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Reformer for the People

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Regional Power Brokers converge on Belize

Belize's Prime Minister Said Musa, the President Pro-tempore of the Central American Integration System, SICA, once again hosted Central American/CARICOM heads of government summit, this time on May 12.

Among the heads of state who attended were Guatemalan President Oscar Berger, Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, Baldwin Spencer, President of Costa Rica, Oscar Arias, President of El Salvador Antonio Saca Gonzalez, Prime Minister of Grenada Keith Mitchell, President of Haiti, Rene Preval, President of Honduras Jose Manuel Zelaya Rosales, President of Nicaragua Daniel Ortega, and Patrick Manning Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago and Prime Minister of Barba-

dos Owen Arthur.

A bevy of foreign ministers lead other delegations and foreign ministers from 21 countries were invited to a Foreign Minister's meeting on Friday, May 11. A number of them will meet again in June in Panama for the Organization of American States, OAS, General Assembly. Caribbean foreign ministers have also been invited to a meeting in Washington DC in June with US President George Bush.

Among the items on a twenty point declaration, leaders of the small states pledged to "recommit" to negotiations to formalize a Free Trade Agreement over the next few months, using a CARICOM-Costa Rica Free Trade agreement as a starting point.

Although there were previous indications trade talks would conclude within six months, Guatemalan President Oscar Berger told reporters, "The process is beginning, but no deadline has been set."

Prime Minister of Barbados, Owen Arthur, says while some Central American countries have already signed Free Trade Agreements with the United States, he believes that "Before trade relations with the US can be discussed with the US, we have to establish stronger relations within the region."

Members reiterated their government's commitments to poverty alleviation, anti-corruption measures, crime fighting, increased tourism and climate change monitoring as well as a

host of social and economic concerns common to countries of both regions. The full text of the declaration is available on the government of Belize website.

Prime Minister Musa told members of the media that Belize has strong historical and geographical reasons for seeking better integration between the sub-regions and should continue to bring leaders of government and the private sector together, "I would like to believe that Belize has been a catalyst for building this bridge between the regions, but it is a work in progress."

The first CARICOM/SICA heads of government meeting was in Belize in 2002.

OAS Point Man - a True Visionary

Indy Reformer Weekly had an opportunity to interview Ambassador Albert R. Ramdin, Assistant Secretary General of the OAS last week when he visited Belize to be a part of the joint foreign ministers' session: Central America (SICA countries) and CARICOM member states of the OAS.

On May 11, 2007 our editor conducted the following question & answer session in Belize at the Radisson Ft. George Hotel:

Q: What can you tell us about the CARICOM/SICA Meeting, Ambassador Ramdin?

A: In discussing the importance of Caricom's position at the OAS: CARICOM constitutes 40% of the membership and as a region contributes several key elements: strong democracies, good rule of law, independent judiciary, relatively governance, strong civil society. These assets are critically important, relevant, to building democracies, best practices, for Central and South America. CARICOM countries can express themselves by becoming engaged, not just in areas of Caribbean interest, but by taking positions within the general strategic vision for the hemi-



OAS Assistant Secretary General, Ambassador Albert R. Ramdin

sphere. This strengthens individual positions, strengthens uniting and collaboration as a hemisphere.

Q: CARICOM has been playing an important role at the OAS?

A: Yes, certainly, the Inter-American Democratic Charter would not have been adopted with real teeth without the Caribbean giving it teeth in 2001, making it more meaningful. But there needs to be more policy dialogue and finan-

(Please Turn To Page 3)



Brenda Habuayo wins Female Cross Country



See story on page 14

Letters to the Editor

Editorial Director

Meb Cutlack

Editor

Karla Heusner Vernon

General Manager

Trevor Vernon

Design/Layout

William G. Ysaguirre

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P.O. Box 2666

Telephones:

(501) 225-3520

Email:

independent.newspaper.bz@gmail.com

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Phonics are basic to Reading

Dear Independent Reformer & Deacon Cal,

I'm a Belizean living in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. I hold a Masters of Science degree in Psycho-Education from Florida International University, and work with the Florida Diagnostic & Learning Resources System-South (FDLRS/S: Miami-Dade County Public Schools) as a lecturer. My areas of specialization are the brain and learning, and reading instruction. My job requires that I research, design, and train inservice teachers primarily in Miami-Dade County, and in the state of Florida via our FDLRS network; there are 19 FDLRS systems in the network throughout Florida. I also lecture at Barry University.

My reason for introducing myself is that I just read your article titled "Textbook Standardization Poses Threat to Belizean Printer" in the INdependent Reformer newspaper. I'm not familiar with BCR's Reading program; however, I'm very concerned that, according to the article, the government is substituting phonics instruction with whole language instruction in the schools. Very cursory research on whole language will yield valuable information that the effectiveness of whole language instruction is unsupported. To adopt whole language to the exclusion of phonological awareness (phonemic and phonics instruction) does not teach children the vital skills they need to learn to read competently. Reading, unlike learning to speak, is not inherent to the brain. Children learn to speak by listening to their primary caretaker; reading, on the other hand, must be directly taught through systematic and

explicit instruction in phonological awareness.

Phonological awareness is the building block for reading instruction in which children learn the sounds (phonemes) of the *spoken* language, and that there is a predictable relationship between those sounds and the letters and spellings (graphemes), that represent those sounds in *written* language. Whole language has its place in the scope and sequence of reading instruction; some children are global learners and need to see the "whole" before the "part". But even these children must be explicitly and systematically taught phonological awareness skills if they are to become competent readers. While it is true that whole language programs emphasize reading and writing, phonics instruction is generally embedded in these activities. This means that letter-sound relationships are incidentally taught based on key letters that appear in the material the student may be reading. That is not enough!

The English language is based on the alphabetic principle and the challenge therefore is to find research substantiated methods to help children learn to "break the code". Research also indicates that without direct support in systematic and explicit instruction, phonological awareness eludes as much as 25% of middle class students from print rich environments, in the early grades! Think what those percentages could be for students from lower socio economic statuses who might not have access to such environments!

I learned to read and write in Belizean schools using the phonics method; I remember it well! In the past, Belizean students attending universities here in Florida (and, I'm

sure, elsewhere) have always enjoyed recognition for their superior reading and writing prowess. It would be a shame to see that change.


Sincerely,

Cynthia Humphreys-Magnus

The Vagaries of Belizean Politics

Dear Editor,

Politics in Belize have pretty much been played out in the traditional fashion of CHARACTER ASSASSINATION and UNREALISTIC PROMISES for a EUTOPIA by politicians. The opposition promising freedom from poverty or oppression caused by the ruling government AND the ruling party painting a picture of success and accomplishment and literally begging the population for another opportunity to govern.

The last 15 years have shown or (Please Turn To Page 15) 

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OAS Point Man - a True Visionary

(Continued From Page 1)
 cial commitment. The financial increase in quotas is minimal considering what they are buying into. We are not talking about tens of thousands of dollars, but thousands of dollars. It has tremendous impact. It shows the Caribbean is serious about the OAS, are hemispheric partners. The cost is very low compared to the benefits.

Q: Tell us a little about this joint sub regional heads meetings.

A: Caribbean and Central American heads have met twice in Belize. **I have to give Belize credit for keeping this relationship alive.** This is a natural alliance to be built with Central America and with a common agenda: 1) vulnerability 2) economic opportunities globally 3) together CARICOM and Central America make up 60% of the OAS membership. They can, and should, join hands, learn from each other.

In some ways the Central American integration is more developed, and in other ways CARICOM has valuable contributions. This relationship should be intensified and nurtured.

Q: Ambassador, what can you tell us about the upcoming GA meeting in

Panama?

A: The main theme will be Energy for Sustainable Development. Very relevant right now due to high prices, the impact on the budgets and economies of countries in the hemisphere, on the population, effects at all levels. Members will look at cooperation strategies and mitigating factors.

In terms of the long term vision, there will be discussions on alternative sources of energy such as biofuel, solar and wind energy. Biofuels have more political implications, can raise some food security tensions, concerns about loss of land, say as in the case of sugar cane production for ethanol, versus agricultural products, so there is some political orientation there.

The OAS strength is bringing to the attention of member states the importance of stability in countries, in terms of their economies and political situation. The General Assembly is a chance for all 34 foreign ministers to meet.

What is interesting is that over the past 18 months there have been 16 elections. So there is a new political environment, new ministers. Some of the new governments have perspectives out-

side the mainstream. So there are challenges, but also opportunities. Instead of the usual 45 minutes or so, we will have an entire afternoon retreat, with no set agenda. It will be a chance to get different perspectives on international relationships, development issues. It's a chance to listen to the new, democratically elected leaders, and to work with them.

It is of critical importance the minister talk more frequently. The OAS provides the platform, the permanent basis for 34 countries to sit around the same table and take collective action.

There will also be private sector forums.

"The way I see it, hemispheric development cannot just be in the hands of governments; it is a shared responsibility of building stable societies. It takes civil society and governments to accomplish that."


