

# The Independent

Reformer for the People

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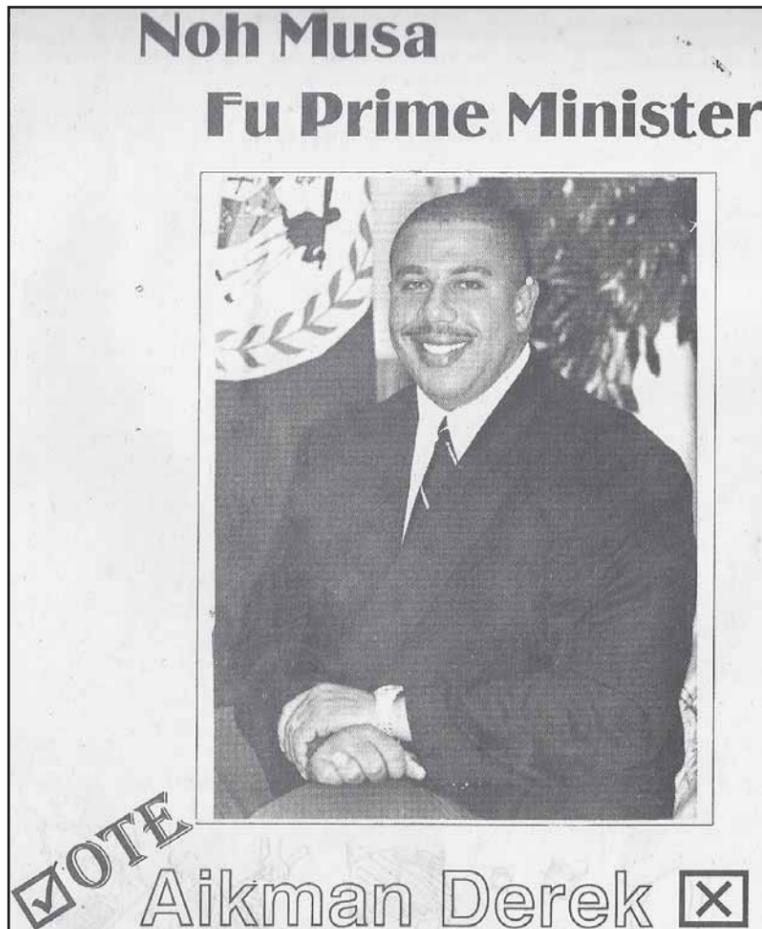
## Back to the Future

We all know the Aikman story or so we think: clean-cut “Wonderboy” drop-kicked the PUP leader’s butt in the polls in Freetown some 20 years ago and paid the ultimate price: major humiliation, financial and otherwise. It is generally accepted that there was apparent collusion between both political party leadership & a certain highly successful banker to bury Derek politically. They did a wicked number on the man for being young, popular, assertive, and ambitious. That was then.

The man possesses political genius; and, there are forces in our society who knows who possess the real Svengali-like powers around here and now two decades later, a lot wiser, Aikman has resurfaced yet again.

There exists a need in the Belize political landscape today for a leader to pull together the various third parties to make them see the common ground on which they stand. There have been a lot of energies expended to get this accomplished over the years but human nature being what it is, the efforts have fallen on fallow ground.

In walks Derek, looking rather saintly when



juxtaposed beside the super materialistic Dean Oliver and super disgraced Said Wilbert. Nobody knows who’s walking behind him and there’s a lot of speculation. Some even believe that the Lord of the Bank developed a conscience and a chance to right a wrong committed against a younger Aikman, a couple decades ago. Or maybe he just sees an opportunity to pit the big boys against each other by introducing another third man into the ring.

We also believe it is possible the rainmakers think that Derek Aikman is the man who can bring the third parties together, that can then take down the Musa Government, fair and square in any election with great ease and some resources. They are not so comfortable with the other leader-in-waiting because he is not so comfortable with them.

So no good deed goes unpunished.

For as quickly as he got 10,000 people mobilized in 48 hours to pressure the Government to withdraw its ridiculous proposition to bail out private concerns, he was picked up, bound, gagged and held for 3 days. Disciplined. A

(Please Turn To Page 16) 

## Caught with conch in reserve waters

The Belize Audubon Society (BAS) marine protected areas staff have detained three persons for illegally fishing within the Halfmoon Caye Natural Monument. On Sunday, May 27<sup>th</sup>, the marine protected area (MPA) staff detained Markito Mendes, Hipolito Novelo and Geraldo Cobb for harvesting conchs within the boundary of the Halfmoon Caye Natural Monument. One hundred and fifty-two (152) conchs that had already been removed from the shell were confiscated for evidence, and 194 live conchs were released within the Halfmoon Caye Natural Monument.

