as a nationalist in a different context.

The cosmopolitan view is the core of cosmopolitanism, a socio-political stance or movement which sees all persons in all nations as members of a single global community — in contrast or conjunction with nationalism.

My father’s father (Charles Harrison) was of Irish-African blood coming to Belize from the Caribbean. His mother (Barbara Medina) was of Mestizo origin coming to Belize from Guatemala and Mexico.

My mother’s father (Wahib Habet) was of Lebanese origin, while her mother (Verena Lisbey) was of Afro-Mestizo origin coming to Belize from Cayman Island and Tabasco Mexico via Guatemala.

This kind of mixture is common-place in Belize.

My father was an independent type, and was the ultimate entrepreneur in my eyes. He had a thousand and one ideas for income generation, and actually made many experimental projects, from tub ice-cream to bamboo crafts, from planting beans to saw-milling timber, from operating a concession serving the British army to trading avocados and limes. He was never successful in a grand scale on any project, but I can remember my mother rationing

food in our home only once, for about a week, during my lifetime. During that week, we ate mostly over-ripe avocado with stew beans and corn tortillas. We learned very early that it was ‘normal’ for entrepreneurs to experience upward and downward trends in their economic affairs throughout their lifetime. He was the builder of a strong entrepreneurial spirit.

My mother was also fiercely independent, determined to do the best with what we had, understanding and living the meaning of ‘through good times and bad’. She also set her life by proverbs and sayings. She would tell us ‘*early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise*’. We would have to rise with the sun, and she would check that we completed all the chores that she set for us before getting ready for school. At various stages, she supervised us working in her back-yard vegetable garden and feeding the chickens that provided eggs for our table, saying ‘*if you don’t sow, you can’t reap*’. She would say ‘*waste not, want not*’, and so we were not allowed to make waste of anything. She gave the example by doing such things as making patch-work bed-sheets from clothes that did not fit us anymore. She would say ‘*make hay while the sun shines*’, otherwise we would ‘*learn how barley grows*’. Although I had no idea what hay or barley was, I got the sense very early. She loved the ‘*speed and accuracy*’ booklets we would use to do our homework. She would say ‘*don’t leave for tomorrow what you can do today*’, and she would have us working in the yard until sundown most days. If we did good work, she would reward us with evenings to play football or basketball in the neighborhood. She understood the importance of punishment and reward in shaping her children, while always expressing unquestionable love. We would have to be home before dark, or get a trashing not soon forgotten. She would listen to Seferino Coleman every evening on Radio Belize, and laugh out loud at the healthy cheer he spread to his listeners, making reference to funny things he observed taking place in our communities across Belize. She was the builder of moral and spiritual values and work ethics.

As children, my father always took one or two of us (we are ten siblings) along with him, to most places he went. Whether it was to the Royal Bank of Canada (now the Belize Bank), to negotiate financing for his projects; or to deliver logs to Mr. Johnny Roberson’s (I think he is American) sawmill in Ontario. Sometimes he would take us to Spanish Lookout, ‘just to show you how the little German boys drive tractors and plough the fields’, or to show us how the men were able to repair damaged truck parts so they could work ‘like new brand’. We got to know many parts of the country, from north to south, whether trading avo-

cados and lime, searching for reusable truck parts or just visiting his friends who lived in those parts.

I can still remember when Caesar Sherrard (I think he is South African) came to San Ignacio with his family as ‘hippies’ in a little Volkswagen van. He set up a gift shop next door renting one of Carmen Requena’s property (I understand that at one time she owned most of what is now Santa Elena), and he eventually started New Hope Trading Company. They employed many Belizeans and produced high quality wooden furniture and gift pieces for sale to tourists and later for export. My dad used to sell him mahogany and cedar lumber. Many years after, Efrain Medina who worked a long time for New Hope, started Medina’s Furniture in his back yard.

It does not take a social scientist to figure out that the populating of Belize has not been coincidental. Just looking at the Mayan population. . . .you see round faces, tall bone structures, with clear skin (almost Chinese looking eyes) in the Mopan Maya of central Belize. . . .you see darker skin with relatively short bone structure in the Quiche of southern Belize. . . .you see very tall bone structures and almost pointed in the Yucatec of northern Belize. Their features are so unique even to this day, as to suggest that they coexisted within a relatively small geographic area, with only limited inter-racial mixing. Can it be suggested that the same is occurring today with the ‘new’ Germanic, Indian and Chinese ethnics that have arrived here? Is there a deliberately high level of mixing

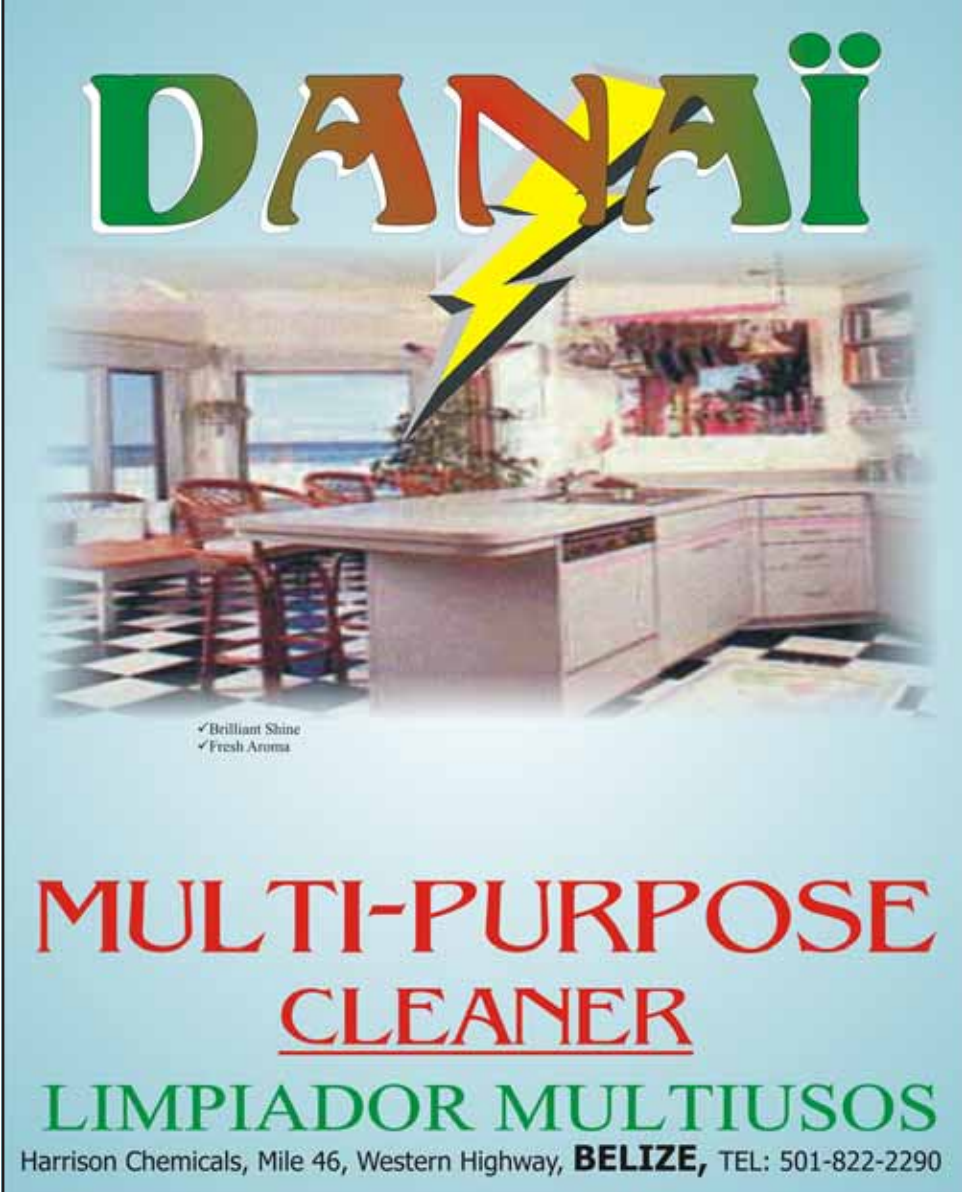
occurring between the ‘indigenous’, Hispanic and black populace? Are these behaviors deliberately ‘promoted’ within the subcultures that ‘motivate’ each group? Are there new trends in inter-racial mixing among Germanic and Hispanic persons? Is there a trend in the mixing of American ex-pats and the ‘local breed’? If so, what motives or ‘drivers’ are at work here?