The OAS is striving, more and more, to include civil society, invite them to be a part of the discourse. There will be 3 dialogues (at the GA) heads of delegations and civil society, permanent observers (67 members) and private sector representatives. The permanent ob-

servers contribute to funding, programs. The guest speaker this year will be the new Secretary General of the UN, Ban Ki Moon, of South Korea.

Q: Ambassador, what would you like our readers to know about the OAS as it relates to the Belize/Guatemala facilitation process?

A: I think a lot of progress has been made but it is time for a conclusion to the Belize-Guatemala "differendum" as we are to call it. We regret that despite what has been agreed in the context of the OAS efforts, we were not able to make progress. There has been some progress in some areas, the maritime issues look to be resolved soon, but the border issues, the moving of Santa Rosa to Guatemala, needs to be stressed.

The OAS does not want to continue discussions that are counter-productive, but we want everyone to realize the importance of the facilitation model. If that is successful, it could be used for other cases, in other countries. (We've heard that someplace before)

I have been to the Adjacency Zone, the OAS maintains an office there, and (Please Turn To Page 13) 



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Conscientious Objector



By: Karla Heusner Vernon

Everyone, but everyone, is wondering what will happen at this coming Friday's House of Representatives Meeting. No, its not a protest outside they want to see, but a revolt inside.

Belizeans—every man, woman, and some of our more aware children, are waiting to see if any of the five cabinet minister who said they did not know the Prime Minister had signed the Universal Health Services Guarantee, and would not have supported it if they had seen it, will support it now.

Essentially, we want to see if they will put their duty to the people they were elected to represent before the leaders of their political party, before the party itself. If they will put their duty to the

people they were elected to represent before their own political careers.

If they can see what is wrong in what was done, even if the man responsible pretends not to see the wrong in what he has done.

I guess we need to know, Gentlemen,

Essentially, we want to see if they will put their duty to the people they were elected to represent before the leaders of their political party...

if you can tell: is he naked? Or if you will stand around him, hiding his exposed form, shielding him from view, protecting him from the rotten tomatoes and spoiled eggs those who can no longer afford bread, nor cake, would like to throw at him. If you will put him in the stocks in the square, or whisk him off to some secluded place of leisure and comfort, where he is no longer a danger to the rest of us, or himself.

We need to know if it will just be business as usual for you all, or if someone among you will have the courage to break ranks and object. And if this happens, will others stand around YOU and

unite behind you instead of the betrayer? Instead of around the heir apparent waiting in the wings, crony's arm around his shoulder...

A lot is riding on your actions. A lot of people are looking for leadership. A lot of people are hoping and praying you

have as much courage when he is in the room and you did when he was out of the country.

What will you do to our own Napo-



leon? The little man so intent on his own conquest he cannot see he is standing at Waterloo. So paranoid, so persecuted, he can no longer trust anyone, not even those closest to him.

In other places there would have been a vote of no-confidence a long time ago. But this is Belize. And yes, we tend to do things on "Belize time." But eventually we do get there...

Gentlemen, all of Belize is watching you right now, praying for you, sending you courage. Will you lead us, the people who chose you to lead? Or will you reach down and cover your own nakedness? Hope we will look the other way?

Let your conscience be your guide....



Onward and upward, let's unite on this \$30 odd million pledge we gave our good ol' boys.

High Powered Meetings: Very "Hush-Hush"



By: Trevor Vernon

Belize City was host to a number of high level meetings last week that was poorly publicized, in Belize. Apparently many of the attendees, including Presidents & Prime Ministers, had coverage in their national media outlets. Every meeting was "hush-hush": Foreign Ministers from both the sub-regions: CARICOM & GRULAC/SICA, heads meeting, and a COFCOR/CARICOM Foreign Ministers meeting. Obviously, there were other meetings on the periphery of the hodgepodge of meetings that included some heads of state.

It's a noble effort to bridge the two sub-regions the country straddles, we hear, but with no details forthcoming, we remain skeptical, given the Administration's track record.

We first learnt of the meetings via a Mexico, DF-based media organization. So we promptly asked whoever we knew and didn't know in Belize's Foreign Affairs Ministry but were stone-walled. We asked other media houses, but as it turns out, we were

better informed than they were. So we didn't feel especially left out of their press conferences and other non-starter events for the media of Belize.

What were they trying to hide from the Belizean people who "gave them a mandate" in 2003? We, the people, still don't know what happened, exactly. But we know there were bilateral discussions over the "differendum" between the Heads of the respective countries.

I've lived in a couple of other countries (in excess of ten years) and had never seen this type of news blackout on exactly what was taking place in the name of the people of that country. Places where the media were/are generally respected. Here in Belize, the government ministries simply dismiss the media whenever they feel they can get away with it.

In Belize today there is no reporting on these high level meetings, because generally, the media houses do not have the training and background in these matters of state. The government loves this for obvious reasons. The leader of the opposition, on the other hand, would have had to have been briefed and ought to have been monitoring and reporting back to the people. But, maybe we expect too much of our leaders.

How can this be rectified? Well,

first there needs to be the interest of the general public and then the follow-up by these our media houses. Maybe if we were to tell the public what was going on before it happened and then tell them what happened after, they'd appreciate it more and develop an interest. Get people like retired career Ambassadors to comment on the process. I can think of at least two retired or separated persons who would be able to do good analyses and commentaries. And one is a retired "school teacher" to boot.

Some pressing issues the public need to know, given the tens of millions that went missing and the horrible state of the nation state's finances:

- 1) Financial impact on our treasury of hosting; who paid for what?
- 2) How much of this was within Belize's temporary rotating seat obligation as Presidente Pro Tempore of SICA [SICA is the Central American Integration System, by the way]?
- 3) How much was borne by CARICOM Secretariat or the OAS Secretariat?
- 4) We know the COFCOR Mandate coming out of CARICOM but where does the mandate come from for the joint meeting for the two sub-regions?
- 5) How many meetings were there, officially?
- 6) Did Musa meet with his Guatemalan counterpart to discuss taking the Guatemalan claim to

court, the ICJ? Moving more boundaries and/or markers?

7) Were there any monitors/observers at any of both the formal & informal meetings?

8) Were there any new declarations that were signed that will further prove to be a drag on the economy of Belize? We know that GOB has placed a present value figure of all government's future earnings and sold off that future revenue stream. So the people remain concerned with all these hush-hush commitments.

There are so many questions to ask the Musa Administration about these meetings, but their temperament at this late stage is pure unadulterated hostility. They don't seem to realize that this country is no longer PUP country precisely because of their hostilities toward the people generally, and the media specifically.

They had better start talking with the people and stop this talking down to us, because life in the game is not going to get any easier with the political quandary they find themselves in.

Elsewhere in this paper there is an exclusive interview we did with the Hon ASG of the OAS, HE Albert Ramdin. For those of you following, he is Ambassador Luigi Euinadi's replacement at the OAS. However, we were limited in the interview to ask only of things for which he is responsible. And he was kind enough to do the interview. For this we thank him, in the name of our readership.

Independent Belizeans Abroad

Off the Menu

By FLORENCE FABRICANT,
New York Times

Opening This Week (May 9)

CHINA DE PUEBLA Ian Nal, the owner of this Mexican restaurant with an Asian outlook, which opened Monday, is from Belize and has a Mayan last name. He knows a lot about the trade routes between Mexico and the Far East and is having his chef, Jason Scott Titner, incorporate those connections into dishes like huitlacoche fried rice and hoisin-braised duck carnitas: 3143 Broadway (123rd Street), (212) 222-8666.



Restaurateur Ian Nal

Cayo Police & Community help Senior Citizens

Civilians working with Police are organizing a special event in the Cayo District. The event, a Senior Citizens Mothers day special, is scheduled to be held at the Columbus Park in San Ignacio Town from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 pm. this Thursday, **May 10, 2007**. The event is being organized by the *Zone Ten Neighbourhood Watch*, a Police-Community initiative chaired by community activist Desol Neal along with Zone Beat liaison Police Officer Darius Martinez.

According to Martinez there will be lots of prizes and surprises. Desol Neal reports that the business community has been very generous in giving prizes towards this event.

The Zone Ten Neighbourhood Watch meets every third Thursday of the month and the next meeting will be held on June 21st 2007. For additional information, contact Ms. Desol Neal at 824-2590 or Mr. Martinez at the address as shown below.

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http://www.belizenorth.com/independent_reformer.htm

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What is a Public Opinion Poll?

* Opinion polls are surveys of opinion using random sampling.
 * They are usually designed to represent the opinions of a population by asking a small number of people a series of questions and then extrapolating the answers to the larger population.”*

Why a Telephone Opinion Poll?

* Telephone polls are faster, cheaper, and more reliable than say:

face to face interviews on the streets or in households.

* In a democratic society, participation is a key pillar; and where opportunities for such participation in governance are limited, polling provides the best option

* An innovative approach to the traditional public consultation yielding scientifically reliable public opinion.

Why now?

* Belizeans’ voice on UHS issue

is important;

* Implications of UHS case on Belize’s Democracy, Governance, & Justice Systems;

* Part of SPEAR’S mission to inform and educate;

* SPEAR’s strategic focus is governance

What were the measures?

