



CAPITAL WEEKLY

"From the Heart of the Nation to the Soul of the People."



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NEW FISCAL YEAR BEGINS

Challenges Abound - Restraint Applied - Optimism Maintained

This Friday, April 1, 2016, marks the start of the new fiscal year.

It is when the new National Budget kicks in with its approved allocations for public spending set out in General Revenue Appropriation Bill.

The new Budget Proposal was introduced in the National Assembly three weeks ago on Tuesday March 8, 2016 and debated in the House of Representatives on Tuesday and Wednesday March 22 and 23, after which the House approved it. It is expected to be ratified by the Senate on Tuesday March 29, after which it will be signed into law by the Governor General.



*Right Honourable Dean Barrow
Prime Minister of Belize*

Titled "Stability in a Time of Change", the 2016-2017 National Budget is a realistic but ambitious proposal in the face

of unprecedented regional and international challenges, against a backdrop of shrinking disposable financial resources, but thankfully on the back of a macro-framework characterized by, in the words of the Prime Minister, "an economy and public finances which stand on the rock-solid foundation of a strong currency backed up by excess reserves, robust fiscal revenues and a well-managed public debt."

The 2016-2017 Budget was crafted in the context of the administration's transformational success in the past term and the promise for this term that "The Best is Yet to Come". The Government's mission in

this budget is to maintain optimism even as it employs sound fiscal policy which compels it to square its ambitions with the means at its disposal. This, clearly, is the mood that Prime Minister Dean Barrow has attempted to set as he remarked in his budget proposal, "The extent of this reduced but still robust new normal will be determined by a number of factors."

This being the first and pace-setting budget in his last term as Minister of Finance, the Prime Minister certainly wants to preserve his legacy of transformational development and social justice, but also of fiscal responsibility and sound stewardship.

More Border Problems Guatemalan Shoots BDF Soldier

A member of the Belize Defence Force was shot on Holy Saturday, March 26, 2016 by a Guatemalan farmer near the Western border. Sergeant Richard Lambey was at a water-pond more than a Kilometre north-west of the Valentin Operation Post, when he was attacked by the Guatemalan Xatero who had a .22 rifle. There was an exchange of gunfire and Sergeant Lambey was hit a few times, including to the abdomen and hand. As many as twenty-six

expended shells have been removed from the scene. Sergeant Lambey is receiving medical attention at the KMH Hospital.

As we go to press Easter Monday evening, the matter is under investigation by the Ministry of National Security and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in accordance with the usual protocol adhered to with respect to such border incidents that have the potential to escalate tensions between our two countries, Belize and Guatemala, which have an unresolved territorial dispute.



Minister of National Security Hon. John Saldivar visiting BDF Soldiers at an Operation Post near the Belize-Guatemala Border

Guatemalans Grab Garland Belmopan's Borland First Belizean



New Cross Country Champion Alejandro Padilla Miranda (center) flanked by Second Place finisher Julio Padilla Miranda (left) and Third Place cyclist Joel Borland of Belmopan, first Belizean finisher

After 144 grueling miles of pedal-pushing, Belize's most popular single-day sporting event, the Holy Saturday Cross Country Cycling Classic, came to a finish at the BTL Park in Belize City, with two visiting Guatemalan cyclists taking first and second place.

The new Cross Country Champion is Alejandro Padilla Miranda, and the second place finisher is his brother Julio Padilla Miranda. Third place was taken

by Joel Borland of Belmopan, the first Belizean to cross the finish-line. Fourth Place went to Brandon Cattouse; Fifth Place to Bill Elliston; Sixth Place to Scottie Weisse, Seventh Place to Nissan Arana, Eight Place to Robert Liam, Ninth Place to Henry Moreira, and Tenth Place to Ron Vasquez.

The Champion finished the race in a time of 5 hours, 51 minutes and 9 seconds. This was the 88th edition of the Cross Country Cycling Classic.

EDITORIAL

Reflection - Renewal - Recommitment

The Easter Holiday just past, is invariably for us a time of reflection, renewal and recommitment to the principles and ideals we strive to uphold. We trust that such is the spirit of the entire nation.

The timing of the holiday this year was particularly appropriate, as it marked the end of the old fiscal year and the beginning of the new. Following some fiery, sometimes personal exchanges in the House of Representatives, our parliamentarians had the extended Easter weekend to cool off and refocus; and now the work of nation-building must resume in earnest.

By all accounts, the fiscal year that commences April 1, 2016 will be exceedingly challenging as disposable public resources are shrinking and large sections of our productive and financial sectors face crippling adversities, some natural, others induced by the architects and regulators of the global economy.

Though confronted by these issues of daily survival, we cannot allow ourselves to be so consumed as not to remain vigilant against the external threats to our very sovereignty as evidenced by the assault on various fronts by our 'friends' to the West and South who, well into the Twenty-First Century, insist on clinging to an unfounded, outdated and unneighbourly claim to our territory.

As individuals, we are endowed with the indomitable will to survive and overcome; a virtue we must exude and extend to the communities we serve and reside in. As a people and nation, we must do all that is humanly possible to cope, even as we place our ultimate faith in the Supreme Creator whose divine master-plan and intervention grants us unlimited power and dominion over all things.

Just as the grave could not contain him, so can we never be denied, nor long detained, against all odds, from the triumph and prosperity that is the just reward for our determination, resourcefulness and faith. In truth, the Saviour lives; and so does Belize!

Faber or Saldivar for Deputy? PM Barrow "Scrupulously Neutral"



Honourable Patrick Faber



Honourable John Saldivar

It's a contest that has been looking inevitable for quite some time, but it has now been hastened by the voluntary stepping aside of Hon. Gaspar Vega as First Deputy Leader of the United Democratic Party. And, as expected, Belmopan Representative Hon. John Saldivar and Collet Representative Hon. Patrick Faber have both announced their entry into the contest to fill the position.

Both gentlemen did so on Monday, March 21, the day immediately following the Party's National Convention which was scheduled well in advance when no one anticipated the position of Deputy becoming vacant. As to the special convention to fill the post, that hasn't yet been exactly scheduled, but all indications are it will be sometime in June.

Faber made his announcement with a press conference at the Party Headquarters in Belize City, while Saldivar made his via a nationally broadcast television message.

One of the youngest politicians in the National Assembly, Faber is promoting his candidacy as "The Path to the Future", while Saldivar, the more elderly parliamentarian, is employing the slogan "Unity, Maturity, Continuity". It promises to be quite a contest, the two being close friends but both fierce and savvy political contenders.

The last time there was a contest for First Deputy Leader was back in 2013 when Hon. Patrick Faber was defeated by Hon. Gaspar Vega who was defending the position. At that time, Prime Minister Dean Barrow, who commands much respect and love within the UDP, had showed his hand in support of Vega, something which many believe was the single greatest determining factor. This time, the equation promises to be much differ-

ent as PM Barrow has publicly pledged to remain, in his own words, "scrupulously neutral."

In an interview with the national media, the Prime Minister suggested that the contest for Deputy could have strong implications as to who will replace him as leader as he is scheduled to retire as Party Leader and Prime Minister by early 2020.

"There would need to be a convention for leader at that time. My sense is that most people see what's going to happen now as a kind of dry run for 2019 or 2020; and I think the hope is that whoever wins now, will be seen as having a lock on 2020, and that might actually result in our avoiding having another convention. If that's how it turns out, so much the better; let us have the fight now and let us have, therefore, years after the fight takes place, to heal all wounds," the PM explained.

The date and venue for the special convention will be set at a National Party Council Meeting to be held following the Easter Holidays.

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Fireworks in the Capital

DEBATE ON NATIONAL BUDGET 2016-2017



*Right Honourable Dean Barrow
Prime Minister of Belize*

Eagerly awaited, this year's edition of the annual debate on the national budget *did* live up to expectations as far as the fireworks were concerned. But how substantive and productive were the often fiery exchanges? The answer can be as subjective or objective as one wants to be. As objective as we can, let's recap some of the highlights of the two-day debate.

In accordance with tradition as spelled out in the Standing Orders of the House, the debate kicked off on Tuesday March 22 with the rebuttal by Leader of Opposition Hon. John Briceno who gave an almost point by point reply to the PM's Budget Proposal.

In his introduction to the actual meat of his budget proposal, the PM had made the bold declaration that this inaugural budget of the UDP's third consecutive term "in like fashion as the previous eight budgets I have read, will, I believe, reassure general citizenry and particular stakeholders alike that the current and forecast state of the public finances of Belize are both sturdy and stable."

He nevertheless anticipated the Opposition's criticism of his budget, remarking, "There is, of course, a narrow political minority that reflexively opposes everything UDP. But impartial observers all agree that the sterling stewardship of the people's money was foremost in the minds of the voters as they cast their ballots last November. Our consistent and long record of judicious financial management, Mr. Speaker, has produced an unbroken period of steady growth and optimal economic conditions. There is now a historical vindication of both our philosophy and our probity."