It was not by coincidence that people of African and European origins landed and settled here among the ‘indigenous’ peoples. Even ‘indentured’ laborers from China and India did not land here by coincidence. Christian Lebanese and Palestinians who came here, and all over Latin America, were escaping difficulties in their own countries. Guatemalans, Hondurans and Salvadorans who have been moving here in great numbers also sought to escape wars and economic strife in their own countries. The scale of this generational influx of ‘foreign’ people could in no way be considered ‘insignificant’, given the relatively small population of Belize. Many Belizeans go to other countries, mostly the USA, to escape difficulties they perceive they cannot overcome here, to reunite with their families who went before, to pursue the ‘high life’, or by adjusting to their circumstances. People might be coming here for similar and justified reasons.

In this decade, Belize is observing another large scale influx of ‘foreign’ persons. Again, this is by no coincidence.

Some local business leaders have expressed the need for Belize to populate

(Please Turn To Page 8) 



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Zee's Genius

By: Meb Cutlack

Zee Edgell's new novel "Time and the River" is being launched this week at the Bliss.

It seems an appropriate moment to revisit her first book, 'Beka Lamb,' a book that truly reflected life in Belize at the time Zee was growing up.

Extraordinarily, and perhaps distressingly, the main character (Toycie's) experiences then, almost 3 generations ago, still reflect many of the socially crippling and negative aspects of our Belizean society today.

Zee's portrayal of Toycie and her relationship with her young man from among Belize's upper class; her pregnancy out of wedlock and of being dishonoured and flung out of school, of being deserted by the father of her child, is all too familiar - even today.

Back then did Toycie and Beka faced a different set of standards in educa-

tion, social ideas and ideals? As Zee wrote, the school's attitude was: "In cases like this, we believe it is entirely up to the modesty of the girl to prevent these happenings".

Toycie then, and a lot of today's young women face the same set of circumstances, disgrace and a single mother's life of trying to raise a family.

In Beka Lamb, Emilio, the father of Toycie's child, faced no consequences. He was not expelled from school. He was able to receive the education his wealthy family paid for and look forward to a job and position in society when he graduated.

Toycie was however damned and everything Troycie's aunt had saved for Toycie's education was wasted. Isn't it equally true today that there are hundreds of girls like Toycie out there? And also, hundreds of under privileged girls and youths particularly, from among the

poor, who are still being brought up by a relative because 'mother', and often 'father' too, is 'away' in the USA.

While the sheer brilliancy of 'Beka Lamb' written some years ago, still resonates as if it was written yesterday, its clear message is an indictment of Belize today.

Where is the future so glibly promised by Independence? Where has it gone? How brutally our politicians, and many of our big businesses, have corrupted it, have taken away hope and promise from generation after generation of young Belizeans. Too often, not even by intent but by selfish corruption and greed - the only ingredients necessary to stop a society dead in its tracks.

Here's Zee 'history': Born Zelma L. Tucker in Belize City. Zee has had a variety of careers. She received a diploma in journalism from the Polytechnic of Central London, and then furthered her

education at the University of the West Indies. She then worked for the "Daily Gleaner" in Jamaica from 1959 - 1962, and next became editor of the "The Reporter". She also taught at St. Catherine Academy in Belize City.

In 1981, she was appointed Director of the Women's Bureau in Belize. From 1984 - 1985, she assumed the portfolio of vice president of the YWCA in Nigeria, and was also a UNICEF consultant to the Somali Women's Democratic Organization. Back in Belize in 1986, she became Director of The Department of Women's Affairs.

Zee is currently Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Kent University, Ohio. Zee has written three other novels since Beka Lamb. In Times Like These (1991). The Festival of San Joaquin (1997) and now Time and the River.

Welcome Home Zee!

Tourism decision making: a matter of fact

By: Sir Ronald Sanders

A new study commissioned by the Caribbean Hotels Association (CHA) has re-emphasised the important role that tourism plays in the economies of many Caribbean countries, and has pointed to opportunities for locally and regionally produced goods and services.

The study entitled, "The Caribbean Accommodation Sector as a Consumer of Locally Produced Goods and Services and Contributor to Government Revenues" was produced by Tourism Global Inc with funding from the European Union (EU) and the African Caribbean and Pacific Group.

Informed decision-making about tourism by both governments and the private sector in the Caribbean has suffered from insufficient information based on hard evidence.

This is the second study that the CHA has commissioned recently on the Caribbean tourism industry in an effort to guide decisions on the basis of knowledge rather than hunch. An earlier study conducted by the World Travel and Tourism Council in 2004, established the considerable contribution (an average of 65%) that tourism is making to the GDP of the region.

The ten countries covered by the new study are: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Dominican Republic, Dominica, Jamaica, St Lucia, St. Kitts & Nevis, Trinidad & Tobago and the US Virgin Islands.

It is noteworthy that the US Virgin Islands was sufficiently keen for the study to be conducted that it paid for

its own participation.

Guyana, which was invited to participate, declined. The new Minister of Tourism, Mannie Ram Prashad, who appears keen to get the sector moving Guyana, said this was a private sector decision.

The point of the study was to quantify what a sampling of the hotels (small and large) in the 10 countries spends on an annual basis on locally and regionally produced goods and services, and their contribution to the revenues of governments.

Only 54 of the 604 hotels in the ten countries responded. Of these the properties in the USVI and Trinidad and Tobago were reported to be outstanding in their cooperation.

This reticence in providing information indicates two things: the intensely competitive character of the hotel business in the Caribbean, and a lack of appreciation by hotel managers and owners of the value of research and data to their own decision-making. It is an area in which CHA will have to work continuously in the future to educate its members.

In any event despite the fact that only 8.9% of the properties responded, the study concluded that "the sample size overall was sufficiently large to make generalizations with a level of precision of plus or minus 5% at a 95% level of accuracy".

Some of the findings are as follows:

- 93% of the utilities, i.e., electricity, water and telecommunications purchased by hotels comes from the local economy;

- 84% of services required by the hotel sector are being purchased locally.
- 74% of vegetables used by the hotel sector are produced locally;
- 67% of dairy products are sourced locally;
- 63% of meats are sourced locally;
- the hotel sector provides employment at the average rate of 2.3 employees per room, spending \$61.1 per room per day in payroll and related costs in 2005;
- The hotel sector provides direct entrepreneurial opportunities in at least 14 areas identified in the survey e.g. taxi concessions, water sports, spas and beauty salon, gift and craft shops and restaurants.