* **Identify people’s perception**

on:

* **Governance (Transparency)**

– The need to seek approval from

the National Assembly prior to signing the UHS guarantee;

– **Governance (Accountability)** – To seek approval from Cabinet prior to tabling the UHS guarantee in the House of Representatives;

3. **Governance (People’s Participation)** – Public Disclosure of intent to sign UHS guarantee;

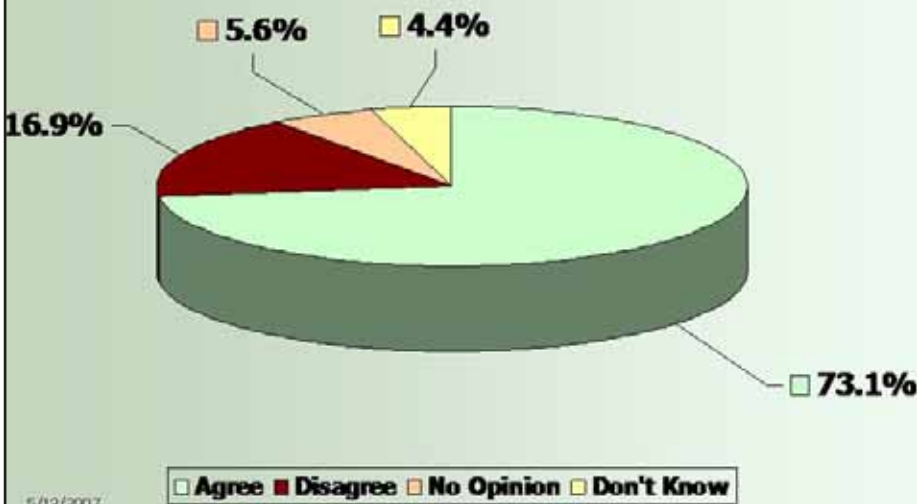
4. **Governance (Justice)** – Should taxpayers pay the debt;

(Please Turn To Page 7)



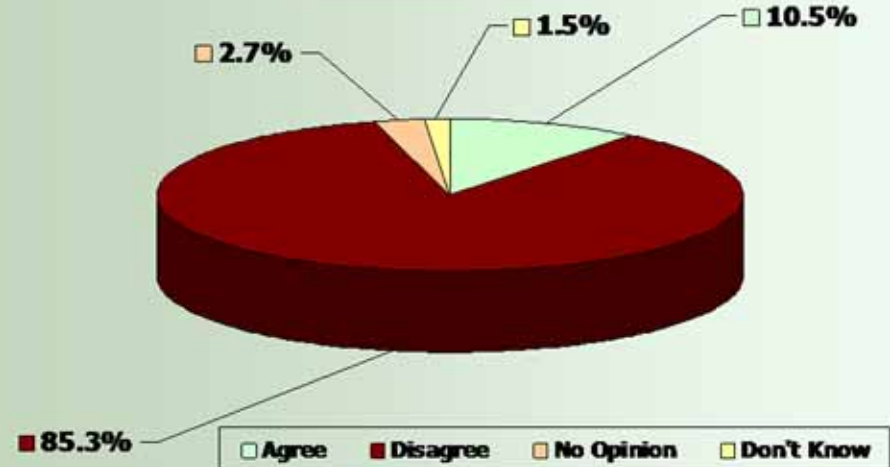
Q1: “Do you agree or disagree that the Prime Minister should have gone to the National Assembly with a Bill to approve the UHS Loan Guarantee for \$33Mn?”

Governance - Transparency



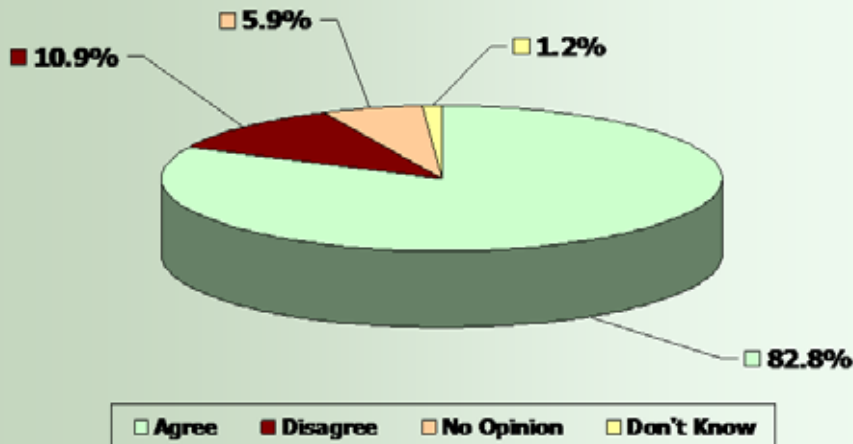
Q4: “Do you agree or disagree that Belizean Taxpayers should pay for the Universal Health Services debt to the Belize Bank?”

Governance - Justice



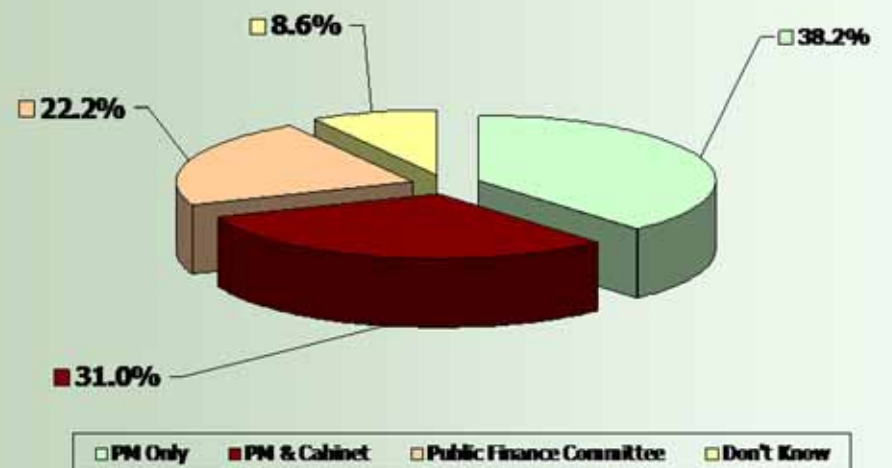
Q2: “Do you agree or disagree that the Prime Minister should have first obtained Cabinet support for a bill to approve the Universal Health Services \$33Mn loan guarantee before signing it?”

Governance - Accountability



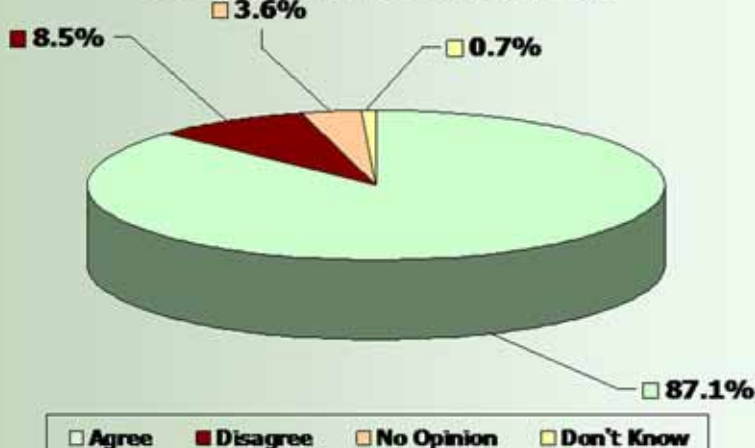
Q5: “Whom do you say should take full responsibility for the signing of the Universal Health Services loan guarantee?”

Burden of Responsibility



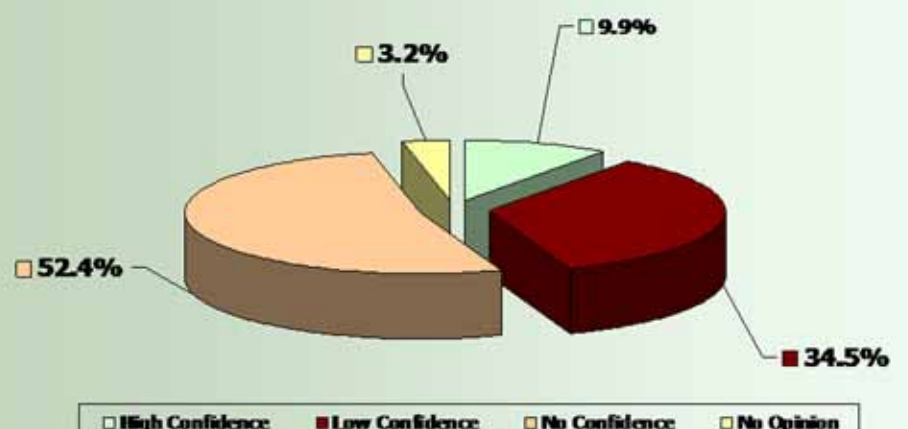
Q3 – “Do you agree or disagree that the Prime Minister should have informed Belizeans about his intention to sign the Universal Health Services loan guarantee for \$33Mn?”

Governance - People’s Participation



Q6: “How would you rate your present level of confidence in this Government?”