Opposition Leader rebuts Prime Minister

The PM then went on to chronicle what he contends is, by all accounts, a good performance starting in 2008 and leading up to the fiscal year coming to an end.

"First, there is an unmatched string of year on year increases to the size and diversity of the economy. And this has been complemented by the longest post-Independence period of low inflation, reductions in the cost of borrowing for both private and public sectors, and increases in revenue generation by the Government," he asserted.

"Second, we have been architects of monumental advances in the wellbeing of the working class as measured by the lowest unemployment in a decade, and by the surge in real wages. I remind all that in the case of our 12,000 public officers and teachers, the salary augmentations amount, with this the third consecutive year of increase which I proudly declare now will take place, to almost 25 percent. That, by any measure and in comparison with any country anywhere, is absolutely spectacular. And complementing and buttressing this new purchasing power for the middle class is our robust safety net for the disadvantaged, including our signature BOOST and Food Pantry Programs, record education and health subsidies, and now an increase in SSB monthly payments to 8,000 pensioners," the PM added.

And for good measure, he emphasized, "The third point to make, in this context, is the unrelenting swell of public investments in national infrastructure such as streets, drains, roads, bridges, sporting facilities, parks and playgrounds. When assessed in its totality over the nine budget cycles, this will have surpassed \$1.5 billion and will have touched the lives of citizens in every corner of the country."

And so, the PM asserted, it is on the strength of such consistently sound performance that he was introducing his new budget for the new fiscal year: "Thus it is that in introducing this Budget, Mr. Speaker, my Administration is able to demonstrate its fidelity to, and reaffirmation of, the vow we first

swore in 2008 and renewed in 2012 and 2015: our commitment to strive always and ceaselessly for advance, for equity and for openness in our stewardship of the public finances."

Well, characterize him as you will, be it the leader of that "narrow political minority" which according to the PM "reflexively opposes everything UDP", Leader of the Opposition, John Briceno had a different take on the Government's performance and its vision going forward as outlined in the new budget.

"We believe that at the heart of any budget, and by extension this exercise, should be the confidence that better days are ahead of us. We believe that this exercise should inspire in all our people Hope and from all of us it should elicit action," Briceno remarked. "Indeed, we expect the budget to be more than just numbers. Any responsible government in 2016 should formulate, present and pass a budget that prioritizes its programmes. This budget must also show the efficiency and effectiveness of the administration's stewardship. The budget should be the ultimate exercise in the effective allocation of the nation's resources. And it seems this year, our nation's resources are very scarce indeed. Perhaps this fact has been wilfully ignored in these past years, since the Auditor General's report indicates that this Administration seems indifferent to affordability and efficiency of the spending of the public purse."

Briceno extolled the spirit of the Belizean People, but was not as flattering of the Government and its budget proposal: "Mr. Speaker, Belizeans are an incredible people; we are a creative, productive, friendly and compassionate people. For the most part, we are an optimistic people. This 2016/2017 budget, I am afraid, does not reflect any of the qualities that we see in our collective Belizean identity. This is not a budget that is optimistic. This is not a budget for Belizeans. It is not creative, and it is neither hopeful nor resourceful



*Honourable John Briceno
Leader of the Opposition*

as we are. The priorities set out in this budget, if any, are not the priorities of the Belizean people, they are recycled initiatives and programmes put in place by an administration that lacks the competence to find real solutions to the serious problems that face our generation. This budget will not make us safer; it will not provide those much-needed jobs that will grow our economy; it will not encourage any new growth in the business sector; it will not expand education for our young people who are out of school, and it is not reflecting the fairness we need if we are to lift up all Belizeans."

And then, for good measure, the Leader of the Opposition threw in a perhaps anticipated political punch: "Indeed after the tax increase on fuel levelled on us just days before the budget speech, Belizeans listened to the Right Honourable Prime Minister's speech with fear, afraid that with the Petro Caribe money all but gone, that this government may be one pay check away from bankruptcy. Everyone knew that with the elections now behind us, this would be a year filled with pain and sorrow...I wished we could all anticipate a good year. After all, the best, they said, was yet to come. So, before the speech, I really expected a good budget. Sadly, this budget is a letdown. UDP's, PUP's and all of us have been let down by a budget that lacks any meaningful plan for the future; it offers no path to the creation of new jobs or the improvement of productivity."

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Fireworks in the Capital

DEBATE ON NATIONAL BUDGET 2016-2017

Having rebutted the spirit of the Prime Minister's Budget Proposal, Opposition Leader Hon. John Briceno proceeded to take issue with the actual figures presented.

"In 2015, our economy grew by a meager 1.2 percent, well below the 2.5 percent that Government projected, and well below the average world economic growth of 3.1 percent. Government overspent by more than 143 million dollars. In a 4 billion dollar economy, Government spending seems out of control. Government is spending 25 cents out of a dollar in our economy. At the end of 2015, we owed \$2.35 Billion with a "B", and we are going to borrow another 183 million this year; and according to the Right Honourable Prime Minister, we should end up at 2.8 billion by this time next year... The national debt will soon be at 80 percent of GDP," Briceno contended.

He then went on to make the major assertion that the Belize Economy is in recession: "The Truth of the matter is that for each of the past two consecutive quarters of 2015, the economy shrank. In the second quarter of 2015, the economy shrank by 1.6 percent. In the third quarter of 2015, the economy shrank by 1 percent, and for the fourth quarter, the SIB is yet to announce the figures. But if you go by the Prime Minister's announcement that overall the economy grew by 1.4 percent in 2015, then there has not been any growth since the first quarter. Economists define a recession as two consecutive quarters of negative growth...By any standard, local or international, it is clear that our economy is contracting. Mr. Speaker, we are in a recession!"

But Belmopan Area Representative Hon. John Saldivar, who the Prime Minister later described as the only real economist in the House, would not allow Briceno to get away with such a bold assertion. "I don't know where the Leader of the Opposition studied his economics," Hon. Saldivar remarked. "Contrary to what he has been saying, our spending power has been protected by the United Democratic Party. Add to that the fact that public officers will receive their third consecutive raise of pay; and thanks, Mr. Leader of the Opposition for supporting it. I am the Area Representative for Belmopan. Belmopan is the home of thousand of public officers and teachers. I stand here proud to know that the people I represent—the public officers and teachers who voted for me in great numbers, especially in Belmopan Central—will be receiving another raise of pay. Also, Mr. Speaker, our retired public officers and teachers who will be benefiting from this raise of pay will also be benefiting—along with the other

John Saldivar versus John Briceno



*Honourable John Saldivar
Belmopan Representative*

retired workers in this country—from an increase in Social Security pensions. This is absolutely amazing. I love my Prime Minister and I love my U.D.P. Government!"

The Opposition Leader also took on the issue of jobs and wages noting that, as Briceno put it, "the Right Honourable Prime Minister took pride in declaring that his Government advanced the wellbeing of the working class by touting the lowest unemployment in a decade and a surge in wages." On the contrary, Briceno claimed, a total of 3,300 jobs had been lost in key industries since the UDP Government took office. He argued that statistics produced by the IMF show that over the eight years of the UDP, the average income per person in real terms, after accounting for inflation, has increased from \$7,318 to \$7,663 an increase of only \$43 per year or 0.6 percent per annum. This, he said, is in stark contrast to the nine years under the PUP when, according to him, average income per person grew more than five times faster than under the UDP, increasing from \$5,675 to \$7,318, or by over \$182 per year per person. And, he claimed, over 39,000 Belizeans who want to work, won't be able to get a job, and thousands more will join the work force this summer. "So, to say that the unemployment rate has gone down is at least a fiction, if not a fraud on the people," Briceno alleged.

But Belmopan Area Representative Honourable John Saldivar countered, "I don't know if he noticed, but unemployment today is the lowest it has been in the last five years. And the 2008 unemployment figure to which he refers, has to be clarified by the fact that there was bloated spending, bloated borrowing...un-sustainable, and that's why we were where we were in 2008. In 2012, we were at 15.3 percent. We took it down to 12.9 percent in 2013; 11.6 percent in 2014; and now it is down to 10.1 percent. That is sustainable. That is what we call prudent management of our economy. Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, this single indicator is the main reason why we have won a third term; jobs are being created, people are working,



*Honourable John Briceno
Leader of the Opposition*

people are satisfied with the U.D.P!" And with that argument, Saldivar segued towards touting employment and increased capacity in areas which fall under his own portfolio as Minister of National Security.