But, there are areas in which the hotels could do better and which provide opportunities for local and regional businesspeople including fishermen, interior designers and construction firms.

For example in a region whose waters are abundant with fish, only 20% of hotel needs is purchased locally. The share of the local market for fresh fruit and eggs is even worse at 16% and 10% respectively.

The hotels claim that "factors beyond their control influence their ability to procure locally, such as local supply chain elements -e.g. availability, quality, price, reliability, and logistics and convenience, as well as intra-regional shipment issues on a regional scale".

This points, once again, to the urgent need for a regional transportation policy for the efficient and swift movement of goods within the region, and the oppor-

tunity for reliable shipping to fill an obvious void. Equally, there is need for Caribbean countries to develop agricultural production and marketing plans, and to dismantle barriers to the importation of fish, fruit and eggs from regional neighbours.

Were such arrangements in place, Guyana, Dominica, St Vincent, St Lucia and **Belize** could provide much of the fish, fruit and other agricultural products still being imported by the hotel sector in the region.

The study also revealed that less than one-half (47%) of requirements for light manufacturing is sourced locally even though some items are higher than the average. For example bakery has an 80% share of the market, non-alcoholic beverages 66%, uniforms 60%, and printing and stationery 56%.

Expenditures on construction and fitting out of hotel plant are extremely low with market share at 39% locally and 8% regionally.

CHA should be congratulated for its effort to raise the basis of decision-making about the tourism industry from hunch to research.

Now governments and the private sector should join them in taking advantage of the obvious opportunities to keep more of the tourist dollar in the local and regional economy.

Sir Ronald Sanders is a business executive and former Caribbean diplomat who publishes widely on small states in the global community. (Caribbean News Net, March 10, 2007).

The PoPuLaTing of Bel ize

➡ (Continued From Page 7)

itself with more consumers so that they can sell more of their produce and grow their domestic-market-oriented businesses. Some business leaders and political leaders expressed the opinion that without 'investors' and/or 'laborers' from abroad, Belize will not be able to develop itself. Is there a deliberate racially motivated attempt at latinizing Belize, or is it primarily an economically motivated issue of populating Belize with 'consumers'? We would be in a better position to answer this question if Haiti was also one of our next door neighbors, and we were making an obvious choice of Latins or Blacks. Belize has undertaken to promote its tourism ambitions to north Americans, and their entrepreneurs are listening and coming here in increasing numbers. Would it not be interesting to know the percentage of tourism businesses in Belize which are owned by Americans or naturalized American-Belizeans? The US policy of restricting the entry of persons from the Middle East and Asia has also

generated significant demand for immigration to Belize, as a stepping stone to that country; given that the US '*barrier to entry*' of Belizean nationals into their country is set relatively low. Belize's accommodating realities for get-rich-quick by any means' subculture would make it quite attractive to such persons as they bounce on the trampoline. Belize's 'guided' relations with Nigeria, Cuba and CARICOM has also stimulated increasing immigration from those parts, especially of professionals who come here and later bring their families to settle.

Thus exists a strong demand for work permits and residential/nationality status by foreign nationals in Belize...and the purported thriving trade in such 'rights'. Like drugs, any industry with strong demand for its commodity with comparative advantages will continue to operate, even if it is made illegal and loses its revenue heading in the national budget. The income is thus lost to the national treasury, and would thus accrue to the private peddlers and their accomplices who would

take the risk of operating illegally.

Belize's lax policy on immigration, on distribution of national resources to foreign nationals, on law enforcement willingness and capability, in dispense of justice, and in exportation of funds, has been inviting influx of other types of prospecting 'investors'. In many instances, it can be argued that these prospectors are not required to attend to the responsibilities that should accompany the rights that they enjoy here in Belize. Some of them come from very vast countries, where national laws are not as well known or respected as their own laws and they learn to make do with what they can 'get away with'. In any case, if difficulties arise here, they just flee and alter their identity or are pronounced as expired persons back in their vast territories.

Since Independence, Belize's immigration policy has been mostly influenced and determined by persons who fancy themselves 'internationalists'. To them it seems, citizenship and nationality is just another tradable commodity. In Belize,

immigration may be one of the biggest industries. Unfortunately for Belizeans, it may be interpreted that this industry might have been relegated to the grey market by way of elitist collusion, exploiting the nationalist views of most Belizeans, by pandering in public with nationalist pronouncements while it could be business unusual. Like most other state-regulated industries in Belize, it would be described as a monopoly, or at best an oligopoly; if there are only a small number of actors and beneficiaries.

There is a lot of good that can come about when foreign nationals bring new skills, know-how and resources to Belize, and use them in ways that Belizeans can learn and develop themselves. We should be aware that with every opportunity comes risks, and it may be wise to take steps to mitigate those risks.

Does all this mean that Belize is bound to become increasingly cosmopolitan? And if so, is 'cosmopolitan' diametrically opposed to 'nationalist'?

Remittances to Latin America from US top \$100B

reprinted from www.iadb.org

GUATEMALA CITY – Remittances to Latin America and the Caribbean will continue to grow in coming years and surpass \$100 billion a year by 2010, according to the Inter-American Development Bank's Multilateral Investment Fund (MIF).

MIF Manager Donald F. Terry today presented the estimate for the money transfers made by Latin American and Caribbean migrants at a news conference held here on the eve of the annual meeting of the IDB Board of Governors, which will convene here Monday and Tuesday.

"Given present economic and demographic trends in Latin America and the Caribbean and in industrialized countries, remittances will continue to grow in volume over the next few years to more than \$100 billion a year by 2010," he said.

For the IDB and the MIF, added Terry, this growth is not a cause for celebration because it reflects the fact that the region cannot generate sufficient income opportunities to prevent millions of people from migrating.

Nevertheless, he said, remittances will continue to flow and already exceed both foreign direct investment and overseas aid to Latin America and the Caribbean, helping millions of families to escape poverty.

"The challenge for the countries in this region, and for institutions such as the IDB and the MIF, is to find ways so these flows may have a greater development impact by offering migrants and their families more options to get more out of their

money," Terry said.

The IDB and the MIF support programs to expand the economic impact of remittances by encouraging financial institutions to handle these flows so that people who send or receive money transfers may build credit histories and gain access to services such as savings accounts, insurance, pensions and business and housing loans.

The MIF will also support a new program launched by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), which will establish a \$10 million facility to finance projects to cut the cost of making money transfers to remote rural areas around the world.

Remittances in 2006

Latin American and Caribbean countries last year received some \$62.3 billion from its migrants, mostly

in North America, Europe and Asia. The total was 14 percent higher than the amount for 2005, said Terry.

At \$23 billion, Mexico was by far the top recipient of remittances, followed by Brazil (\$7.4 billion) and Colombia (\$4.6 billion).

Several countries received slightly more or less than \$3 billion: Guatemala, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador and Peru.

For 2007, Terry said, the MIF expects remittances to Latin America and the Caribbean to rise to around \$72 billion.

About the MIF

The Multilateral Investment Fund promotes private sector development in Latin America and the Caribbean, with an emphasis on microenterprise and small business. The MIF, which

is administered by the IDB, makes investments, loans and grants to finance innovative projects in areas such as microfinance.

The MIF began analyzing remittances in 2000 to gauge their volume and economic impact. Their studies and projects spurred competition among service providers and encouraged financial institutions to enter a market traditionally dominated by money transfer companies.