Level of Confidence in Government



What is State and Private Sector Economic Discrimination?



By: William Schmidt
PG correspondent for Independent Weekly

The BTIA Toledo Branch is asking the Toledo Ecotourism Association, TEA, to join the Belize Tourism Industry Association. They have informed them that the TEA is a tour operator and BTIA's membership for tour operators is \$263 per year plus \$50 for application.

This is much more than the TEA can pay at the present time. A member of the BTIA executive has also informed the TEA, that as a tour operator they need to get a tour operator's license from the BTB, this will be another \$250 per year. At this time TEA cannot afford this either. BTIA has informed the TEA that if they can't pay these fees they must remove their desk from the BTB office. The BTB also wants each guide to have a recommendation from the local Tour Guide Association, this will cost \$35 each guide for membership. The BTB wants each guide to have the tour guide

course, then two photos cost \$10. The Red Cross course \$40 each person. The site specific card \$10. This amounts to over \$100 per guide. This is way over what a site guide in the TEA makes per year, as members in the TEA program take turns, sharing work and benefits.

The women who conduct the village tour take turns, and they only get \$7 Belize per hour. Twenty percent of this they contribute to the Village Health and Education Fund and the TEA office. The tour is one or two hours so they don't make enough to pay these costs. The BTIA and BTB are requiring fees beyond the ability of the rural villagers in the TEA to pay. This can be called state and private sector sponsored economic discrimination.

These fees violate the People's human-rights to economic development. The TEA program has won the world's most prestigious prize for socially responsible community based eco-tourism. The TEA has definitely attracted tourists to the tourism industry in Toledo and other parts of Belize. Hotels, restaurants, tour operators, tourist guides, souvenir sellers and many others have benefited and continue to benefit while the TEA operates. Now the program is threatened by those more powerful and wealthier than the people of rural Toledo. If the TEA is so good why hasn't it grown? The simple fact that anyone who would care to research can prove is that the BTB and the private sector

BTIA has failed to support and encourage the TEA's growth and in fact have obstructed it.

Discrimination can usually be traced to economic reasons. When the TEA first formed, the local branch of the BTIA was very much against it. They even had the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Tourism Mr. Victor Gonzalez call and inform me that in order to get USAID money for the development of tourism, the government had to work with the private sector, (in this case represented by the BTIA) and the Toledo branch of the BTIA did not support the idea of community guesthouses. They claimed the growing development of tourism in Toledo could be negatively impacted by tourists having bad experiences in the rural villagers. Many negative things were said about the rural villagers' ability to host the "sophisticated" tourists.

At one meeting I attended with the BTIA members, I was told, "right now the tourists come to my hotel, they pay me to take them out to see the villages and the ruins and return with me to stay in my hotel. Why should I help the villagers to get the guesthouses, that will then compete with my hotel?" Another said, "The rural villagers didn't help me to get my business why should I help them to get theirs?" Another said, "The rural villagers can't work together or learn new things, just look at how many projects have failed, once we get a bad name for

tourism in Toledo we will never be able to live it down."

I replied, "Most tourists enter Belize up north. Most are on a budget and only have a limited amount of time. Up north they can see rainforest, ruins, rivers, cays and many other attractions. Why should they spend two of their valuable days on a punishing bus ride or spend a lot of their limited funds to fly round-trip to Toledo and back?" Because what Toledo has that visitors cannot find up north are more than 40 indigenous communities. This eco-cultural tourism attraction destination could bring visitors to our town businesses as well as help our rural villagers earn much needed income.

I asked them to help and support the villagers in their efforts to develop well-planned and regulated tourism in Toledo, to ensure they did not have the problems they were concerned with. Unfortunately they were adamantly opposed to this. Fortunately Mrs. Jean Shaw was then president of the National BTIA, Miss Joy Vernon director of the Belize Tourist Board, Honorable Glen Godfrey was Minister of Tourism and The Right Honorable George Price was the Prime Minister. They did support the poor of Toledo and encouraged me to continue to sponsor free workshops where the villagers designed what came to be a world award winning project.

(Please Turn To Page 12) 

SPEAR poll sets 95% certainty

 (Continued From Page 6)

5. Burden of Responsibility – Potential liability arising from signing of unlimited sovereign guarantee;

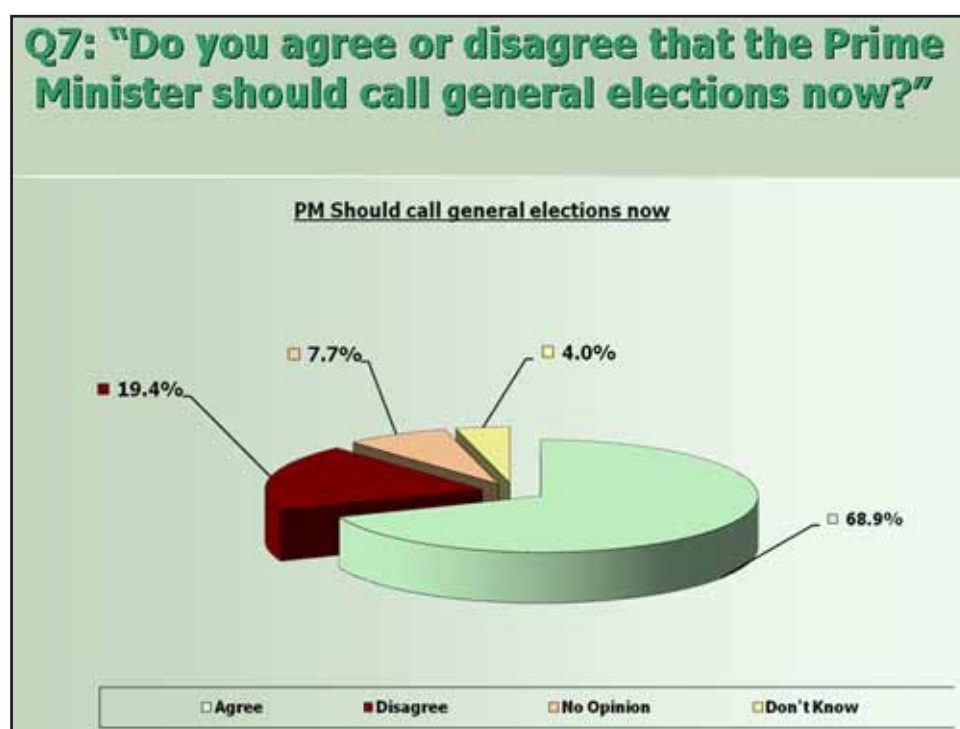
• Impact on People's Trust – Confidence level in Government;

7. Attitude Toward Early Elections – Should elections be called now?

* "Do you agree or disagree that the Prime Minister should have gone to the National Assembly with a Bill to approve the Universal Health Services loan guarantee for \$33Mn?"

* "Do you agree or disagree that the Prime Minister should have first obtained Cabinet support for a bill to approve the Universal Health Services loan guarantee for \$33Mn?"

* "Do you agree or disagree that the Prime Minister should have informed Belizeans about his intention to sign the Universal Health



Services loan guarantee for \$33Mn?"

* "Do you agree or disagree that Belizean taxpayers should pay for the Universal Health Services loan guarantee?"

* "Whom do you say should take full responsibility for the signing of the Universal Health Services loan guarantee?"

* "How would you rate your present confidence level in the govern-

ment?"

* "Do you agree or disagree that the Prime Minister should call general elections now?"

What was the Margin of Error?

* The poll has a 95% Confidence Level or say, **a margin of error of + or - 5%.**

Explain This Please:

* Means that going from the sample population to the voting age population within the stipulated margin of error we are 95% confident that the voting age population would respond in the same way

* Sample size

* Geographic distribution:

* District

* Urban/Rural

* Age distribution

* Sex distribution

* Education background

* Sampling Frame: Voting Age Population (18+)

* Sample Size: 414 Individuals



Current Issues

Mayhem in the Streets?

By: Meb Cutlack

Elsewhere in the Caribbean, if the people had been treated by their government as the Belizean people have been treated for the past 9 years, there would be marches in the street, constant union strike action and virtually open revolt against the government.

Belizeans however appear to have a passivity that is of great solace to our reckless, spendthrift, overtaxing and lying government, but how long before the veneer on this rotting edifice cracks through and the whole thing comes tumbling down with bloody and irrecoverable consequence?

Mr. Musa, Mr. Fonseca and their not-so-merry-men appear to think that the castle can never tumble down. They even take the recent village council elections as a sign of that they did not lose as many seats, or at least not by as huge a margin, as they anticipated.

But let's take a closer look at those results and the reason why the PUP retained the few seats that they did.

Ever since the PUP government abandoned 'Radio Belize' by selling it out-lock stock and barrel to Love FM, there has not been a national radio network offering true news coverage to the nation.

Belize City is well served by many weekly newspaper and any number of diverse radio and television programs and talk shows while the districts, since the demise of Radio Belize, have been totally starved of almost all independent news.

Yes, they get Love FM, but that's basically always in the government's pocket and they get occasional re-broadcasts of pro-government programming. Channels 5 and 7 are harder to find.