"Out of last year's budget, we were able to grow the Police Department by a whopping and unprecedented 320 new police officers. The BDF we were able to grow by 160 soldiers; and the Coast Guard we were able to grow by 94 seamen. Last year, we also completed dormitories in Hattville, refurbished the Coast Guard Base, repaired the barracks at Price Barracks, repaired the barracks at the Police Training Academy, and repaired the Pomona Police Station. From this budget, we will add another 160 police officers to our ranks, another 50 Coast Guard members to our ranks, and another 80 BDF soldiers to our ranks. In this fiscal year, we will complete the Forward Operating Base at Hunting Caye; will commence the groundwork for the patrol base at Northern Ambergris Caye; we will complete the multi-purpose building within the Coast Guard Headquarters Compound; we will support the construction of the joint forces bases at Consejo; we will commence construction of a station in Punta Gorda; and we will commence construction of a station in Big Creek. And we will acquire, for the first time in the history of this country, two 100 foot patrol boats valued at over 10.2 million US dollars...This will allow our Coast Guard to properly police and manage even our economic zone which is over 200 miles out. In the BDF, over 2 million will be spent on training for our helicopter pilots. Yes, Mr. Speaker, we now have 3 helicopters in the BDF!"

Hon. Briceno also rebutted the Prime Minister on Petro-Caribe spending. "One would have hoped that this kind of spending would have served as a catalyst, a driving force for our development," Briceno argued. "Of the 325 million spent from Petro Caribe funds, 35 million was put into the National Bank. From what the records show, it appears that the National Bank is operating at a loss...I wonder if many of

the inferior quality streets and roads that were rehabilitated with Petro Caribe funds were done cost effectively...The Member from Belmopan loves to remind people of the past, and about what we supposedly did between 1998 and 2008. He pretends to forget that it was the PUP who did the Marine Parade reclamation project, we built the Burrell Boom-Hattville Road, the Orange Walk By-Pass, we did work on the Humming Bird Highway and built the Southern Highway...Perhaps the people from the "special vehicle" institution called BIL can provide for us a list of their projects and let us see if those projects impacted Belizeans the way ours did...I was the person who signed the Petro Caribe Agreement some years ago, and as I understood it at the time, the role of the fund was mainly to assist in the development of the country... Petro Caribe monies should have also been invested in creating a formidable trade infrastructure to support our industries, enabling them to compete not only in regional but international markets."

But Hon. John Saldivar scoffed at Briceno's pronouncements and suggestions in this regard, remarking, "He wants to school us about how to spend Petrocaribe money! I mean, I guess, they are between a rock and a hard place, because they have a job to do, but each and every time that they open their mouths and try to criticize something from this government, we can always point to their slip that's showing. We can always point to what they have done. You can't come and instruct us, Mr. Leader of the Opposition, because when you had access to the Petrocaribe money—he says that everything he hears from the government is Petrocaribe, we are singing the praises of Petrocaribe; yes, we are telling the people what we are doing with Petrocaribe, and that is why every half-turn you hear, Petrocaribe is building a road, Petrocaribe is doing this and that—they didn't want the Belizean people to know about Petrocaribe. They never used to whisper or holler, "Petrocaribe", because they did not want the people to know that we had Petrocaribe. They did not want the people to know what they were doing with Petrocaribe. Over 80 million dollars they had!"

And having rebutted the Opposition Leader's rebuttal of the Prime Minister's Budget Proposal, Saldivar threw in one last political jab, for good measure. "This is his second turn as Leader of the Opposition. Unfortunately he may have taken over under circumstances not too friendly, because it was very noticeable in his presentation the lack of applause from his colleagues on that side of the House," Saldivar concluded.

Fireworks in the Capital

DEBATE ON NATIONAL BUDGET 2016-2017

The following are excerpts from presentations by the two elected female parliamentarians in the House of Representatives during the Debate on the 2016 National Budget.

Hon. Beverly Castillo

"This budget is a BOLD budget. Like the other eight budgets presented by this administration and by this Prime Minister, this 2016/17 budget allocates significant resources to three pillars of our country: Education, Healthcare and National Security."

"As the Prime Minister so proudly stated, the Petrocaribe sponsored funds greatly transformed the lives of our Belizean people, specifically in the areas of infrastructure, social welfare, Education and Healthcare. The growth and transformation in these areas were truly phenomenal. I am proud to say that all 9 villages in the great constituency of Belize Rural Central were a part of the unprecedented infrastructure-transformation."

"This is an administration that has provided, and will continue to provide the environment to uplift and empower our people."

"As I turn to this year's budget, I am reminded that the reason why we are here today to support this budget is because the Belizean people, for the third consecutive time, have entrusted us with this sacred responsibility to manage the public purse on their behalf. This responsibility is given because of the stellar past performance of this Government."

"Allow me to remind the people that we promised that the 'BEST is Yet to Come.' The best thing a government can do for its people is to Provide 'Stability in a Time of Change'. In the 2016/2017 budget, you will see the focus remains on improving the quality of life for all our people by making sure the ministries have funds to capture and address those actions that will ensure that all our people, including the good people of Belize Rural Central, are never left behind."

"This budget allows an initial 20 million for salary increases to public officers and teachers, pending the tabulation of the revenue increase over last year. This raise, represents an unprecedented salary increase for our public officers and teachers."

"This raise, of course, is in addition to the 6 and 8 percent raise they received over the last two fiscal years, respectively. The fact that this Government is able to accomplish this feat is testament to the fact that this UDP government is the best at governance and the

The Women in The House



*Honourable Beverly Castillo
Belize Rural Central Rep.*

management of our public monies. This is a government that makes and keeps its promises."

"I am most pleased that this government will continue to invest in our little ones by expanding preschool opportunities for the over 8,500 preschoolers in this country."

"This budget provides an additional \$60 million for building new high schools and payment for CXC's for our students. This demonstrates that this administration is committed to building our nation through the empowerment of our people. Education, after all, is what will lift our people out of poverty."

"We have allocated funds that will allow us to increase the delivery of primary care services by doubling the funds for medical supplies, upgrading of our medical buildings, as well as expand our programs to control vector-borne diseases."

"These efforts, in no small measure, will ensure the health and well-being of our people and thus contribute to the prosperity of our nation."

"National Security is one of our core responsibilities as a responsible government. As such, you will note that we have allocated significant resources to these efforts. The budgeted amounts reflect the importance of this budget to the safety and security of our people. We are doing everything to make sure the lives of our people get better. We have a great head-start with this budget."

"History has shown that our UDP Government has brought great transformation to Belize and Belize Rural Central. We were elected a third term based on the performance of the last two terms. Thus, we cannot, and will not disappoint our people. We will work everyday to ensure that we deliver on all of our manifesto promises, and thus improve the lives of all of our people."

"Now as in the past, Mister Speaker, this budget guarantees a stable future in a time of change. I support this budget."



*Hon. Tracy Taegar-Panton
Albert Representative*

Hon. Tracy Taegar-Panton

"The Albert Constituency is no different than the other 30 electoral divisions which have been the primary beneficiaries of the people-centred, pro-poor policies that continue to be the driving force of this UDP Administration. I can attest that, through the Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports & Culture, young Albert residents have received unprecedented access to educational opportunities at the primary, secondary, vocational and tertiary levels. In addition to tuition support, there has been support for the purchase of text books, school supplies, feeding programs and other extra-curricular activities, particularly in the areas of music and sports."

"Many of my constituents have benefited from the mortgage write-off programs; the write-off of outstanding bills at the KMH. Many have been recipients of the extraordinary support provided during the flooding we experienced in the latter half of last year. Those in my constituency who work in the Public Service continue to receive annual wage increments as part of the Government's comprehensive Salary Adjustment Program...Improvements in health services provided by the Ministry of Health; improvements to the citizen protection programs and community policing efforts being spearheaded by the Ministry of National Security; access to affordable mortgage capital made available through the Ministry of Finance and the National Bank of Belize have all provided a renewed sense of hope."

"I make reference, Mr. Speaker, to the areas of Investment, Trade & Commerce for which I have been assigned oversight responsibilities, in areas that continue to attract strategic investments to Belize. Reforms actively being pursued through stakeholder engagement and cross-ministerial collaboration will strengthen the investment infrastructure

to allow for more seamless facilitation and greater predictability in the investment process."

"Our national investment portfolio will also comprise a new dimension. Over the past two years, the government commissioned an assessment of Belize's readiness to utilize a Public Private Partnership Platform for development. It has been determined that this new model is relevant and timely within the present outlook and can serve as a new mechanism to support both the development and management of major infrastructural works, projects such as new port facilities, new airport facilities, an upgraded road network that will take into consideration the movement of people, the movement of settlements, access to markets, improved land transportation systems, and the use of waterways to further expand tourism and tourism auxiliary services."

"The talk on every international medium, the IMF, the World Economic Forum, and others, is about the dismal Global Economic Outlook for 2016 and the expectations of yet another economic downturn due to inflationary pressures that go well beyond falling commodity prices. The growth expectations seem to be falling consistently, downgrading growth estimates by 0.2 percentage points across the board, worldwide. The advice given to policy-makers is to build short term resilience and find ways to bolster activities for sustained long-term growth prospects...The core values we will adhere to have a holistic approach to Investment Promotion, Export Promotion, Trade and Commerce and are the same core values the Government has relied on in building a strong tourism economy - transparency, consistency, predictability and accountability."