The fund currently finances various programs seeking to leverage remittances and expand access to formal financial services for migrants and their families as well as to stimulate economic activity and job creation in their communities of origin.



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Anita Tupper
Christine Tupper

Your weekly

HOROSCOPE

ARIES (Mar. 21- April 20)
Stand up and propose your ideas, and you'll be surprised how many people will follow you. You will enjoy events that lean toward theater, art, or music this week. Purchases will be well worth it and they will last a long time. Channel your energy into decorating or household chores. Your lucky day this week will be Monday.

TAURUS (Apr. 21- may 21)
You may find that depression is causing you to feel lonely and insecure. Take the time to close deals that have been up in the air. Entertain those who can provide you with valuable information and knowledge. Your energy will be high. Your lucky day this week will be Tuesday.

GEMINI (May 22-June 21)
Try to get others to stand behind your good judgment. Don't rely on others to do your work. This is a great day to mingle with people you would like to impress. Try not to argue about trivial matters. Your lucky day this week will be Monday.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)
You will learn valuable skills if you sign up for seminars this week. Entertainment could cost you more than you expect. Pamper yourself this week. Do things because you want to, not because someone else thinks you should. Your lucky day this week will be Tuesday.

LEO (July 23-Aug 22)
Try to keep your opinions to yourself. Emotional disputes will only end in sorrow. Take a long look at your present direction and consider your

professional options. Accept the inevitable and continue to do your job. Your lucky day this week will be Sunday.

VIRGO (Aug. 23 -Sept. 23)
Need some adventure in your life? Exotic destinations beckon you. Put your efforts into physical fitness programs or competitive sports. You can convince others to follow suit. Be diplomatic when dealing with in-law. Your lucky day this week will be Tuesday.

LIBRA (Sept. 24 -Oct. 23)
Everything is moving quickly, just the way you like it. Look into making changes to your personal papers and don't neglect those bills that have been piling up. Be careful not to lead someone on if you truly have no interest. You may overspend if you travel this week; however, the trip will be one to remember. Your lucky day this week will be Sunday.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24 - Nov. 22)
If you go shopping, only take what you can afford to part with. You won't be able to keep a secret. Depression may be likely if you're away from home. Travel for business purposes may bring the highest returns. Your lucky day this week will be Tuesday.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 23 -Dec. 21)
Your ability to talk circles around your colleagues will help you forge ahead in the workforce. Trips should be your choice. Pleasure trips will bring you into contact with new and interesting people. In-laws or older individuals may give you a bit of a hard time this week. Your lucky day this week will be Saturday.

Teen

Page



I dream of a better tomorrow... where chickens can cross roads and not have their motives questioned

Live like every day is the last day
Love like you have never been hurt
Dance like no one is watching

Heck is where people go who don't believe in gosh

You laugh at me cuz I'm different. I laugh at you cuz you're all the same.

I'm not totally useless! I can be used as a bad example

You have the right to remain silent. Anything you do or say will be exaggerated or misquoted and used against you.

Live your life so the preacher won't have to lie at your funeral.

It's all fun and games until someone pokes an eye out... and then it's hilarious.

There is a fine line between fishing and just standing on the shore like an idiot.

I never apologize. I'm sorry, but that's just the way I am.

A day without sunshine is like night.

Don't look at me in that tone of voice

7/5 of the population doesn't understand fractions

Two wrongs don't make a right... but three rights make a left

I love animals... They're delicious!

Keep watching....maybe I'll do a trick

Never Knock On Heaven's Door...ring the bell then run (he hates that)

I'm usually skinny and gorgeous but its my day off!

God, if you can't make me skinny, please make my friends fat!

CAPRICORN (Dec 22.- Jan. 20)
You may want to invest in something that will grow in value. Don't back down but don't ignite the situation. Your ideas are right on the mark and your work commendable. You will be too quick to point your finger at your mate. Your lucky day this week will be Saturday.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 21 -Feb. 19)
Make sure that you have all the pertinent information before any reprisals or making any moves. Focus on your domestic scene. Get together with friends or relatives. Get thinking about prolonging longevity. Try not to spend too much on children or entertainment. Your lucky day this week will be Thursday.

PISCES (Feb. 20-Mar. 20)
You should be putting in some overtime. You will have a tendency to put on pounds. You can make progress if you deal with the right individuals. Pleasure trips will be favorable and bring about romance. Your lucky day this week will be Thursday.



THE

hunt

FOR

GOOD

FOOD

with Anthony Hunt

NERIE'S RESTAURANT

Douglas Jones St. & Daly St, Belize City

★ Nerie's is practically a Belizean institution. From their humble beginnings on Freetown Rd, to an expansion to a second place on Daly St, to new digs on Douglas Jones, their take on traditional fare has always remained consistent and above par. While, again, there are better places for overall food delectability, some items do set Nerie's apart. Their escabeche and their chirmole are good, especially when you get the nice hot tortillas, and their fried fish is worthy of a seaside diner in Caye Caulker. But, alas, one of my "spies" classified their rice and beans with stew chicken as just "ok", so there is room for improvement. They do get an "A" for service and atmosphere though, and with two locations, you don't have to go far out of your way.

Note: I had to send out the reviewer's agents (properly screened of course) on this assignment as target establishments are beginning to spot me out!

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Inspired



Insights

Church's Mystery



By: Rev'd LeRoy Flowers

Here is the mystery of the Church of Christ, a true, impenetrable mystery.

She has the power to give me holiness, yet she made up all, the way through, of sinners- and what sinners!

She has the omnipotent and invincible faith to renew the Eucharist, yet she is made up of weak men groping in darkness and fighting daily against the temptation of losing their faith.

She carries a message of pure transperance, yet she is incarnate in a

mess of dirt, which is the dirt of the world.

She speaks of the sweetness of the Master, of his nonviolence, yet in history she has sent armies to disembowel infidels and to torture heretics.

She carries a message of evangelical poverty, yet she often seeks gifts and alliances with the powerful.

We have only to read the Inquisition trail of St. Joan of Arc, to convince ourselves that Stalin was not the first to falsify charges and corrupt the judges.

We have consider what the innocent Galileo was made to sign under threats to be convinced that the personnel of the church, although they make up the Church, are often evil and fallible personnel, capable of making errors as great as the earth's path round the sun.

It is useless to want anything else from the Church except this mystery of infallibility, sanctity and sin, courage and weakness, credibility and the lack of it.

People who are dreaming of something different from this reality are simply wasting time and keep going back to the beginning again. Moreover, they show they have not understood human-kind.

Because that is human, just as the Church shows us to be, in our wickedness and, at the same time, in our invincible courage, which faith has given us? And the love of Christ has us live.

The Church exists, not for the pious and righteous, but for sinners and godless man. It must not judge and condemn, for all the gravity of its message, but heal, forgive, save. Its inevitable warnings must not be and end in themselves, but a reminder of the offer of grace held out by God. It can never, despite all its graces it has received, indeed precisely because of the grace it has received, pretend to be self-righteous caste or class of pure and holy men. It can never assume that unholy, godless and evil things exist only outside itself. There is not endangered, frail, and unstable, constantly in need of correction and improvement. The front-line between the world and the reign of God passes directly through the centre of the Church, through the heart of every individual member.