Yes, some talk shows do reach the districts! But to participate from the districts costs a fortune. Every minute costs not cents, but dollars. A call to Love FM from within the Belize District may cost up to \$1 or \$2 at the most. A caller, kept hanging on, from Cayo, the Cayes or Corozal can wind up paying \$10 to \$15!

Because of Love FM's monopoly of the old Radio Belize towers nationwide, most of the other commercial radio and TV signals from Belize City do not reach the districts or, if they do, it is barely audible.

What all this adds up to is that the Government, and Mr. Musa and the PUP know this only too well, has a much louder voice in the districts in every way than opposition or Independent candidates.

Simply put, the PUP should have done much, much better in the districts than they did in the Village Council elections. Their district power is slipping disastrously and it's now become only a matter of time, and a few more scandals like the UHS, ever increasing taxation and higher and higher utility costs, before their district vote disappears altogether.

Just glance at last week's figures, which revealed that (thanks to their increased profits from Belize, our electricity supplier)

Fortis Inc., made the biggest profit in its history. This was at the same that they were pressing for higher electricity rates! This could be just one more straw (of iniquity piled on iniquity) which will cause the camel to collapse.

Take just the last quarter, January to March, of the balance sheet from Fortis Inc. Electricity sales rose from 80 to 87 KWh and profits from \$20,000,000 to \$22,000,000.

That is for just 3 months! And, at the

same time that Fortis and BEL were pushing the PUC for price rises!

Belizeans are perpetually being caught between a rock (the ever increasing power of local and foreign finance groups) and a hard place (The PUP government). Well, concerted and collective action by all Belizeans can shatter the rock and soften the hard place.

Vote with your feet and shout and march again and again against the iniquities of this PUP government.

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Land of Milk & Honey

By: Richard Harrison

The land which provides an ample supply of “milk and honey” is considered by its people to be the promise land.

Literally, milk and honey are highly nutritious foods and form important parts of a balanced and healthy lifestyle.

The world milk market is historically “controlled” by a few European countries; whose governments continue to support their farmers with large subsidies; which make it very hard for producers in countries with little or no subsidy to compete. Nestle; a multinational company with headquarters in Vevey, Switzerland; is a monopoly player in the world's market for milk and milk-products. Not-too-long-ago it acquired one of its main rivals, Borden Foods of the USA, thus fortifying its monopoly power. A monopoly market is described as a market where one player controls 55% or more of the market-share. The European Union is committed, through the WTO, to reduce its subsidies, and has done so on various occasions. Consumers world-wide have seen a gradual but steady increase in the price of milk ever since, each time these subsidies are periodically reduced; and as monopoly power is concentrated in one company.

The world honey market used to be controlled by USA, Canadian and European producers. Over the past ten years, significant changes have been taking place in the honey markets; with China, Argentina and Mexico now playing increasingly important and competitive roles. Subsidies are being reduced in Europe and the USA, which have caused farmers to reduce the maintenance of their hives to reduce cost. This in turn has exposed their hives to diseases and infestations, causing large reduction in their productive capacity. Thailand, Vietnam and Ukraine are also emerging players in the world market for honey. World market prices continue to remain stable and relatively high. While the demand for honey by manufacturing industries, such as bakeries, have been driving the greatest portion of the increase in imports of honey; there is also a noticeable trend towards increased demand for organic honey and unique-flower honey, such as citrus-honey. Thus the market is becoming highly differentiated.

If both these trends continue, it can be fairly accurately forecasted that production of milk and honey will shift away from USA and Europe. Depending on the rate at which new players take up the slack, the prices will likely increase for these commodities.

Belize has dabbled in both milk and honey production. It can be argued that we have not really made a serious effort in neither of these.

While we drank fresh milk and ate white-cheese from my uncle's farm as children, a serious effort at commercializing milk production in Belize was only attempted during the USAID projects of the 1970's and 80's. At that time, we started to see Holstein milking cows with improved genetics, we started to see improved grazing pasture, even feed-lot systems for improve nutrition of the cows. USAID added to local know-how in the areas of animal husbandry, farm management, milk-storage and transportation, milk processing, packaging and distribution. In other words, attention was given to all the levels of the production-chain. The government even put in place non-tariff barriers, to prevent the importation of products that compete directly with fresh cows milk; claiming to be supportive to farmers and industry. Even non-Mennonite farmers attempted to make money from milk production and processing. We still cannot claim success after 25 years of dabbling in the domestic market for milk and milk-products.

The nature of milk is that it contains proteins. Proteins are very complex molecules, which behave very differently than expected, if exposed to very small changes in conditions. In short, the processing of milk is not as simple as mixing a glass of Kool-Aid. The entire production chain must be carefully managed with substantial know-how at each critical level.

Another given is that the final product (output) is only as good as what goes into it (input). If the milking cows are not well kept, they will likely suffer from mastitis, or infection of the udder, so the cow will produce low-quality acid milk. If the milking process is not sterile, there will likely be bacteria and other contaminants that will get into the milk and can cause it to spoil quicker or attain undesirable characteristics. If the milk is taken correctly from a healthy cow, but then it is not properly refrigerated, its rich nutrients will allow bacteria to grow and spoil the milk in the holding tanks. If a sub-standard milk is fed into the processing system, or if the processing system itself is inferior, one can expect that a sub-standard product will result.

Consumers have not been too impressed with the quality/consistency of fresh cow's milk and milk-products that they get from local producers.

The final price that the consumer pays for a product must include a reasonable margin for all the players in the production chain, from the farmer to the retailer. If a player in this chain is weak from compressed margins, the chain will not function properly and the industry is likely to falter.

The final price for a product is de-

termined in many different ways. However, the most common way is to look at prices for products competing in the market. This might be referenced to products that compete directly, or products that can act as substitutes.

Milk powder, evaporated milk and sweetened condensed milk can and does act as a substitute for fresh cow's milk. They compete in every cup of coffee or tea, in every birthday cake or pastry. So, they naturally affect the price that fresh cow's milk could be sold at. As those products come from highly subsidized European and American production systems, they ‘control’ the world market by pricing at low levels that will not allow local production systems to compete effectively. Our farmers had to price their milk at levels predetermined by these subsidized products.

Compounded to the subsidy effect that European and Americans enjoy, our own Government put a ZERO PERCENT rate of import duty on milk-powder, evaporated milk, sweetened condensed milk and liquid UHT milk. This results in a negative Effective Rate of Protection (ERP) for the local industry, regardless of the non-tariff protection that they put in place only for liquid cow's milk. This is like a sprinter shooting himself in the leg before he starts the race.

My calculations are that a 20% rate of import duty would convert this scenario into a positive ERP, making it possible for local producers to take full advantage of the BZ\$22 million domestic market for milk products; even if milk products were not protected by non-tariff barriers (which happen to be illegal by WTO rules anyway). This will allow appreciable margins from farmers all the way to the retailer, for most dairy products; and will allow farmers and processors to invest more in improving the quality of their product, and to meet the demands of the consumers.

We can do this now, and start stimulating our local milk industry in a real way..... Or, we can wait for three more years, when our milk prices will have increased by 20% anyway with the continued reduction of subsidies in the industrialized countries; and as the exercise of increasing monopoly power drives the prices upward. While the consumers stand to ‘lose’ temporarily from paying a higher price for milk products, the country stands to gain by reducing its need to import large quantities of this commodity.

I will argue that one of the main obstacles to a truly industrial Belize, is the paradigm that exist as a result of our long history of importation. Our successive governments have sat on

(Please Turn To Page 10) 

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Dormitory at Belize clinic to honor memory of Abby

Sunday, May 06, 2007 A year and a half after their daughter's death, Roger and Jan Brinkman are helping others as they continue to heal. Roger and Jan hope to raise enough money to build a dormitory at the Hillside Healthcare International Clinic in Belize, the clinic their daughter Abby fell in love with. Abby had talked with us about wanting to devote a portion of her life to working at Hillside Clinic," Roger said. "She can't do that, but if we can enable other people to do that, our biggest hopes and dreams will be realized." Abby, 28, died while serving a rotation in tropical medicine at the rural clinic in Punta Gorda, Belize, preparing for a career in pediatrics and mission work. In early November 2005, she boarded a boat headed to Gladden Cay for scuba diving. When the engine stopped with no flares, no working radio and no way to communicate, Abby and three other divers decided to swim for land. The four divers drifted for three days. Emergency workers found three divers alive. Abby had died. After her

death, family, friends and even strangers began asking Roger and Jan how they could help, and within a year more than \$12,000 had been donated to the clinic. Nearing the year anniversary of Abby's death, clinic board members asked Roger and Jan how they would like the donations allocated. "We suggested it go towards helping an IU medical student serve at the clinic," Jan said. "They said they had no shortage of volunteers, but what they did lack was housing for those serving. What they really needed was a dormitory for the volunteers." Currently, the clinic can house a handful of volunteers in a small outbuilding called the "tree house." "I remember Abby kind of laughed about the conditions," Jan said. "The water for the shower came on at 7 a.m. and was turned off at 7 p.m." Jan said the volunteers who don't fit in the "tree house" must ride their bikes seven miles to the closest rental properties. "They are riding their bikes alone in this remote area, sometimes very late at night," Jan said. "If they

could all stay in the same place they could talk about cases and come up with treatment plans." Abby's House The proposed dorm, called "Abby's House," will feature eight bedrooms, a living room, a dining room, a kitchen and two large bathrooms. The estimated cost of the 3,364-square-foot building is \$125,000. The Columbus Rotary Club has committed to raising \$12,500 for the project. "Rotary is about international understanding and fostering world peace," said Joe Smith, Columbus Rotary club president. "This is just the kind of project Rotarians respond to." Smith said many members also knew Abby. "Roger has been a long time

Rotarian, and Abby was certainly visible at Rotary events throughout her life," he said. Pete King, Columbus Rotary member, said a handful of members presented the project to 63 Indiana Rotary clubs at a recent conference. "The response was great," King said. "This kind of project really resonates throughout all segments of society. "We think it is just a very fitting memorial to a very wonderful young woman." Jan and Roger hope to raise the money by the end of the summer and to begin construction by fall. "Any parent who has lost a child will tell you that the worst thing that can happen is that their child is forgotten," Jan said. "Abby's House is just one more way to tell Abby's story.