"We can be pessimistic about the challenges or we can choose to build on the successes by strategically aligning resources to support the meaningful gains to ensure long-term sustainability. We must remain proactive and vigilant to take advantage of our growth prospects and best position ourselves to seize these opportunities. This is exactly what the proposed 2016-2017 budget hopes to achieve. On behalf of Albert constituents, and all of us who continue to work in the areas of Investment, Trade and Commerce, both in the public sector and the private sector, I am pleased to place on record my support for the Right Honourable Prime Minister, for the policies and programs of this Government, and for the 2016/2017 Budget Estimates as presented. I thank you."

Fireworks in the Capital

DEBATE ON NATIONAL BUDGET 2016-2017

Faber Counters Hyde & Musa



Honourable Said Musa
Fort George Representative

On the Opposition side, the man who filled the second spot, following Hon. John Briceno, was Lake Independence Area Representative Hon. Cordel Hyde, this being his first Budget Debate since returning to the parliamentary fold. Hyde, in his usual down-to-earth fashion, took aim at the Prime Minister's Budget Proposal, calling it empty and irrelevant to the lives of the common people.

"The Government says they are pro-poor, and I agree; they are all about keeping you poor; this budget will ensure that", Hyde asserted. "This budget is like all the rest. It will not make the lives of the 175,000 poor persons in this country better. In fact, of the one billion dollars that will be spent in this budget, the ministry tasked with fighting poverty, Ministry of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation, will receive a mere 3% of the entire budget...When you elect a government that tells you they are swimming in money and the best is yet to come, and then you discover after the elections that they are all broke and it's only the worse that is yet to come, what are you to do? There is not much you can do, except to get on your hands and knees and pray...I've looked high and low, but I can't find any weapons against mass poverty inside this budget. Perhaps those on the other side will be able to show us; and don't tell me about infrastructural projects, because those are beginning to seem like purely get-rich schemes."

Following him, on the Government side, was Collet Representative and aspiring UDP Deputy Leader Hon. Patrick Faber. But Faber would not spend much time countering Hyde's arguments, except to characterize his presentation as dis-



Honourable Patrick Faber - Collet Division Area Representative

appointing and not living up to expectations. Faber instead turned his attention to the Opposition's most seasoned debater, former Prime Minister Said Musa.

"When he was Prime Minister and in his eighth year, he said Government took the decision to rein in the deficit because 'we' recognized that fundamental imbalances had emerged in 'our' fiscal accounts; time was not on 'our' side in correcting those imbalances. He said the alternative would have been to continue to delay the adjustment with potentially disastrous consequences for the economy and our nation. He had to slow things down. Remember the economic train that they were talking about that Ralph had helped them to lead? It had run away, and they were having serious problems. And, like the ostrich, he for a long while was burying his head in the sand when, of course, some of them from this side at that time, and the people of the country started to rein him in. We must not forget the unions and everybody else who started to agitate for changes to be made. And so, in order to try to save face and to appease some of his own colleagues who were telling him how terribly wrong he was going, and the people of this country who were outside of these National Assembly meetings rioting and trying to make sure that things go the right way, he had a change of heart and tried after so many years to make things right. But it was too late, Mr. Speaker. The writing was on the wall already!"

Hon. Musa, in his charac-

teristically shrewd and humorous debate style, replied, "Over the past one hour and twenty minutes, you would have thought that we were debating the budget of 2006/2007. I felt a little privileged, in fact, honoured that the Member for Collet Division, the Minister of Education, would spend so much time trying to debate a Musa budget of 2006 instead of trying to make his contribution to the 2016 budget debate. But I suppose this wannabe Prime Minister could not find it within himself to really concentrate on the budget before us today, so he harps back to the 2006 budget. And it makes me feel that this man has an obsession, an obsession with me, Mr. Speaker."

Turning to the Budget itself, Musa contended, "The Prime Minister has presided over the expenditure of about 8 Billion Dollars - Billion with a B—and so obsessed was the leader of the U.D.P. to win a third term, so obsessed were all of them, in fact, that he has indeed gone for broke, and now the country is broke; thousands of Belizeans are broke. The Treasury has been raided, the Central Bank has been raided...The Government has been on a spending binge, and like the proverbial drunken sailor, while the spree was going on, there was no concern about tomorrow. And in addition to the billions spent from the budgeted amounts collected from the people in taxes, they also borrowed and spent millions more. We've heard about the 325 Million of Petrocaribe funds; loan funds, squanders. They also blew away 160 Million of budget-



Honourable Cordel Hyde
Lake I Representative

ary support from Taiwan—20 Million Dollars every budget year they get from Taiwan. They borrowed millions more from the World Bank, millions more from the IDB, millions more from the CDB, millions more from CABEL. And in order to prop up B.T.L, which they had taken over, they raided Social Security funds for another 50 Million—15 Million in addition went to the B.E.L acquisition. Mr. Speaker, as the Leader of the Opposition said, the chickens have indeed come home to roost."

The specific points and assertions made by Musa and his other colleagues on the Opposition side would be skillfully and forcefully countered by the Prime Minister in his wrap up of the debate. But, Faber, for his part, contented himself with defending the overall spirit of the Budget and the investments and expenditures by the Administration nationwide, particularly in his own constituency.

"You know what really bothers me, when these on the other side get up? I think the Prime Minister outlined the amount that was spent in that flood. You hear them criticize the Prime Minister about that 1.9 Million Dollars. I heard the Leader of the Opposition repeat the ridiculous talk about flat-screen TV and a whole lot of nonsense. Why do you continue to spew nonsense? Where is any evidence that any flat-screen TV was bought after that flood? And I warn you about criticizing barbecue and pibil. It did not work for you. It did not diminish my margin in the Collet Division; in fact, it increased the margin. And, no matter what kind of nonsense you all talk on that other side, the people of Collet are in love with Patrick Faber, and Patrick Faber is in love with the people of Collet," he concluded.

Fireworks in the Capital

DEBATE ON NATIONAL BUDGET 2016-2017



Honourable Michael Finnegan
Member for Mesopotamia

A newcomer to Parliament, Kareem Musa has quickly emerged as a force to contend with on the Opposition side of the House; and, as we anticipated, he made his mark on the 2016 edition of the National Budget Debate.

Sincere or not, accurate or not, the younger Musa, as Area Representative for the business-focused constituency of Caribbean Shores, made some pretty compelling arguments against the Prime Minister's budget.

Fair or not, what stood out most about his presentation was his attack on Prime Minister Barrow and family for legal fees which Musa claims they had collected for representing the Government on a number of litigation matters.

"Do you want to know how much money the Prime Minister as the Minister of Finance gave to his family members and friends in legal fees? If you turn to page forty-six of the budget, Mister Speaker, at forty-one-ten, you will see that over the last three years, the Prime Minister as the Minister of Finance has paid out a whopping fourteen million—this is not monopoly money, by the way; this is real money — fourteen million, eight hundred and ninety-five thousand, four hundred and thirty-two dollars to his friends and family in legal fees. But that is only one line item, you know...fourteen millions plus.

It does not end there. If you go down on the same page forty-six to line item one-eight-zero-eight—now, somehow this found its way mysteriously into a Capital Two project, legal fees you know, Capital Two project—the Prime Minister as Minister of Finance paid out to his family and friends an additional 12, 719,926 dollars, bringing the grand total of this parallel underground operation to 27, 615,358 dollars. You heard right; that is the magic number that this Prime Minister has time and time again refused to disclose to the Belizean people."

And, if that was not enough, the Caribbean Shores Representative offered some additional com-

ASSAULT - WARNING - REPRISAL - WRAP-UP

mentary and name-calling, asserting, "The Prime Minister glorifies the B.T.L and B.E.L acquisitions as his crowning achievement in an attempt to try and create some sort of legacy for himself. But, Mr. Speaker, as each year passes by, whenever he mentions this supposed nationalization, his applause gets lower and lower as even his own people are on to him; his own people are now realizing that this was all just one big family hustle. Twenty-Seven Million for Lois and Denys and Naima, and the top job at B.T.L for his son, his text-savvy son; that's what he calls him...Anwar!"

While the matter involved public business, the spirit and tenor of the attack seemed personal, and while the Prime Minister would definitely have the last word in his wrap-up, it was Mesopotamia Representative Michael Finnegan who gave the first response in the tone of a stern warning to the younger Musa.

"I listened a while ago to the member from Caribbean Shores, and he did something I did not like," Hon. Finnegan remarked. "He started calling names, and names of people's wife, etcetera. And I don't want this to get out of hand. He is a young member in this House. Stop calling people's wife name, and call people's wife or ex-wife name in Parliament, because when you got sash window, you don't throw stone, Sir. And a lot of names can be called. The Leader of the Opposition, just after accepting his post of Leader, said that we must be friendly to one another; we must discuss the issues; there must be no name calling, insinuation and aspersion on people's character and people's name. Be careful, because this side could call people name and say a lot of things," Finnegan chastised.