A Church which in these last days does not realize that it is composed of sinful men and exists for sinful men, must grow hardhearted, self-righteous and without compassion, deserving neither the mercy

of God nor the confidence of men. But a Church which is genuinely aware that only the perfect reign of God can divide wheat from tares, good fish from bad, will be granted the grace of holiness and righteousness which it cannot create for itself. Such a Church will know that it has no need to affect a high moral tone for the world's benefit, as though everything in it were as good as it could be: it will know its treasures are stored in very earthly vessels, that its lights are dim an flickering, its faith weak, its knowledge lacking, its confession of faith halting. It knows that there are no sins and omissions to which it cannot be tempted and to which it has not, in one way or another, yielded and that however much it continues to keep sin at a distance, it has no reason to keep the sinner at a distance also. The Church would be unable to enter the Kingdom of God justified, if looked down self-righteously on publicans and sinners. But if the Church, as the fellowship of those who are called to righteousness and holiness, remains aware of its guilt and sin, then it may live in joyful assurance of forgiveness, then in the dawning reign of God its unholy members will be saints, then it need have no fear despite the almost irresistible temptations to which it is exposed and despite its constant failures and mistakes. For the Church has been promised that he who humbles himself shall be exalted. This is the Church we are called to build and be to the world.

Journalists under attack...

➡ (Continued From Page 5)

report what is going on in Belize. Including things the politicians do not want the public to know. We will print letters and articles from people who are fed up, feel this government has been too long in office. That's just the way it is. The SPEAR Polls has twice confirmed that the majority of Belizeans feel this way, it is there in black and white for the entire world to see.

And furthermore, when faced with these harsh economic realities of being taxed on everything including medicines and death certificates, the Belizean people have had to shed their inhibitions of the overbearing traditional respect for the "honorable" elected politicians. They are no longer afraid of The Minister's tactics of intimidation. They are truly freeing themselves from the mental slavery and demanding better of elected representatives.

Belizeans will continue to show their displeasure, at the current polling for elections of the 192 or so Village Councils and we will continue to report it. The government can try to hide the results, the Red & the Blue can claim all the victories they wish but that's not the reality in the streets and picados of the countryside. The people are waking up from the slum-

ber. The daily pains are too great for them to remain in the state of mass party hypnosis. They will vote for independent slates, where the choice exists.

So we believe that the media, especially the non-aligned houses, needs to be united in our opposition to the predators on both sides of the house who are inciting and instigating their

troops to bring harm to more journalists. The sustained attack as vicious as the ones being visited on our 2006 man of the year is an attack on us all. We must band together to fight this grave injustice; because, if we don't they'll feel free to take it to the next level and we could end up getting our faces peeled off just like the late freelance court reporter & jour-

nalist, Richard Hulse who was found viciously murdered in his home a month ago...without any semblance of a real investigation.

The MEDIA is not to blame for the mess Belize is in. We all know exactly who is responsible. But not to worry, they will fall from glory soon enough.

And when they do, we will all be there to comment on it.

Nature's Way Guesthouse

In Punta Gorda

Welcome To Nature's Way Guesthouse

Clean, Safe, Affordable,
Central Location Sea Front View & Breeze
Single \$23BZD, Double \$33BZD,
Triple \$48BZD
Get off bus at Catholic Church on
Main & Church Streets, walk down
hill 75 yards to Guesthouse.

TOPICAL TIDBITS

Huge drug catch



(Reuters) - U.S. and Panamanian officials made one of Central America's biggest drug busts on March 14, seizing 11.4 tonnes of cocaine worth an estimated \$200 million on a ship bound for the United States. U.S. Coast Guard and Panama's anti-drug police stopped the boat in the Pacific Ocean after it had left Panama and arrested eight Venezuelan men aboard a **Belize registered vessel**.

Belize in cheating scheme



(AP) A federal judge has ruled the founder of a debt management firm accused of cheating thousands of debtors is in contempt of court for trying to shield assets from a fund set up to repay the former customers of his company.

U.S. District Judge Peter Messitte ordered Andris Pukke to turn over roughly \$40 million worth of disputed holdings that include proceeds from an Internet gambling venture, a Belize housing development and a California mansion.

Messitte said Pukke had not been forthcoming with a receiver the judge appointed to find Pukke's assets. He

said Pukke's credibility was "zero" and that he continued to obscure his holdings even during lengthy testimony during the 10-day contempt hearing. "I cannot let pass the duplicity I found in this case," Messitte said. Messitte froze Pukke's assets in 2005 while the FTC case was still pending, and appointed the receiver, Robb Evans & Associates to track down his holdings. In the fall, the receiver asked Messitte to hold Pukke in contempt, saying he was using family and friends to hide substantial sums. Pukke did not comment after the ruling. Messitte said he would consider possible jail time if Pukke continues to shield his funds.

The receiver claimed the hidden funds included a \$10 million stake in a project to build multimillion dollar homes near a Belize game preserve, a purported interest in an online gambling venture worth \$20 million, Latvian bank accounts and a \$6.45 million Laguna Beach, Calif., mansion that was bought in the name of a friend. In his testimony, Pukke denied the charges that he was not forthcoming about his holdings. He said he invested \$3 million in the Belize game preserve but lost much of his stake after declaring personal bankruptcy in 2005. He said the Latvian bank accounts were controlled by his father, who used the money to help pay his son's hefty legal fees.

Lesson for Belize



British politicians have voted to reform the country's unelected upper house of parliament, the House of Lords, making it fully elected for the first time in its history.

Following two days of debate in the House of Commons, members voted 337 to 224 in favour of evicting all 'hereditary peers' in the House of Lords. In the UK, it has been traditional to appoint hereditary peers - Lords who serve a life term rather than a fixed period in office, an unusual practice in most democracies.

The vote will not automatically become law, but the government says it will take the results into account when

it draws up legislation later in the year.

The debate examined 10 options for proposed laws to reform the chamber, including splitting the Chamber equally between elected and appointed peers.

Leaky Border



Mexico, Prensa Latina - Trafficking with people, drugs, arms and Central American women is commonplace in Quintana Roo, at the southern Mexican border with Belize.

Hundreds of places are unguarded at what El Universal daily defines as a liquid, unmarked, imaginary border along the 112 mile Hondo River.

Such are the cases of La Unión, San Francisco Botes, Cacao and El Ingenio villages. People can cross the river on foot from Belize to La Unión, and although the Navy improved their patrols, they neither request ID at night nor detain anyone.

Next to San Francisco Botes, in September the Belize Police seized cargoes of AK-47 and AR-15 rifles heading to Mexico and detained seven Nicaraguans and one Belize

citizen abandoned along the roadside in Cacao.

El Universal also talks of brothels operating with Central American women in El Ingenio, a sugar plantation village.

Not Condeleeza, the other rice



Reuters reports that Mexico is conducting tests on U.S. rice imports to ensure it is free of genetic material not approved for human consumption, a government official said on Wednesday.

Marco Antonio Meraz, who heads a federal Biosecurity and GMO commission, said the government was testing for the LL Rice 601 strain, which contaminated the U.S. commercial supply last year.

The USA Rice Federation said on Wednesday Mexican officials had stopped rice shipments at the border and were asking for certification that the grain is free of the genetically modified material.

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Environmental planning: it's terribly important to Belize — RIGHT NOW!

By: Nadja Chamberlain

Being an environmental advocate in Belize will require some knowledge of environmental planning in order to help protect Belize, so here are thoughts to ponder in this second of a series of articles.