Land of Milk & Honey

➡ (Continued From Page 7)

a fence between the influential importer groups and the industrially ambitious newcomers. Our advocacy groups, such as the Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI), have attempted to 'represent' industry and commerce clients with interests that have so far remained mutually exclusive.

To break this cycle, the importers need to see themselves not merely as 'representatives' of foreign interests in Belize, but as 'traders' for profit who are part and parcel of a constructive product-market chain that is Belizean. Local producers need to recognize this role of the 'traders', and not attempt to be all things to all persons. These organizations already have the distribution and selling channels established; which they have invested much to develop. Local producers who desire to export will have to work with distributors in other countries anyway. So, why not learn by working with local distributors here in Belize? Countries that have successfully pursued export markets have spent much effort and resources in developing this product-market chain.

If we can solve the issue of importer vs. producer in the building of a strong Belizean product-market chain, we would not need to break up the BCCI into commercial and industrial rivalries. It could become instead a beacon of constructive collaboration between industrial and commercial in-

terests. If we can't solve this problem, then we will continue to see such groups as the Agro-Productive Sector Group and others becoming more influential in representing the interests of industry groups, with a relative weakening among such groups as the BCCI and the Belize Business Bureau. As Belize is very small, this could mean more industry representation, within a context of a weaker and divided private sector lobby, especially if the rule of 'structure follows function' is not adhered to.

BUT.....the secret is in the ERP.....if this is negative, the local producers will likely have compressed margins that will not allow them to offer competitive margins to the local traders and still make a living for themselves. The local traders should not seek to gouge the local producers by demanding higher margins than they get from imported products.

While I know that some naysayers will argue that this article is representative of the old and discredited import substitution models, I will argue that the market realities are constantly adjusting themselves, and because something did not work ten years ago, it does not mean they will not work today....if we did it the right way. Food security should always remain high on our agenda.

If our managers can break this cycle of misunderstanding, Belize can truly move its children closer towards the "land of milk and honey".



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Let these days count

Graduation is near for all you STD 6 students so let these days count. We will be moving on to high school and you might not see your friends again. Sad I know, but true. But you never know, you just might be put in the same class.

Girls: I know you all probably don't talk to the boys all that much but you should, because your gonna miss them. You might be in a school with all girls— not fun. Boys: try and get along with the girls and try not to say some perverted things (like some people I know).

Your friendships will change, you might even get separated from your best friend. But stay strong. Don't be scared that you won't fit in. Of course you won't fit in the first few days because you might not know where to go and the other people might laugh at you, you may not know all the rules. And its like they say, "leaving the familiar for the unfamiliar..." But one of my friends who already graduated last year said that he was kinda happy and he felt

accomplished and relieved. Some other people didn't care at all if they graduated or not, it was no big deal.

But it is still important to graduate. And I hope I'll see you in high school.

Jokes:

It was graduation day and Mom was trying to take a picture of her son in a cap and gown, posed with his father.

"I want a good picture, so try to make this look natural," she said. "Junior, put your arm around your dad's shoulder."

The father answered, "If you want it to look natural, why not have him put his hand in my pocket?"

Mothers

If I had a flower for each time I thought of My Mother, I could walk in my garden forever.

God could not be everywhere and therefore he made mothers.

Mothers hold their children's hands for a short while, but their hearts forever.

Your weekly HOROSCOPE

ARIES (Mar. 21- April 20)

You will easily charm members of the opposite sex. Voice your opinions and contribute to the de bate. Avoid any over indulgences. Do not yield to children or relatives when they really don't deserve it. Your lucky day this week will be Friday.

TAURUS (Apr. 21- may 21)
Travel and communication will be lucrative for you. You may have a hidden adversary who would love to prove you wrong. Monitor your budget carefully to avoid unnecessary stress. Express your interest if you want the relationship to progress. Your lucky day this week will be Tuesday.

GEMINI (May 22-June 21)

You will have good ideas for home improvement projects. Keep your thoughts to yourself for the time being. You can find out interesting information if you get a chance to talk to people you respect. Don't blame others for your own stubbornness. Your lucky day this week will be Friday.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)

Visit friends or relatives who have been confirmed. Changes at home will be necessary. Now is a good time to ask for favors. Travel will promote new romantic encounters. Your lucky day this week will be Friday.

LEO (July 23-Aug 22)

It's time to make professional changes. You can enjoy social events and meet new potential mates; however, avoid being lavish. You will have a great day if you just say what you feel. It might be best to keep your ideas to yourself this week. Your lucky day this week will be Saturday.

VIRGO (Aug. 23 -Sept. 23)

You will be erratic and quite likely to make personal mistakes. You may find that family members may not be too easy to get along with. You will have to make some changes regarding your direction if you wish to keep on top of your career expectations. You need to clear up some important personal documents before the end of the year. Your lucky day this week will be Monday.

LIBRA (Sept. 24 -Oct. 23)

Be tolerant, but don't let any one take you for granted. Emotional upset may prevail on the domestic scene if you have neglected your duties or your mate. Your financial situation may be draining and it's time to make some serious changes. Use your high energy and dynamic approach to win favors from superiors. Your lucky day this week will be Friday.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24 - Nov. 22)

Discover opportunities based on the individuals you mingle with this week. So smile! You may be tired of working for someone else. You can expect opposition from family as well as colleagues. Your lucky day this week will be Sunday.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 23 -Dec. 21)

You can win points if you present your ideas this week. Involvement in groups will be favorable and lead to valuable information. Opportunities may come up at prestigious affairs. Be very careful while in transit or while traveling in foreign countries. Your lucky day this week will be Tuesday.

CAPRICORN (Dec 22.- Jan. 20)

Encourage the youngsters in your family. There's lots to be done and if you meet your deadline you'll be in your boss's good books. Colleagues may try to undermine you when talking to superiors. Be prepared to neutralize any threats. Your lucky day this week will be Tuesday.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 21 -Feb. 19)

You could lose a good friend because of it. Your dramatic approach to life has probably gotten to your mate. You have the stamina and determination to succeed. You will enjoy interaction with others this week. Your lucky day this week will be Friday.

PISCES (Feb. 20-Mar. 20)

Your goals will be in reach if you direct your energy wisely. Direct your energy wisely. You will be able to contribute a great deal to organizations that you join. Be tactful if you see flaws in someone else's work. Your lucky day this week will be Tuesday.



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TOPICAL TIDBITS

Man of the Year



Isn't it interesting how the PUPs are catapulting Jules into the Political Hall of Fame. They attack Jules on a daily basis, while leaking stuff to him simultaneously. First Ralph, then Said, now "falla-foot" Smith-Lightburn. Worth watching. Jules was our man of the year for 2006 and unless anything changes, he's well on the way again for 2007.

And justice for All



Musa has been on a roll attacking the Reporter Newspaper. He has been awarded, or better put—he has put a \$40,000 hurting on that Newspaper. And while his cases get called up whenever he wishes, there are other lawsuits dragging on ad infinitum, thanks to a wonderful new appointees in the Judiciary, hand picked by the man himself. Animal Farm? Whoever said justice delayed is justice denied?

Press blackout on international meetings



What's up with these high powered meetings last week in Belize? Little cooperation from Press Office or Foreign Affairs Ministry. Maybe they were in the dark too. They are usually told only what they need to know so you can't blame them. They are "just doing our jobs" and God knows so many of us live paycheck to paycheck.

Riot Police trained for another demonstration



Lots of talk about big demonstrations on Friday, May 18th, 2007 house meeting in Belmopan. They even brought Tradewinds "simulations" into the picture for crowd control and to intimidate the public. Uncle Sam had better be careful that Musa won't use US troops to settle domestic issues...

Ineffective Demonstrations



The demonstrations are a waste of valuable time, resources, and energy that can be better deployed elsewhere. Didn't you folks hear what Musa told BBC Caribbean Reporter and Reuters after the Jan 2005 demonstrations? (It's on the BBC.com website still) He said he won't resign or call early elections UNLESS there is "bloodshed" or risk to life & limb because he is the democratically elected leader.