As to the substance of the accusations, Finnegan explained, "He cast aspersion on family members of the Prime Minister in connection with their legal profession, and tried to paint a picture and give the public an impression that these family members collected some 40 million dollars in terms of legal fees being paid out to them. Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely not true; that is a lie, Mr. Speaker. He fabricated the notion, he used the figure that is in the book, and he decided, as the Pharisee, who will get 5 million, who will get 4 million, who will get 3 million. Mr. Speaker, that is not so; those are monies that were allocated for legal contracts as far as the government is concerned. All those monies are not monies for legal fees, Mr. Speaker."

Finnegan's intervention was more than a strong warning, it was an accurate forecast, as the

Prime Minister in his wrap-up launched what was the equivalent of a counter-attack with intentions a few levels more lethal.

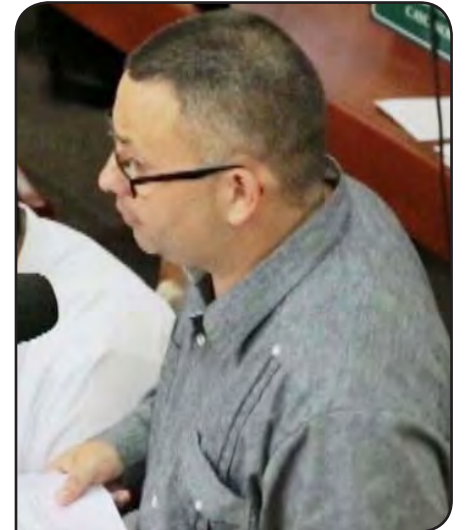
"I heard when the member for Mesopotamia, the Minister of Housing, was remonstrating with the young member from Caribbean Shores, and I thought what the Minister of Housing said was extremely timely. I will only add this. I personally was not surprised because to paraphrase Emmanuel Kant,...out of the crooked timber from which he comes, no straight thing was ever made...Mr. Speaker, this is in obvious contrast to my own family, you know, none of whom was ever accused, not by any Auditor General, not by any Police, and certainly not by the People, of fraud, conversion or stealing; and, for sure, no child of mine will ever have to suffer the ignominy of their father being described by the highest court in the land as "a malignant tumor". And so, Mr. Speaker, I tell the Member for Caribbean Shores, once and for all,...find somewhere other than this Honourable House to deal with your daddy issues; and find some means other than our debates to expiate the shame of your inheritance!"

Turning to his rebuttal to the substance of other issues raised about the budget itself, Prime Minister Barrow argued, "Now, among the half-truths, untruths, falsifications and misrepresentations from the Opposition, one stood out, that was the charge that the Petrocaribe projects being implemented by BIL had contracts awarded on the basis of cronyism.

Mr. Speaker, that's why we put representatives of the National Trade Union Congress of Belize and the Chamber of Commerce on the BIL board of directors, to make absolutely sure of transparency, to guard completely against any possibility of HP, as your station called it, "hanky-panky." And those repre-



Right Honourable Dean Barrow
Prime Minister of Belize
Wrapping Up the Budget Debate



Honourable Kareem Musa
Member for Caribbean Shores

sentatives will tell you that all these contracts were awarded on the basis of fair and open bidding. You talk about the Civic Center? The outfit that won went up against Kee Chanona from Trinidad and Tobago, first class regional reputation; and the local outfit that won, which is a partnership, came in some 6 million dollars under Kee Chanona; that's why they won the contract; and as you can see, work has already started and is proceeding apace."

"But, Mr. Speaker, Petrocaribe, BIL, the Government's fantastic public works program, this has so upended those on the other side, that they're going bunkers, to the extent now where they will indict the social partners; because if hanky-panky there was, the social partners would have had to be a part of it."

"The Leader of the Opposition had, in seeking to manipulate things, had the effrontery, the nerve, the gall, to talk about debt and to say by way of complaint that the debt to GDP ratio under the UDP is now almost 80%, neglecting to say that when they left office it was 92%. We took it now, going up again, but going up again, Mr. Speaker, because of the borrowings from Petrocaribe.

I hope the true economist in the House will perhaps invite him for some sort of a private session and explain to him the simple fact that if you can borrow on concessionary terms, if you can borrow on super concessionary terms, I don't know of any other arrangement, any other international facility where you can get 1% money over 25 years. I cited for them one time an article in the Financial Times that made the point, borrowing in those terms is almost like a gift. So while in terms of the statistics it does take up your debt to GDP ratio, if I could continue to borrow like that forever, I would borrow like that forever.

So please, Mr. Leader of the Opposition, you really need to be extremely careful when you talk about debt and debt under the UDP in an accusatory manner. Don't talk to us about debt sir. Don't talk to us about debt. You invite us to pour scorn on you."

CARICOM supports BELIZE

Issues Strong Statement against Guatemalan Intimidation



The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) has issued a Statement expressing concern over an incident between Belizean Security Forces and Guatemalan Armed Forces, at the Sarstoon River, the Southern boundary of Belize with the Republic of Guatemala, on 12 March 2016. The full statement reads as follows:

"The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) expresses its grave concern over the incident which took place at the Sarstoon River, the southern boundary of Belize with the Republic of Guatemala, between Belizean

Security Forces and Guatemalan Armed Forces (GAF) on 12 March 2016. The GAF entered Belizean internal waters and acted in an intimidating manner towards the Belizean forces at their Forward Operating Base on Belize's mainland at the mouth of the Sarstoon River. The GAF claimed that the River belonged to them, although the mid-channel of the River was the settled and agreed border between the Republic of Guatemala and the United Kingdom long before Belize's independence in 1981. Since Independence Belize has always continued to assert its sovereignty over

the area. Although the incident ended peacefully following contact at the highest level between military and political leaders on both sides, CARICOM notes with grave concern the tension caused as a result of the incident.

The Caribbean Community restates the importance it places on respect for international law and the sanctity of treaties and deeply regrets any actions of the GAF which violate the sovereignty of Belize and attempt to change the status quo prior to the submission of the Guatemalan claim to Belizean territory to the International

Court of Justice in accordance with the Special Agreement ratified by both parties. The Community reiterates its strong and unequivocal support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Belize and calls on the government of Guatemala to agree to Confidence Building Measures, in conjunction with the Organization of American States, to ensure peace and stability along the southern border of Belize with the Republic of Guatemala." (Guatemala has since issued a defiant and baseless response, which we will not dignify by reproducing it in this publication.)



Belize's Prime Minister Honourable Dean Barrow and CARICOM Secretary General H.E. Irwin LaRocque

National Unity on Belize-Guatemala Issue

New Bi-Partisan Efforts and Old Political Challenges

The new efforts at resolving the age-old Belize-Guatemala Territorial Dispute has an encouraging component, which is the rekindling of national unity around a bipartisan approach to negotiations and bi-lateral talks with the Guatemalans as facilitated by the OAS and supported by our international friends. This has been enabled, to a large extent, by the level of political maturity demonstrated by the opposition's new leadership.

Shortly after being sworn in as Leader of the Opposition, Briceno met with PM Dean Barrow and expressed his party's desire to work in unity with the Government on matters of National importance, citing the Belize-Guatemala relations as one such issue. Prime Minister Barrow has reciprocated the goodwill, keeping Briceno and his party updated on developments and including the Opposition in negotiations and bilateral talks at the highest level. During the National Budget Debate last

week, Briceno reiterated his full support and that of his party's executive for the unified national position on this and other issues.

"We will work with the Government on finding a peaceful and lasting solution to Guatemala's unfounded claim to Belizean territory, clear in the understanding that we will never surrender one square centimetre of what we know to be rightfully Belizean territory, be it land, sea or river; we are going to protect every single square centimetre of our territory, Mr. Speaker," Briceno stated.

Responding to Briceno,



*Hon. Wilfred Elrington
Minister of Foreign Affairs*

Belmopan Area Representative and aspiring UDP Deputy Leader Hon. John Saldivar remarked, "I want to thank the Leader of the Opposition for the about-face that he has made; and notice I'm saying 'he'; I am not saying 'his party'. I am thanking you, Sir, for the about-face that you have made about the Guatemala issue. Thank you; but I don't know, I did not hear any applause from your colleagues when you said so. I have to wonder if that is the view of your party."

Indeed, there was at least one member of the Opposition,



*Hon. John Briceno
Leader of the Opposition*

namely Cayo South Representative, Julius Espat, who appeared to take issue with the national unity being forged on the Belize-Guatemala issue. Meanwhile, on the Government side, Hon. Michael Finnegan called for unity and caution on the matter. Notwithstanding, the Leader of Opposition's expressed goodwill was unreservedly welcomed and applauded by Foreign Affairs Minister Hon. Wilfred Elrington who stated, "I was saying in your absence, Mister Leader for the Opposition and Member for Orange Walk Central, that I commend you for appointing your advisory team. I was commending you on your elevation to the status of Leader of the Opposition; and I was saying that since this new term, I am resolved, along with your team, to make sure that I will not give any more interviews to any newspaper or to any television station unless I do it jointly with a member of the Opposition Party because this is a national issue and we must speak with one voice."