Because Belize is a small country and has a small population, environmental planning is do-able for the entire country. Belize has a treasure chest full of natural resources that provides us with a high quality of life; but we have to protect those resources from poorly planned development. We could lose this quality of life either through many poorly planned small development projects or through a few poorly planned large developments. Well-planned development that considers the impacts on our way of life and the impact on the environment can be beneficial to all, including the developers, while thoughtless development impoverishes us.

Let's look at how the process of environmental planning for the future works because we can all make contributions to it. First of all we need a big topographical map of Belize and some folks with knowledge of land use, natural resources, and geology, for example. Here are some of the considerations we need to make:

We will begin by marking off areas where people should not live like

flood plains, steep slopes, and groundwater recharge areas. We would mark off the 66 ft. buffer zones that are Queen's Lands and are for public benefit, i.e., those areas where both freshwaters and salt waters meet the land. Saving this buffer is presently the law but in some places the law is not being respected. We would mark off a buffer zone of the mangroves that protect our shorelines and provide nursery areas for our important fisheries, and we would mark off buffer zones around the edges of our lagoons and estuaries to protect our fisheries. Of course, archaeological sites would be marked off as would be areas that are already considered as parks and reserves. There are other concerns such as environmentally sensitive areas of endangered plants and animals that should be protected and these have already been identified in studies of the special areas of Belize. We would need to mark off shoreline parks so the people will always have access to the sea. Belize already has some wonderful inland parks but the sea-land interface need protection, too. Next would be to mark off areas of soils that are good for those important agricultural uses that add so much to our good nutrition in Belize. OK, these are just some examples and you get the idea about this part.

Then we would look for areas that

could be developed in the future without hurting our wildlife habitat, our fisheries habitat, our water supplies and other important factors that support our treasure chest of natural resources.

If we're really smart to start with, the areas that we look for to develop will have elevations at least 20 feet above sea level so that 50 years from now we won't be building dikes and dams to hold back the sea that is rising with climate change. Living on higher elevations in the coastal areas will also protect us from hurricane storm surges. This will also leave our existing undeveloped coastal areas for recreational uses by the people and so they can continue their traditional lifestyles. We would then never have to worry about not having access to the sea like in Florida where nearly all shorelines have been blocked off for private use and going to the few beach parks means being squashed together with thousands of others trying to enjoy the seaside.

After we find the very best areas for development, we can get to the community level where people can have input on how they want to live, where they want their neighborhood parks to be, where their children's schools should be, what would be their opportunities for employment, and to tell what would be important for them in a new community. They can even plan where the village dump should go, i.e.,

where the toxins from the garbage won't filter down into their groundwater, and how the dump can be downwind where the smells from the facility won't drift into their neighborhoods from time to time. Even in the communities, we could have wildlife corridors so a squirrel in Corozol could jump from tree to tree until he got to Punta Gorda, and singing birds would remain a part of our life.

We are small in population, we have land, and we have choices right now. But this is RIGHT NOW! We are starting to grow in some ways that are not beneficial to all. Let's demand that we stop and do some serious environmental planning and even put a moratorium on the sale of large parcels of government land until the people of Belize can do this planning for their future. Belizeans could still ask for the smaller parcels of land that are their due, but let's leave as much of our government land intact so that we could trade for land we'd like to have for specific uses in the planning process.

Carefully consider what has been proposed here. If you agree with the concept, ask those who are going to be running for office if they would support environmental planning that would benefit the entire country. And be prepared to be a part of the planning process by offering your services in your area of expertise.

E-Government prizes to be awarded

In a bid to promote greater public sector transparency and citizen participation, the Organization of American States (OAS), partnering with the Institute for Connectivity in the Americas (ICA), today launched the "excelGOV" electronic government prizes.

Public sector organizations in 32 Latin American and Caribbean countries are eligible for these awards, designed to recognize efforts to use information and communication technologies (ICTs) to implement strategies to improve transparency and participation. Institutions connected to the executive, legislative or judicial branches or other central government agencies are eligible.

Winners in both categories—public transparency and citizen participation—will be awarded 10 scholarships to pursue OAS e-government training courses, as well as a trip to Canada, where the ICA is based, to observe first-hand that country's



*OAS Executive Secretary for
Integral Development Alfonso
Quiñónez*

progress in using technology for public services.

OAS Executive Secretary for Integral Development Alfonso Quiñónez explained that the excelGOV Awards were created to highlight progress being made throughout the Americas in

the area of electronic government. "Technology is an important tool with which governments can modernize their institutions, increase efficiency, ensure accountability and generally strengthen democratic governance," said Quiñónez.

Individuals and institutions may submit as many nominations for the excelGOV Awards as they wish by filling out the online application form, details of which are available on the Web (www.redgealc.net). A group of experts from around the region will judge the nominations and select the top ten finalists; these will then be evaluated by a panel of distinguished experts in the field of the knowledge-based society.

In rating the applications, special attention will be paid to solutions that meet the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. Two awards will be given in each category—for best solution and best effort, the latter in-

tended to recognize significant achievements in countries with more limited resources.

This initiative is one of the activities of the Network of Electronic Government Leaders of Latin America and the Caribbean (RED GEALC, in Spanish), an OAS-created forum for hemispheric efforts to promote the exchange of experiences and cooperation in this area. The Dominican Republic will host the next RED GEALC annual meeting, slated for May 24-25, and the excelGOV Awards will be presented at that time.

With technology in the public service becoming increasingly important in the region, last year the OAS General Assembly adopted the Declaration of Santo Domingo: "Good governance and development in the knowledge-based society," which underscores the importance of ongoing use of ICTs to strengthen democratic institutions.

Poll shows PUP Near Dead

By: **Meb Cutlack**

A university of Belize opinion poll last week showed Said Musa and the PUP barely breathing in the political scales and headed for sure elimination in any coming election. Musa was hardly able to beat the leading Independent competitor, and the PUP party itself garnered only 16% in a possible 2008 election while the independents polled more than 20% between their various parties.

This is a stunning indictment of PUP rule and, while the poll awards the UDP a comfortable 55.5%, the results of the Independent parties reveals that although many of the candidates and their parties are totally unknown the public wants them.

In the “The People’s Perception of Election 2008” poll the opinions of 430 randomly selected persons were sampled nationally via telephone.

Pollsters asked respondents two questions: Who would you vote for as the next Prime Minister? Which party would you vote for in the next general elections? For the first question: 14.9% of the sample said they would vote for Said Musa, while 55.7% said they would vote for Dean Barrow. The independents were led by the NRP’s Cornelius Dueck who was supported by 8.9% respondents. On the second question of which party they would vote for: 55.5% of the respondents said they would vote for the UDP, while 16% would vote for the PUP. The NRP would get 8.9%, VIP, 7.3%, the PNP 2.6%, and the We the People Movement 2.4%.

In both Stann Creek and Toledo Independents polled higher than the PUP.

According the Channel 7 the poll found: “that in the Belize District sample, the Prime Minister at 12.8% only has a narrow lead of less than a percentage point on Paul Morgan and Cornelius Dueck who earns 12% of the support from the sample group.”