Nobody is silly enough to believe that. The guy has no intention of doing either, so don't waste your time. Instead, the better protest would be to withdraw all you saving from the bank in question, quit paying that phone bill to the company in question, and never again use the hospital in question, if you

have a choice. That would be way more effective. Hit them in the pockets. And yes, don't forget to wear black to work on Friday. The national day of mourning...

Please don't let Musa sucker you into committing acts of violence on Friday, May 18th. We need no more bloody Fridays.

Still wating for Reports from Inquiry



And, whatever happened to those investigative commissions of inquiries into the missing millions? When are we to get the reports? Are we to wait till they all die off in accidents or old age? Let's get on with the show.

What's the deal with these gangster reconnection fees from the utility companies? These reconnection fees are bleeding us more than Musa's other consumption taxes. Are these the **poverty alleviation practices that are fully sanctioned by Musa's PUP? The ones he sings about to the international community, particularly the British?**

What is State and Private Sector Economic Discrimination?

(Continued From Page 7)

Sadly Jean Shaw is no longer with us and our leaders of today do not manifest the same concern for Belize's poorest of the poor. Our leaders today are not of the same caliber as those before them. The BTB redirected a prime-time German television travel show, that was going to put the TEA and Toledo on the tourism map, to film resorts up north. They continually told visitors who inquired at the BTB office that the TEA did not exist. Year after year they have continued to ignore TEA's requests for support for TEA and Punta Gorda Conservation Committee projects. Recently the members of the Toledo branch of the BTIA

Third Parties to Unite?



Word on the street is that PNP & WTP will join up with VIP. I pray this happens fast. Where is the NRP? Anybody seen them lately? They've gone silent. Way too silent for my liking while the grass is growing. They need to join up with this master alliance to truly make a difference. Make the announcement guys and make it fast. The only way the third party movement will be successful will be through a grander alliance. Mark my word: make that announcement and the others will come. Maybe even Jules will get onboard; he'd make a great addition to the leadership council.



have developed a Cacao Fest, unfortunately they didn't invite the TEA to participate in the planning. Could it be they didn't want the visitors to stay in the rural village guesthouses, but to return to PG and stay in their hotels and nearby resorts? BTB, the BTIA and the Ministry of Tourism should help the members of the TEA to strengthen and expand this valuable program, rather than requiring by law, fees that they cannot afford.

In closing I should point out if these organizations did get behind the TEA and really help them with institutional strengthening, training, upgrading, and marketing the TEA would be able and happy to pay the required licenses and membership

OAS Point Man - a True Visionary

➡ (Continued From Page 3)

spoken to people on both sides. **The OAS role continues to be important, but essentially it is between two countries. It is a bilateral debate in an international context.** For third party arbitration, or the World Court, both parties have to agree and have to agree to follow the outcome. We are still hopeful both countries will be able to reconcile their positions. The political environment must be conducive. Guatemala is going into elections; we shall have to see..."[and Belize is too, Ambassador]

Q: Ambassador, we understand the former head of the OAS fellowship program, Santos Mahung, a Belizean is no longer at the OAS and is now going to be installed as the new President of UB. Before he left, the fellowship program

was halted and controversy prevailed, what is the status now with the Fellowships & Training programs?

A: The program was suspended, yes. But we intend to lift the ban and start application procedures again, before the General Assembly. We have at least 150 annually going to applicants from Caribbean countries and we believe it is critical to the Caribbean, important to these countries. It is a well respected and useful program.

Q: What are the other benefits to Belize from the OAS aside from Fellowships?

A: There are two other projects in Belize, EDUSAT, which is distance learning by satellite technology and a program for sustainable land development systems, it is called Maya Ranch Foundation.

Q: We understand the FEMCIDI (technical cooperation) program is no more, can you tell us what replaced it?

A: We are not really happy with what is in place right now. The fund is for allocation to development projects, but I feel it is very cumbersome and complicated and it does not give due attention

to development issues. The trend is now for a more holistic approach, to consider democracy, security, development issues and members should lead. What I would like to see is a Development Commission on the Permanent Council so that these issues can get their due.

Thank you very much.

Pope to dealers: You'll answer to God



Pope Benedict XVI embraces Brazil's street children.

GUARATINGUETA, Brazil (AP)—Drug traffickers will face divine justice for the scourge of illegal narcotics across Latin America that destroys lives amid seemingly endless drug-related violence, Pope Benedict XVI said Saturday.

"God will call you to account for your deeds," he warned the dealers to cheers from recovering addicts at a rural treatment center founded by a Franciscan friar.

Brazil and the rest of Latin America face dangerously high rates of drug abuse and traffickers must "reflect on the grave harm they are inflicting on countless young people and on adults

from every level of society," Benedict said.

"Human dignity cannot be trampled upon in this way," the pope declared before a cheering crowd of 6,000 on a sprawling lawn outside the "Fazenda de Esperanca," or "Farm of Hope" near Brazil's holiest shrine, the basilica of Aparecida, home to the nation's patron saint, a black Virgin Mary.

Later, Benedict prayed to the saint for help in restoring the church's eroding influence in Latin America's largest na-

(Please Turn To Page 16) ➡



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Brenda Habuayo wins Female Cross Country

Mexican cyclist Brenda Habuayo, riding for Team C-Ray, set a new record when she won the 2007 Female Cross Country Cycling Classic. Habuayo completed the 75-mile ride from San Ignacio to ride solo into the Marion Jones Stadium Belize City in 3:07:30, breaking the record set by Alma Bennett, to win a \$2,000 first prize, a garland of roses, a diamond ring from JEC Ltd, and the championship trophy.

Last year's winner Gina Lovell rode the ride of her life, turning in her best time ever as she led the main peloton of riders into the stadium 8 minutes later. Lovell won the sprint for second place, clocking 3:16:28 to win a \$1,000 prize.

Shalini Zabaneh of Team Sagitun was 3rd, to win a \$800 prize and a trophy.

Marinette Flowers rolled in 4th to win a \$6000 prize and a trophy.

Jamie Lee Usher, also of Team Sagitun, finished 5th, winning a \$600 prize.

Kaya Cattouse of Team C-Ray was the youngest rider to finish the race, rolling in 6th, to win a \$100 prize.

Shantia Morrison of Team Comfort Air was 7th, Canadian rider Karen Turner was 8th, Maria Gabrielle Mobra Cortez of Team Comfort Air finished 9th and the 2005 Cross Country champ Anthea Sutherland completed the top 10. All 6th to 10th place winners



(Left to right) Marinette Flowers - 5th, Gina Lovell - 2nd, Brenda Habuayo - Champ, Shalini Zabaneh 3rd & Jamie Lee Usher - 5th.

received a medal and a \$100 prize.

Guatemalan rider Luisa Fernanda Zea-Zecena of Team Comfort Air had

led at the start of the race, winning the first 6 station prizes till she was overtaken by Gina Lovell at Spanish Look-

out. After that one station prize Habuayo took over the lead and swept all remaining station prizes on the way to the city

Guest Gallery



Our friend "Barnacle Bill" Taylor sent us this photo of quashes at a family feast.



"Barnacle Bill" Taylor captured the splash of colour of this stair plant.



This oriole reciprocates "Barnacle Bill" Taylor's curiosity.



In Barnacle Bill's eye, the unmatched beauty of this lily needs no gilding.

Letters to the Editor

(Continued From Page 2)

rather proven the truth of the adage “six of one and half-a-dozen of the other.” In other words there is absolutely no difference in the governing style of either party when in power. Indeed power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. The corruption continues; bloated contracts; nepotism; unguided ministers; arrogance; greed; vindictiveness and the hustle goes on.

The political stooges and the hard core supporters line up and scramble for the crumbs which fall out of the feeding bowl— then swear on their mothers graves that all is well. Every five years select individuals demand their pound of flesh from the new rulers of the country as payback for giving their blind support or providing needed funds in a timely manner during the campaign phase.

We have seen in recent years interest groups from outside of Belize funneling significant amount of money into political campaigns. Naturally, these too will demand their pound of flesh if/when their candidate is elected into government. Believe it or not the scenario just described will not change for a long, long time to come because we are a peaceful, docile and fun loving people— always smiling, but quietly bitching and praying that God will somehow intervene.

Pessimist! you say, perhaps. But the truth is there to be seen.

Is it our national destiny? Or are we simply too damn naïve, myopic and complacent to see and do the things that need to be done to ensure equal opportunities for all regardless of COLOUR, CREED, OR POLITICAL PERSUASION; or do we continue to be satisfied with the tiny crumbs that slip through the cracks of the politicians feeding trays. In either case as always someone will make a decision for you come next election.

Meanwhile, you can rant and rave, bitch, holler and scream— the die is cast until 2003, or 2004? Or 2005? Or NEVER! Is it politics or politricks or is DEMOCRACY or DEMCRAZY. You decide.

Alfred Ramirez

No blue Note - No Vote

Dear Editor.

For quite sometimes, I have been campaigning to rid our political campaigns from bribery. It is of utmost importance for voters to know that it is a criminal offence to solicit or accept any gift in kind or in cash from any aspiring or incumbent politician or their agents.