BELIZE-GUATEMALA-OAS TALKS

NEW EFFORTS AT RESOLVING AN AGE-OLD DISPUTE

As we reported in our last edition, an encounter between elements of the Belize Defence Force and the Guatemalan Military in the Sarstoon area two Saturdays ago on March 12, had escalated border tensions between our two countries. In a press release, the Government had indicated talks were to take place in Washington on Tuesday, March 15th between the two sides under the auspices of the OAS, and that the Belize delegation headed by Foreign Affairs Minister Hon. Wilfred Elrington would also include Assad Shoman as the representative of the Opposition.

Following the talks, the Government hosted a press conference in Belize City on Thursday, March 17 with Foreign Minister Hon. Wilfred Elrington flanked by Ambassador Assad Shoman and Belize's Ambassador to Guatemala H.E. Alexis Rosado.

Honourable Wilfred Elrington reported, "We had 3 meetings essentially in Washington; we had the meeting with the Secretary General of the Organization of American States, and then we had a meeting with the group of friends, the people who help to finance the OAS office; and then we had a meeting with the United States State Department. We like to think that the meetings went quite well. We appeared as a national team. The team consisted of myself, Ambassador Shoman, Alexis Rosado, Pat Andrews, our Ambassador in Washington, and that comprised the team."

"With respect to the meeting with the Secretary General, the Belize delegation expressed our mandate which was firmly to request the extension of the confidence building measures, from where it is now stuck at the western border, all the way to cover the Sarstoon. That was the instructions we got from Belmopan to discuss at that meeting. The Guatemalans took the position that they did not have the mandate to discuss that issue. They had apprised of that before we arrive there. But we could not countenance going there without in fact dealing with that matter. In fact that was the most pressing matter for us. So, notwithstanding their reticence, we impressed upon the Secretary General the importance and urgency of the continuation of the confidence building measures to ensure the security and safety of our people and, most



*Hon. Wilfred Elrington
Minister of Foreign Affairs*

importantly, to ensure that our defence force would be able to go in and out of the Sartsoon to service our military installation there without any hindrance, That was our very firm position."

"The other vital, important issue was the funding to keep the OAS office open at the adjacency zone. The secretary general explained that the OAS



*H.E. Assad Shoman
Opposition Representative*

essence that their citizens cannot continue to pay - their tax payers cannot continue to pay money to keep the adjacency office open, if in fact we are not making any progress to getting this matter solved. They want to see tangible progress. We were happy to indicate to them that we certainly here in Belize will be taking initiatives which hopefully will result in

peaceful manner without causing any kind of difficulty, without enhancing or increasing tension between our two countries. I think that was the more important aspect...preventative measures and to work out a protocol to deal with these things when they do occur."

Commenting more generally on Belize's sovereignty over Sarstoon Island and its portion of the river in the context of Guatemala's unfounded territorial claim, Elrington remarked, "The claim on the Sarstoon was made on September 21, 1939. Nothing has changed. Nothing has changed! This is a claim that existed from September 21, 1939, when the Guatemalans repudiated the 1859 Convention unilaterally...The claim was made - and I hope I don't have to tell anybody this again."

Ambassador Shoman, for his part, stated categorically, "With respect to the Sarstoon, we have no doubt that the line agreed by the British and the Guatemalans runs under the Isle of the Sarstoon and along the mid-channel, and we have never wavered from that position. Guatemala's position that the river belongs to them, that to me is new; that is relatively new. I have looked at negotiations that were taking place long before I even began to be part of them, and, yes, they've always discussed the Sarstoon and what does mid-channel mean, because in Spanish they say something else - the Spanish version and the English version, where does it lie, and so on. But never have I heard them say, 'The whole river is ours', which is what they are saying now. So that is a difference, and it is one that we have to take very seriously."

I think the government is taking it very seriously, and the government is saying, this is where our border lies, the way the treaty has defined it, and the way that several maps published by the British, for example, since the '70s and '80s, which to my knowledge have never been protested by the Guatemalan Government. So, we have very strong grounds on that.

So you have these incidents taking place. I blame the Guatemalan Armed Forces for that. And what are you going to do about it? What is being sought to be done now? The Minister went there and he made it clear that the objective of Belize is to extend the confidence building measures to the Sarstoon area as well," Shoman explained.



Belize's Foreign Affairs Minister Hon. Wilfred Elrington (left) and Guatemala's Foreign Minister Carlos Raul Morales (right) flanking OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro Lemes (center)

was having serious financial problems, because some of the major donors were not in fact paying their contributions in a timely manner, if at all. That office costs some 2.5 million US dollars annually to be kept open. So it's about 5 million dollars our friends spend just to keep the office open."

"We went on to meet the group of friends. The group of friends are the other countries in the world who have historically and traditionally helped us to finance the office at the adjacency zone. They said that in

very tangible progress being evidenced in a relatively short time."

As to the Sarstoon incident and how it factored into the agenda, Elrington reported, "The entire meeting, the first part of it, related to the fact that this incident had occurred. But any incidents of this type, there will be two sides, and it is not helpful in a meeting of the type that we attended to dwell on the details of that. The important thing is to prevent incidents of that type to happen and to ensure that when they do happen, it is solved in a



Both Foreign Ministers along with Belize Ambassador to OAS H.E. Pat Andrews and other officials at the talks in Washington

Catalyst For Change

AT THE CENTER OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Every ministry and department is important, as it must fulfil its unique function as an essential part of the Government which has the full responsibility to manage the nation's affairs and look after the overall interest and wellbeing of the people and country. One of them is the Ministry of Economic



One of the Facilitators at the Regional Meeting in Belize City

Development, Petroleum, Investment, Trade and Commerce. That Ministry is led by Honourable Erwin Contreras with Honourable Tracy Panton as his Minister of State.

One of two women who are newly elected to the House of Representatives, Hon. Tracy Panton is a valua-



One of the Facilitators at the Regional Meeting in Belize City

ble addition to the Cabinet as she brings years of experience in various sectors of economic development, having served as Director of the Belize Tourism Board (BTB), Chief Executive Officer of the Ministry of Tourism and CEO of BNE Trust managing proceeds from petroleum revenues for national development.



Minister of State for Economic Development, Petroleum, Investment, Trade & Commerce Hon. Tracy Taegar-Panton interviewed by Media

As Minister of State, she has full responsibility for Belize Trade and Investment Development Service (BELTRAIDE) which has become Government's lead agency in promoting investment, trade

ported by BELTRAIDE, as it is impossible to overstate their importance to the state of the nation and its economy.

This week, we feature images from a regional meeting hosted by BELTRAIDE a



Minister of State Honourable Tracy Taegar-Panton at the Head-Table with other Officials at the Regional Meeting conducted in Belize City

and commerce, thereby ensuring that Belize attains and maintains its competitive capacity in a changing and challenging global economy.

From week to week, we feature in this publication, projects, programs, activities and initiatives led or sup-

ported by BELTRAIDE, as it is impossible to overstate their importance to the state of the nation and its economy.

Held in Belize City, it brought together representatives from fourteen (14) Caribbean countries to take stock on key lessons learnt from reform actions



Executive Director of BELTRAIDE Nicolas Ruiz (left) seated at a table with other participants in the Regional Meeting in Belize City

implemented through the Caribbean Growth Forum, and to put forward a communiqué to move forward on their pro-growth agenda.

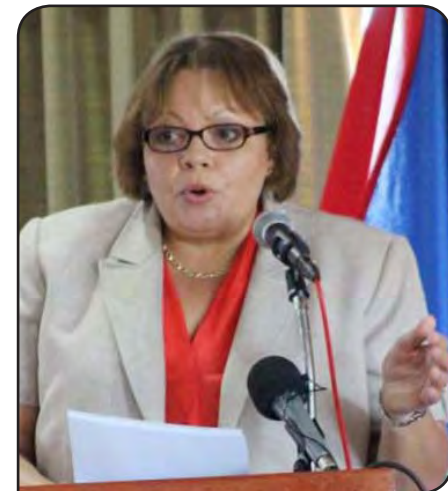
During the meeting, countries discussed and agreed on how to create result-based road-maps to accelerate reforms and help track the implementation of actions linked to these reforms in the



One of the Facilitators at the Regional Meeting in Belize City

areas of investment climate, skills and productivity, and logistics and connectivity.

"Belize is proud to host this meeting. This is an extraordinary opportunity for Caribbean nations to build on the results achieved so far by the Caribbean Growth Forum and enhance the com-



Minister of State Hon. Tracy Taegar-Panton addresses meeting

petitiveness of our respective countries," stated Honourable Tracy Taegar-Panton, Minister of State for the Ministry of Economic Development, Petroleum, Investment, Trade and Commerce.