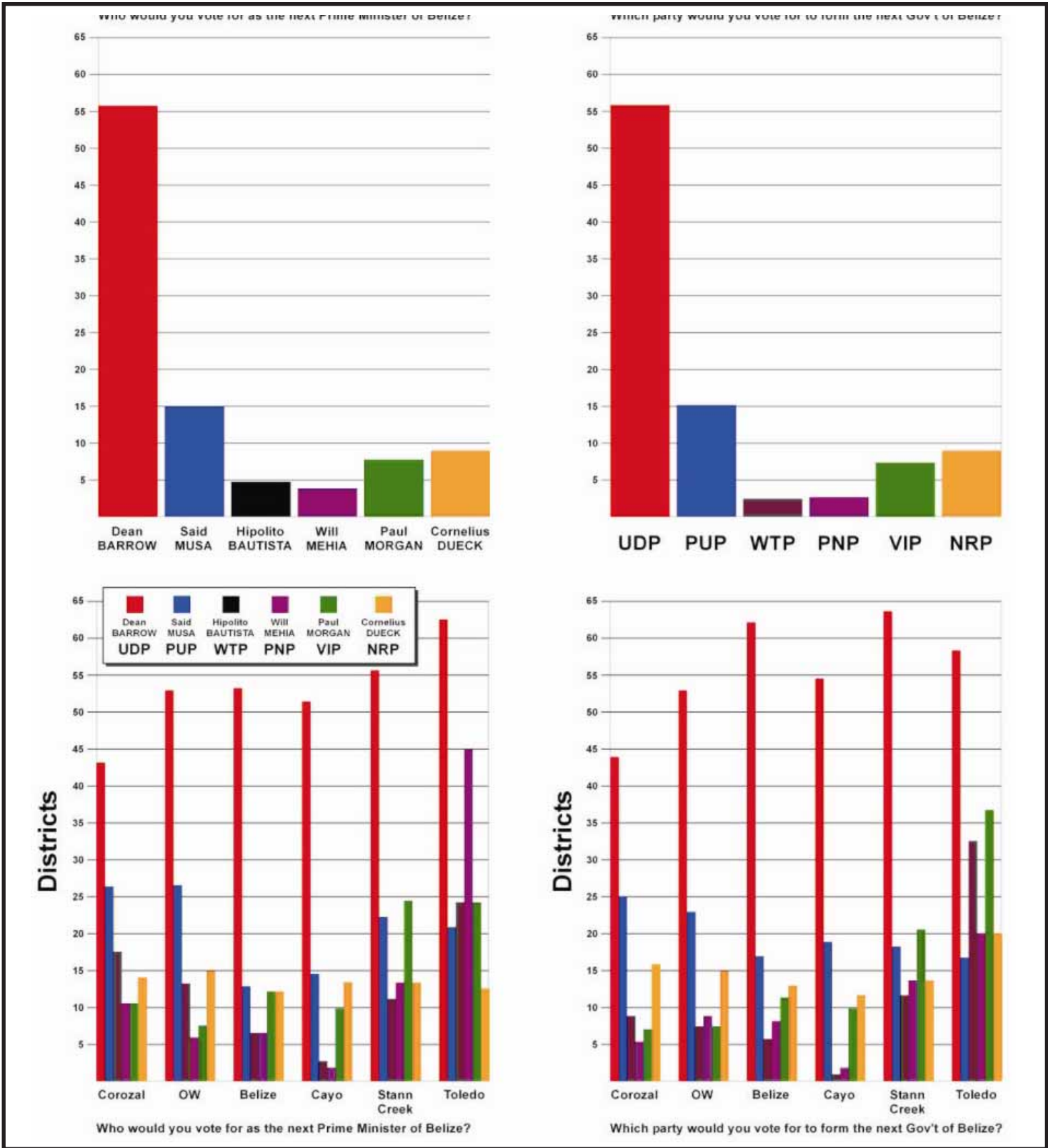
In other districts, the poll recorded that the support for independent leaders actually surpassed that for the Prime Minister.

The significance of these results, added to the first series of Village council elections (in which support for Independents also soared) should not be underestimated. Every day that goes by makes the Independents stronger.

This lesson should also come home to the UDP and get them to realize that there is something ‘lacking’ in their offerings to the Belizean electorate. The 55% represents little more than they have traditionally achieved in winning elections in the past.

The people want a change in the way they are governed. It is probable that, seeing recently the total impotence of the present Senate set up, they also urgently want an elected Senate.

It is no time for the UDP to gloat but to consider seriously just what the electorate is saying.



COURTS staff helps Baby Erollyn Tillett

Press Release-- The staff & management of Courts (Belize) Limited has donated **\$2000** to Errollyn Tillet. The money will be used to assist little Errollyn with medical expenses in the United States where she will undergo treatment.

Our staff was very touched by the story of Errollyn so we wanted to assist. Our Managing Director, Mr. Keith Slater, agreed to have the Company match any staff donations. In an effort to raise funds, staff countrywide gave personal donations and wore casual clothes for a fee. We were able to collect \$1,000 and at 4:30pm last Friday; we were pleased to present a cheque in the amount of \$2,000 to little Errollyn. Her mother, Claudette Haylock, was very appreciative of



COURTS marketing manager Camila Hunt presents baby Errollyn Tillett and her mother Claudette Haylock with the \$2,000 donation from the management & staff.

our Company’s heartfelt gesture. The management thanks the staff for helping to make this donation a success.

TOO WILD FOR WORDS!

Zoo & Toob



Visitors to the Belize Zoo cool off as they enjoy floating on a tube down the Sibun River.

By Sharon Matola

"It's a hot one! Like seven inches from the mid-day sun!" These words belong to legendary guitarist, Carlos Santana, from his song, "Smooth", but they also do well to describe a visit to The Belize Zoo during mid-day at the height of our dry season

But don't sweat it! Because now, there is a cool "post-zoo" river trip which is simple and easy and of course,

FUN!

Forget packing a kayak or canoe, zoo transport will take you on a short 10 minute drive and then assist you as you place your backside into a toob.

You and your toob will be on the peaceful and lush Sibun River, and as you head eastwards, the calls of kiskadees, kingfishers and tanagers will guide you towards the Belize Zoo River Camp.

Situated nearby a gigantic limestone

rock (and you can jump off of this big white stone into the river), is a screened cabana where lunch and cold drinks await you.....very beautiful and exotic and yes, you may hear the call of howler monkeys while you enjoy a healthy helping of rice and beans.,,,

Swimming? The best! Trails to walk? Of course!

And if you are staying at the Tropical Education Center (or want to stay there), then forget a vehicle pick up!

It is a simple journey back - how? Jump back into your toob and float a bit to a nearby trail, climb out and then have a leisurely walk back to your accommodations.

Cool? Relaxing? Refreshing? Yes to all of that!! It is truly a very beautiful time spent in Belize's tropical natural paradise.

No doubt about it, simply: TOO WILD FOR WORDS!!

What kind of Airplane would Belize choose to form its own CARICOM Airline?

By: Ray Auxillou

It was interesting reading the new fad sweeping the Eastern Anglophile Caribbean members of CARICOM, as presented by writer David Jessop in the Belize Times, regarding the formation of a CARICOM internal AIRLINE. This follows much debate here in Belize in what we want out of this idea? Belize is at a crossroads with Caricom and Central American trade and while we are constantly bombarded from home and abroad with the concept of a Caribbean Federation, or CARICOM country, or association, the business and economic trade statistics do not support a CARICOM membership. Only politics on the world stage is of any advantage to us in Belize, in the foreign arena from Caricom dreams.