Chapter 36, Section (2) reads, “No person shall give to any other person on account of any person having voted or refrained from vot-

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ing or having induced any other person to vote or refrain from voting at any election, any article exceeding four dollars.

Chapter 37 enumerates all the offenses which constitute bribing a voter. Among these are even attempts to bribe a voter through any means and by any individual, representing the candidate or the political party.

Chapter 37 section (b) goes on to warn a voter who corruptly accepts or takes food, drink, entertainment or provision aforesaid and Chapter 38

Free Ads!

The INdependent Reformer is offering free classified ads for the month of May:

- 1) 20 words or less
- 2) one ad per person in the promotional period for free (additional ads are only \$10 each)
- 3) with photo (first time free...\$10 additional for photo ads) jpeg or tiff formats only. **Must be emailed, no disk pickup or drop off**
- 4) business card –first run is free for month of May, 2007, \$20 a run thereafter
- 5) All classified ads must be emailed to independent.newspaper.bz@gmail.com with cc to kheusner@yahoo.com and checks to PO Box 2666, Belize City. Please note: We must receive your ad by Friday at mid-day for inclusion in following Tuesday issue.

section (a) warns that even making a threat of losing a job or inflicting punishment is guilty of undue influence within the meaning of this Ordinance.

Many politicians would like this violation of our Electoral Laws to just vanish. BUT the possibilities of enforcing these laws are very easy. GET WILLING VOTERS to assist in eradicating this criminal and democratic practice.

Signed Hector Silva
(Former Member of Parliament)

Conservation Land For Sale



70 acres in Burrell Boom for US\$50K
independent.newspaper.bz@gmail.com

Pope to dealers: You'll answer to God

➡ (Continued From Page 13)

tion, where the number of Catholics has dropped sharply in recent decades while born-again Protestant congregations have added millions of faithful to their ranks.

The pope's warning that drug traffickers will face the wrath of God was similar to a 1990s declaration issued by his predecessor, John Paul II, when he went to the Italian island of Sicily and said that mafia kingpins would be judged by God for their crimes.

Brazil is world's second largest consumer of cocaine after the United States and big cities across Latin America's largest nation are plagued with drug violence, according to the U.S. State Department.

While surveys show cocaine use has been relatively stable in Brazil for years, the violence continues unabated, driven by gangs that control street-corner dealing and the shipment of drugs made elsewhere in South America to Europe and the United States.

In Rio de Janeiro's teeming slums, gangs recruit children and engage in near-daily shootouts between themselves and with police that frequently kill innocent bystanders and force parents to use their bodies to shield their children on the streets.

The violence is endemic in other Latin American countries including Colombia and Caribbean nations. In Mexico, gangs battling over billion-dollar drug smuggling routes into the United States leave a daily body count from beheadings, grenade attacks and execution-style killings.

Benedict also donated \$100,000 to the treatment center and told more than 1,500 recovering addicts wearing white shirts with yellow trim representing the Vatican's flag that they must become "ambassadors of hope."

"The Lord has given you this opportunity for physical and spiritual recovery, so vital for you and your families," the pope said. "In turn, society expects you to spread this precious gift of health among your friends and all the members of the community."

The treatment center in Guaratingueta claims an 80% success rate, giving addicts spiritual guidance as they milk cows, tend apple orchards and work as beekeepers.

Addicts who listened to the pope said his visit was important because Brazilian drug users are often treated as castaways from society — and left to beg on the streets so they can buy drugs.

"We are excluded from society, but we are the ones who the pope is coming to see," said Diego Cleto, a 19-year-old who started taking drugs at age 13.

But some doubted whether the pope's message to traffickers will

have any impact.

"What the pope said is important for drug users, but religion doesn't matter to the dealers," said Felipe Kenji, 27, under treatment at the center since December. "They'll only stop selling drugs when they die."

The Guaratingueta treatment center was founded by friar Hanz Stapel in 1983. There are now 31 similar farm-treatment centers in Brazil and 10 more abroad — in Argentina, Germany, Guatemala, Mexico, Mozambique, Paraguay, the Philippines and Russia.

The center is just a short distance away from the shrine city of Aparecida, where Benedict on Sun-

day will open a Latin American and Caribbean bishops' conference aimed at finding ways to reverse the erosion of the church in the region.

Brazil's census shows the percentage of citizens characterizing themselves as Catholics fell to 74% in 2000 from 89% in 1980, while those calling themselves evangelical Protestants rose to 15% from 7%.

The pope is expected to map out strategy to combat the church's losses when he opens the bishops' conference Aparecida, 100 miles east of Sao Paulo.

The small city is home to the three-foot-tall statue of the black Virgin Mary, called "Our Lady Who Appeared."

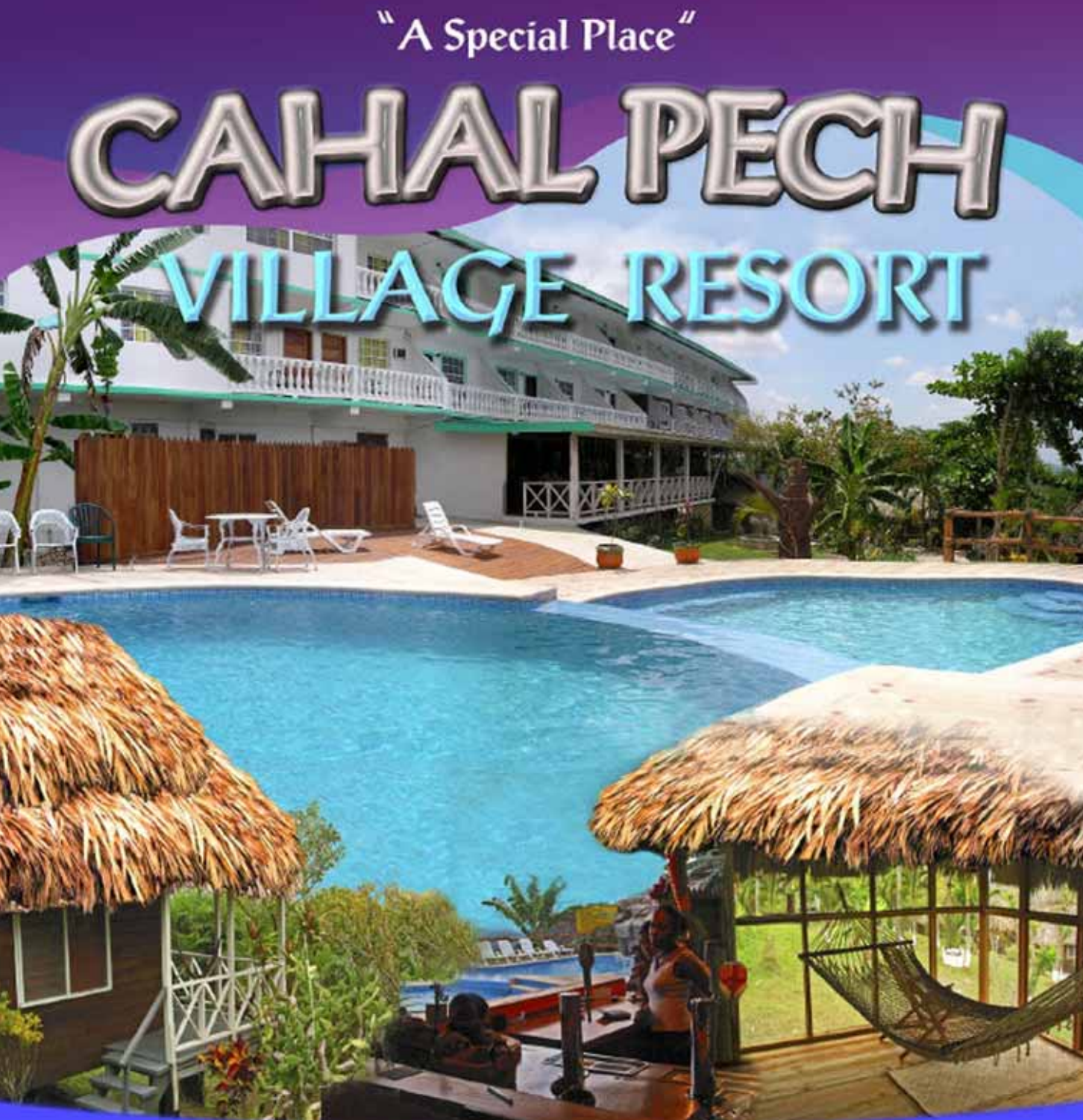
The statue was pulled from a river in the 18th century by poor fishermen who were not catching any fish, and then caught loads in their nets. Miracles were subsequently attributed to the statue, and so many pilgrims flocked to Aparecida that the church built the basilica and inaugurated it as a shrine in 1955.

Saturday night, Benedict implored the saint to "protect the Brazilian and Latin American family" and energize Latin America's priests and nuns with evangelical zeal.

"Pour out upon our brothers and sisters throughout Latin America a true missionary ardour, to spread faith and hope," Benedict said.

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