The three-day meeting was conducted from Monday, February 29 to Wednesday, March 2, 2016.

Breaking The Cycle of Poverty

GROUND BREAKING FOR SIX NEW SCHOOLS



Belmopan Area Representative Hon. John Saldivar, Education Minister Hon. Patrick Faber and Minister of State Hon. Elodio Aragon in Ground-Breaking Ceremony with SIF Director William Lamb and Management and Staff of Kuxlin-Ha Primary School

More than 1,500 Students will soon be enrolled in new pre-schools & primary schools in Belmopan, Stann Creek and Toledo. In this

will have easier access to a better learning environment. It will also enable schools to address the increasing demand for enrolment of students; and it will alleviate over-crowding, thus enabling the

breaking ceremonies were held on Friday 18 March, 2016.

Officials for the ground-breaking ceremonies in Belmopan included Honourable John Saldivar, Minister of National Security and Area Representa-

Officials included Honourable Patrick Faber, Minister of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports; Honourable Tracy Taegar Pantton, Minister of State, Economic Development, Petroleum, Investment, Trade and Commerce;



Symbolic Ground Breaking at Trio Primary School in Toledo

tive for the Capital City; and Hon Patrick Faber, Minister of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports; Executive Director of the Belize Social Investment Fund (SIF) Mr. William Lamb Jr; and Principal

and Executive Director, Belize Social Investment Fund, Mr. William Lamb Jr., among others.

These essential projects are being executed by the Government of Belize through



Hon. Patrick Faber with Teachers at Trio Primary School in Toledo

regard, ground-breaking ceremonies were recently held to officially commence construction of the respective schools, thanks to the Government of Belize.

Funding for the construction of the 6 (six) govern-

country's future leaders to further boost their learning skills and prepare themselves for meaningful participation in the essential work of nation-building.

Ground-breaking ceremonies were held for Kuxlin-Ha



Hon. Patrick Faber with students at Trio Primary School in Toledo

of Kuxlin-Ha Primary School, Ms. Shirlene Wilshire, among others. Ground-breaking ceremonies for schools in Trio and Santa Cruz were held at 10:00 am and 2:00 pm respectively.

the Social Investment Fund (SIF) whose motto is "Breaking the Cycle of Poverty", a most appropriate motto as Education is the greatest tool in breaking the cycle of Poverty.



Hon. Patrick Faber with students at Trio Primary School in Toledo

ment schools is made available through grant-funds from the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) under the bank's Basic Needs Trust Fund (BNTF 7) Program. This means that students in the respective communities

Pre-School and Primary School in Belmopan on Tuesday, March 15, 2016. Meanwhile, for Santa Cruz New Government Pre-School and New Government Primary School and Trio Pre-School and Primary School, ground-



Cultural Dance by students at Trio Primary School in Toledo

"THE ESSENCE OF LIFE"

BELIZE CELEBRATES WORLD WATER DAY



Chief Executive Officer in the Ministry of Natural Resources Sharon Ramclan and other facilitators at the head-table

Often referred to as 'the essence of life', water is one of the most basic elements that distinguish our planet in a universe filled with millions of lifeless cosmic bodies. To

15th and 16th, in Belize City and Belmopan. International World Water Day is held annually on 22 March as a means of focusing attention on the importance of freshwater and advocating for the sustainable management of

eral Assembly adopted resolution A/RES/47/193 of 22 December 1992 by which 22 March of each year was declared World Day for Water, first observed starting in 1993, in conformity with the recommendations of the United Nations Conference

seminars and expositions related to the conservation and development of water resources and the implementation of the recommendations of Agenda 21.

World Water Day is an international observance and an opportunity to learn more



Facilitators Sharing with Students Vital Information about Water

on Environment and Development (UNCED) contained in Chapter 18 (Fresh Water Resources) of Agenda 21. States were invited to devote the Day, as appropriate in the national context, to concrete activities such as the promotion of public awareness through the production and dissemination of documentaries and the organization of conferences, round tables,

about water related issues, be inspired to tell others and take action to make a difference. Each year, UN-Water — the entity that coordinates the UN's work on water and sanitation — sets a theme for World Water Day corresponding to a current or future challenge. The engagement campaign is coordinated by one or several of the UN-Water Members with a related mandate.



Facilitators Sharing with Students Vital Information about Water

highlight its importance, the United Nations has set aside a day, March 22, observed every year as International Water Day. This year, World Water Day was celebrated under the theme, "Water and Jobs".

In Belize, the day was heralded with an exhibition and Water and Jobs Summit held a week in advance on March

freshwater resources. An international day to celebrate freshwater was recommended at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The United Nations General Assembly responded by designating 22 March 1993 as the first World Water Day.

The United Nations Gen-



Awards received by First, Second, Third and Fourth Place Winners of the World Water Day 2016 Poetry Competition

Making Municipalities Child-Friendly



Ivan Yeroi, UNICEF Country Representative in Belize

Much public investment has been made over the past few years in improving the physical infrastructure of our cities and towns country-wide; but most will readily agree that development is really about people, perhaps more importantly about children and young people who represent the future.

The question of how child friendly are our towns and cities, particularly Belize City, was recently addressed by UNICEF's Country Representative in Belize, Ivan Yeroi at an event in the Old Capital.

"I've been travelling around the country precisely doing this kind of event, recognizing the municipalities because of the work they have done so far," Mr. Yeroi remarked.

"We are not yet certifying the city as child friendly; we are now recognizing them. But I'm sure because of the level of commitment and passion that I have witnessed throughout the country, I'm sure that the nine municipalities will be ready to be certified probably in six months from now, probably a year from now. But I've seen the commitment which is precisely what it's

all about. For us at UNICEF, this initiative means giving children a voice, making sure they speak up; making sure they share their concerns, but also making sure that local and national authorities listen to them and do whatever is needed to change the condition and change those issues... remove those issues that are affecting children. We are currently working with UNDP, a sister agency, as part of the United Nations. We are so thankful for that partnership, and I would like to recognize the Ministry of Human Development and Local Government for their commitment."

Strengthening Capacity against Human Trafficking

TWO-DAY WORKSHOP FOR CARIBBEAN HELD IN BELIZE

The International Organization for Migration (OAM) has brought together key stakeholders from five Caribbean territories at a two-day workshop in Belize in an effort to strengthen coordination to counter trafficking in persons in the Caribbean.

Government representatives charged with leading their country's counter trafficking efforts from Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Belize, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago gathered in Belize City on March 16 and 17, 2016, to discuss best practices as well as to explore areas of collaboration and cooperation.

"One aim of the workshop is to promote amongst the participants the use of regional cooperation and to share information, ideas and techniques," said Rukiya Brown, project manager. IOM has been working for more than nine years with countries in the Caribbean training stakeholders, providing assistance to victims and governments, and raising public awareness through



Belize's Minister of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation Hon. Anthony Martinez and his Chief Executive Officer Judith Alpuche with facilitators and regional participants

information campaigns.

During this time, Caribbean countries have displayed their commitment to counter trafficking in persons, leading to an increase in the number of cases investigated and successful prosecutions. Of note is the tier-one ranking the Bahamas obtained under the 2015 United States Trafficking in Persons Report, the first country in

the English speaking Caribbean to have achieved this ranking.

In the past 10 years, the number of trafficked persons identified by IOM's Caribbean partners now exceeds 350. Work towards developing regional mechanisms in relation to victim identification, investigation and data sharing regarding cases is an important part of a comprehensive

counter trafficking strategy.

The workshop was one of the first activities of IOM's sub-regional project in the Caribbean. This project was made possible through funding from the US Department of State Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (J/TIP), with the goal of strengthening the capacity of actors in the criminal justice system.

International Belizean Scientist Returns

DOCTOR ARLIE PITTERS VISITS UNIVERSITY OF BELIZE



Doctors Arlie Petters receives gift from faculty and staff of UB

President of the University of Belize, Alan Slusher, extended an invitation to Dr. Arlie Petters to visit with the University's Institutional Curriculum Review Committee.

The visit, held on Friday March 18, 2016 at the Jaguar Auditorium on UB's

Belmopan Campus, was intended to facilitate dialogue with Dr. Petters and the institution's academic leaders.

Their Discussions focused on strategies to increase UB's contributions to national decision making processes through a focus on targeted research engagements by Fac-

ulty. The group also discussed the significance of STEM Education (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) as a tool to build national capacities to support national development, economic growth and achieve poverty alleviation.

During his visit to UB Dr. Petters also met with students to emphasize the importance and relevance of STEM and to encourage them to pursue careers in these disciplines.

He also used the opportunity to inspire them to see their potential as agents of change among their peers and in their communities. The University of Belize continues to execute its Institutional Curriculum Review process to improve its program offerings and to align its educational objectives with the national priorities. The visit by Dr. Petters is a first effort to engage distinguished national experts in the ongoing review process.