Our trade with Caricom is a miserly drop in the bucket at \$44 million a year. Outpaced by much larger trade numbers with Mexico, or Central America neighbors and growing. Even India and China are going to eventually surpass

Caricom trade numbers. We can see the potential market in Jamaica, Trinidad and Barbados with perhaps vegetables? But without internal transportation, by ship and airline, the concept of a growing Caricom trade is a dead one. PM Musa did the right thing the other day calling for an emergency meeting of Caribbean Heads of State to discuss internal transportation organization.

So if Belize were to go it alone in attempting to start Caricom trade what would we need for an airplane? Quite simple really!. What we need is the biggest cubic volume and weight carrying space possible for the lowest price. We need a multi-purpose aircraft, one for passengers and cargo. This would mean fuel economy, 1800 mile range with reserve, weight and space capacity as big as possible and speed would not be a consideration, fuel economy per pound, or cubic foot volume carried is what counts financially. What airplane would that be, given the distances from Belize to the rest of the target market areas in Caricom. Well I

have one airplane picked, but that is a trade secret and should something better be found, would quickly change my mind, provided the characteristics mentioned above were met.

The trouble with Jessop's article, it is apparent the Eastern Anglophile Caribbean are thinking only in terms of tourist seats. A fool's game in my experience. A multi-purpose aircraft should be able to earn it's keep in different fields of endeavor to smooth out the cycles of seasonal trade. Interesting to read that one island over there on the other side of the Caribbean pond, has decided to act unilaterally and open their skies and borders, to include five neighboring islands to outside air carriers, in order to foster trade, competition, lower fares locally and new routes, were none now exist. With ambitions at least to become an Eastern Caribbean airline hub at the expense of the other local players. On this side of the pond, Belize should be also an airline hub, but how do we do it? Our own CARICOM airline, one plane endeavor would be a

start for sure.

There is a lot of new bureaucratic rhetoric in the Jessop article in the Belize Times, coming now from previous Belize private sector complaints and positions, on non-existent opportunities, explaining the problems from Belize economic viewpoints in trading with Caricom. I still don't see any logic in all the hot air though. What I see is greed on the positions of Eastern Caribbean anglophile governments. Without transportation, Caricom, Mr. Jessop now agrees, is a non-starter as an economic entity. Lip service is fine, but can Belize start a Caricom airline on it's own? We are surely looking at 12 to 15 years of trade building operating at a loss, at least from jet fuel. Even a cheap operating airplane costs money to run. The sharks from the Eastern Caribbean banks would be watching us closely ready to compete, once we opened CARICOM markets and trade. Are these CARICOM people in our bureaucracy really serious about this?

Social Page

St John’s College students Christopher Waight and Eric Alamina won the first ever annual Math Olympiad sponsored by the Belize Social Security Board.

Waight and Alamina scored the highest points – 1,900 to claim the title outright. They also each won a DELL desktop computer with the latest software and accessories as their first prize and a cash prize of \$1,000 educational grant, trophies, medals, and certificates of participation. They also won a projector and atrophy for their school.

Namrita Balami and Ronald Rempel of Belize Christian Academy won second prize which included a \$1,000 education grant each, a plaque, a certificate, medal, and a trophy, plus \$500 for their school.

Roberto Gongora and Dorita Sanchez of Orange Walk Technical High School won third prize, which was \$700 educational grants each, plaques, certificates, and medals.



St John’s College students Christopher Waight and Eric Alamina share the moment of triumph at the SSB Math Olympiad with their math teachers Ufemia Castillo, Julio Tarrogo (holding trophy) and Nadine Williams.

They also won a \$400 prize and a trophy for their school.



Rene Villaneuva Sr gets peck on the cheek from Miss Belize Universe Maria Jefferies at the launch of his new book, “Thanks for Choosing Love.”

Drug Kingpin gets 33 years

March 23, 2007 — A drug smuggler with ties to Colombian terrorists was sentenced yesterday to more than 33 years behind bars for threatening to kill federal agents and conspiring to import tons of cocaine into the United States .

Robert James Hertular, 36, of Belize, boasted of ties to notorious paramilitary leader Carlos Castano, and threatened to have DEA agents killed after they refused to drop an investigation in 2001 in exchange for the drug

trafficker’s cooperation in the case. Hertular also threatened a Belizean law-enforcement officer that same year and offered a hand grenade to a person who turned out to be a federal informant, believing it would be used to blow up DEA agents in April 2003. Hertular was arrested in January 2004 and extradited to the United States six months later. Manhattan federal Judge Naomi Reice Buchwald also ordered Hertular to pay a \$250,000 fine.

Letters to the Editor

(Continued From Page 2)

Of course there is a price to pay for all of this beauty, but we don’t mind that, since fumes have drifted into school yards, businesses and even water cachement tanks in San Ignacio, that our children get to breathe all of this.

I don’t know much about dumps and whether or not they are a health hazard because you can read all sorts of things on the internet. But I do wonder about some things. For instance, can you catch a cold or other more serious virus from breathing fumes from burning hospital waste?

And of course, we know, in spite of what our tourists might think, that we DO practice Sustainable Tourism. After all, the Tourist Board tells us we do. And while seeing might be Belize-ing, it’s not always believing.

Signed, Judy Duplooy

Land-grabbers Not So Anonymous

Dear Editor

Some residents of Placencia & Seine Bight & Maya Beach were talking about this land grab issue outside the main grocery store the other day. Here is a list that is circulating the community. We thought it would be of interest to your newspaper.

- 1 Charles Leslie: 20 acres inner Placencia lagoon entry 8672
- 2 Devita Williams: 10 acres Placencia lagoon entry 8761
- 3 Alexander Nolbito: 10 acres Placencia lagoon entry 8761
- 4 Hands Foundation: 14 acres

Southern Long Caye

- 5 Rodwell Ferguson & Fred Cabral: 450 acres Jenkins Creek area
 - 5 Ernesto Castillo c/o Eagle Dean Company: 30 acres Placencia lagoon
 - 6 Rodwell Ferguson, wife Anna Mae & son: 10.011 acres Pla lagoon, entry 8672, 1 acre Placencia lagoon, 2 acres Placencia lagoon, 148.93 acres Mile 29 Southern Hwy, entry 7375, 48.478 acres west of Sittee bar mouth along sea coast, 5.315 acres Pelican Range, entry 8887, 14.73 acres old Mullins River Rd, plan 283/9, 20 acres mile 11 Stann Creek Valley Rd, plan 115/8
 - 7 Andrea Villanueva: 3 acres Placencia lagoon 1427.559 m2 Small Morris Caye 5.315 acres Pelican Range
 - 8 Elena Cuellar: 1.503 acres Placencia lagoon 1327.559 m2 Small Morris Caye
 - 9 Charles Longsworth: 1.503 acres southwestern portion Northeast Caye, 1 acre Placencia lagoon
 - 10 Anthony Fred Cabral: 2 acres Pla lagoon
 - 11 Percival Neal & wife Betty Jean: 1 acre Placencia Lagoon, 5 acres Placencia lagoon, 50 acres northern side Flour Caye
 - 12 Aquaworld Limited: Jose & Yvonne Coye: 9.735 acres Placencia inner lagoon, 10.066 acres Placencia, between inner & outer lagoon, 10.059 acres Lark Caye
 - 13 George Westby: 12 acres Pla Inner lagoon
- Signed,
Concerned Placencia resident

**Are they Politicians? Are they Statemen?
Are they Patriots?**

No! They're the

PIRATES of the CARIBBEAN
The Curse of the P.U.P

**They used to steal the treasure and bury it on the island
Now they steal the islands as well**