Students of University of Belize receiving inspiration from Dr. Petters

TRANSFORMATION & INAUGURATION

OFFICIAL OPENING OF ISIDORO BEATON STADIUM IN CITY OF BELMOPAN



Belmopan Mayor Khalid Belisle Officially Declares the Stadium Open



Belmopan Mayor Khalid Belisle, Area Rep. Hon. John Saldivar and Minister of State for Sports Hon. Elodio Aragon Cut Symbolic Ribbon

Written by Manolo Romero

The best FIFA certified stadium with all-weather synthetic turf in the country, was inaugurated in the City of Belmopan Tuesday, March 15. The new facility is home to the Belmopan-based Bandits Football Club.

Attending the opening ceremony was Area Representative and Minister of National Security Hon. John Saldivar, Minister of Works Hon. Rene Montero, Minister of Sports, Youth and Culture Hon. Elodio Aragon, and Minister of Immigration and Natural Resources Godwin Hulse, along with Belmopan Mayor Khalid Belisle.

The magnificent facility was constructed under the supervision of Belize Infrastructure Limited and Pedro Lizarraga & Sons Construction Company.

The opening segued into



Belmopan Bandits and El Progreso of Honduras take to the new field



A very good turn-out of fans at the inaugural international friendly

the inaugural football match, Bandits versus the professional football club Progreso from Honduras. Belmopan Bandits lucked out and the match ended 3-0 in favour of Honduras.

The turnout was spectacular. The seating was sold out. Our Belmopan team supporters and visitors from out district were the most enthusiastic fans I've seen - much love and respect. I have not seen so many beautiful ladies in one place in a long time. Belmopan is becoming something special.

The City of Belmopan, I think, has set the stage for what good governance and transparency in finance can accomplish. The proof is in what our United Democratic Party Government has been able to accomplish, and continues to build on, in developing major infrastructure projects of this calibre.

National Coastguard Graduates 46 New Recruits



*Hon. John Saldivar
Minister of National Security*

Belize's National Coast Guard brought in the Easter Holidays with its 8th Graduation Ceremonies on Holy Thursday, March 24 for a total of 46 new recruits. The recruits, both men and women, underwent rigorous training over a period of 12 weeks in order to become sailors in the National Coast Guard.

Speaking with Channel 5 News at the graduation, National

Coast Guard Commander Admiral John Borland stated, "By and large they get absorbed into the fleet to start doing operations in an apprenticeship role because, remember, their first year they spend as seamen apprentices to get all the practical work and on the job training that they couldn't get in twelve weeks of basic training, which was basically for transforming them from a civilian into a military figure."

"The vast majority of

them will join the fleet because that is where the majority of the coast guard work takes place. So it's either into the fleet marines or into the engineers to become the boat mechanic. Some of them will go into the communications specialist department, and hull maintenance, and fiberglass damage control, and repair, and that sort of stuff."

Jaime Castillo, who emerged as the Champion Recruit, commented "It was a chal-



*Jaime Castillo
Champion Recruit*

lenge because there are some of my intake brothers who were a match to me, but nevertheless I ended up at the top. So I just kept working hard, stayed on the right pace just like everyone else, but on different levels and standards."

Minister of National Security Hon. Jon Saldivar was special guest at the ceremonies. The graduation ceremonies took place at Williamson Compound in Ladyville.



Hon. John Saldivar and Admiral John Borland flanked by Recruits

Taiwan President's Farewell Visit To Belize

"OVER THE YEARS, OUR TWO COUNTRIES HAVE COLLABORATED CLOSELY IN PERFECT HARMONY IN A WIDE ARRAY OF FIELDS, AND STRIDE FORWARD HAND IN HAND IN INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY"



President Ma being welcomed by Governor General Sir Colville Young



President Ma and entourage visit Ancient Mayan Temple

He first visited Belize back in 2009, one year into his presidency and the first term of the Dean Barrow Administration which both started in 2008; and President Ma Ying-jeou of Taiwan was back in Belize from March 16 to 17, 2016 as part as his farewell tour.

Upon arrival at the Phillip Goldson International Airport, he made the following statement: "It is a great honor and privilege for me to be invited by Hon. Dean Barrow, Prime Minister of Belize, to lead a delegation to visit Belize.

This is my second visit to this beautiful country. On behalf of the government and people of the Republic of China (Taiwan), I would like to extend our warm greetings to the government and people of Belize.

Belize is one of the staunchest allies of the Republic of China (Taiwan). Over the years, our two countries have collaborated closely in perfect harmony in a wide array of fields, and stride forward hand in hand in international community. Belize has rendered strong support to the Republic of China (Taiwan) for its continuing campaigns for participation in international organizations. I therefore bring with me the heartfelt appreciation from the government and people of the Republic of China (Taiwan) to Belize.

During my visit, I will call on Governor General H.E. Sir Colville Young and Rt. Hon. Prime Minister Dean Barrow to exchange views on matters of mutual concern. I will also meet and renew friendship with Prime Ministers of our three diplomatic allies in the East Caribbean region, as well

as leaders of the Taiwanese Community in Belize. In doing so, my delegation and I can see for ourselves first-hand the outcomes and achievement of our Viable Diplomacy, further consolidate the partnership and friendship between our respective allies, and meet face-to-face with our diplomats and their families who have made tremendous contributions to our bilateral

relations at the airport. Once again, I wish to convey our sincerest thanks."

Commenting on President Ma's visit prior to his arrival, Taiwan's Ambassador in Belize, H. E. Benjamin Ho, remarked, "This trip is very important for President Ma; he expressed his special attachment to the countries visited. There are only three countries that he is going to visit, including Belize,

Guatemala and United States. So

you can imagine Belize has a very important part in his heart. He is going to fly from the United States to Guatemala and then Belize. Of course there will be an inclusion of high ranking officers including reporters, media from TV and papers from Taiwan. There will be a lot of logistical work to be done. The staff from my embassy, we are preparing all this now, working closely with our counterparts from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We are trying to make sure that his trip here is comfortable and as smooth as possible."

As planned, the visit went smoothly, as President Ma touched down in Belize around 11:00 AM on March 16, 2016, amidst much pomp and circumstance, with a delegation of government officials and an atmosphere of festivity created by a sizeable gathering largely made up of members of the Taiwanese Community in Belize waving the flag of the People's Republic of Taiwan.

During his visit, President Ma met with a number of Belizean government officials, as well as heads of state from St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent, who had flown in to Belize for the occasion. He had an overnight roundtable with Prime Ministers Hon. Dean Barrow (Belize), Timothy Harris (St. Kitts & Nevis) and Ralph Gonsalves (St. Vincent) and Dr. Kenny Anthony (St. Lucia).

The following morning, before leaving, he participated in a bicycle tour in the Old Capital, Belize City, which also included a number of Government Ministers, among them Foreign Affairs Minister Hon. Wilfred 'Sedi' Elrington and Minister of Education Hon. Patrick Faber.

President Ma left Belize around 11:00 AM on Thursday, March 17, 2016. President Ma Ying-jeou leaves office in the next month-and-a-half, to be succeeded by Taiwan's first female president, who will be sworn into office on May 20, 2016. During his time as President, President Ma was very instrumental in strengthening and deepening relations between his country and the nation of Belize, which is regarded as one of Taiwan's strongest international ally.



President Ma making address at Belize Biltmore Hotel

President Ma left Belize around 11:00 AM on Thursday, March 17, 2016.

The earthquake in South Taiwan on February 6th resulted in heavy casualties, but the condolences and warm regards from leaders and people of our allies in the Caribbean have provided us with much-needed warmth and blessings. The allies' timely support once again exemplifies the long and lasting friendship between Taiwan and our allies in the Caribbean region.

I am truly grateful for Governor General Sir Young and officials of Belize to welcome me and my del-

egation at the airport. Once again, I wish to convey our sincerest thanks."



President Ma on bicycle tour accompanied by Government Ministers



President Ma at the Phillip Goldson International Airport

Stability in a Time of Change



“Today, our economy and public finances stand on the rock-solid foundation of a strong currency backed up by excess reserves, robust fiscal revenues and a well-managed public debt. We also boast the most diversified economic base ever, with expanding trade access and productive investments in public utilities, innovation and infrastructure. Finally, we spend unstintingly on the education, healthcare and security of our people.

It is because of all this that we premised last year’s election drive on the theme “The Best Is Yet To Come”. So it was not just a campaign slogan, but a call to arms based on past performance and future promise. It was a declaration of confidence. It was an expression of resolve. It was a commitment to perseverance. Above all, it was an articulation of faith that no matter the obstacles, no matter the challenges, no matter the trials, we - the Government, the People, the Nation - will together achieve what is due, what is just, and what is deserved for our beloved Belize.”

**Prime Minister Dean Barrow - 2016 National Budget
“Stability in a Time of Change”**