Under the National Park System Act 1981, it is illegal to fish within any natural monument. The boundaries of the Halfmoon Caye Natural Monument is clearly demarcated by mooring buoys and BAS has undertaken extensive education campaigns to inform fishers of the protected areas boundaries as well as the importance of protected areas to maintaining Belize’s fisheries.

The three men appeared in the Magistrate’s Court and were found guilty of catching fish within a natural



BAS reels in fishermen illegally harvesting conch near Half Moon Caye

monument without written authorization and illegal entry into a natural monument. All three were charged \$400 for the offences. The Forest Department, under whose jurisdiction natural monuments fall, prosecuted the case.

The confiscated conchs were donated to the Dorothy Menzies Childcare Centre in Belize City.

BAS, as the on-site manager, addresses encroachment issues both through enforcement and through compliance by way of public education. Recently, BAS has observed increasing pressures from illegal fisheries within the protected areas. As the Society does not have all the resources to address these issues on its own, it depends on the support of partnership agencies and organizations for their support in conservation efforts.

The Belize Audubon Society helped establish Belize’s first protected area at Half Moon Caye, and now manages nine protected areas covering over 162,000 acres, on behalf of the people and Government of Belize.

Press Release

# Letters to the Editor

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Dear Editor.

If the Prime Minister-- and *this* is a big if-- is *sincere* about *providing* affordable health care for the citizens of this country, there is a less expensive option that would satisfy everyone. He and Ralph could go to the IMF, World Bank: or wherever they go when they need extra pocket money, negotiate a concessionary loan for \$10-\$30 million dollars to upgrade and expand the KHMH, and turn it from a shell hospital into a full-service institution.

The terms and interest rates would be far better than the pound of flesh the Belize Bank is asking for and save this country and the people upwards of \$70-\$90 million.

In addition, Said and Ralph might

even get a good feeling out of asking for money that win actually help the Belizean people instead of paying for all of their failed, short-sided government projects for the benefit of their friends.

After the KHMH is upgraded, additional staff would be needed which could come from those that are no longer at UHS. This change of direction should not affect the Belize Bank because as the Prime Minister has told the people of Belize the UHS has over \$30 millions in assets -and if his word is good enough for us, shouldn't it be good enough for Mr. Ashcroft? Then all the bank would have to do is sell off the assets (some of which KHMH could purchase at discount) and then, this is

the radical part, go after the principals of UBS to collect whatever else is owed to the bank instead of burdening the Belizean taxpayers with their privately owned failed venture.

Sounds like a win-win situation all around. However, as the Prime Minister likes to say, hindsight is 20/20. I say if the PM does not have the forward vision to see this, the people must declare him legally blind.

Unfortunately, the cowards in cabinet and the area reps are the only ones that can stop this madman from pushing his vision down the throats of the Belizean people. Anyone in government willing to stand up and do the right thing?

signed,  
Oscar M.

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# Another desperate cabinet reshuffle: Mark, Cordel, Eamon & The DPM forced to walk the plank

Government of Belize composed PRESS RELEASE  
Cabinet Changes - June 2007. Belmopan - 04 June, 2007

The Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Said Musa, has advised His Excellency the Governor-General to effect a number of changes in his Cabinet.

Against the background of two Ministers being asked to leave Cabinet, the upcoming national Convention of the People's United Party set for July 1, 2007, and the run-up to General Elections due within nine (9) months, the changes being made are as follows:

The Prime Minister has invited veteran politician, Corozal Southeast Representative, the Hon. Florencio Marin, into his Cabinet, and offered him responsibility for the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment. Hon. Florencio Marin will be retiring at the end of this term. Former Minister of State for Labour, Hon. Valdemar Castillo will be appointed Executive Chairman of the Commercial Free Zone at Corozal to replace Hon. Florencio Marin.

o has declined to accept any other post in the Cabinet. The Hon. John Bricen

Senator, the Hon. Eamon Courtenay has also indicated his unwillingness to continue to serve in the newly restructured Cabinet and the Senate.

The Hon. Vildo Marin will be appointed Deputy Prime Minister and retain his portfolio responsibilities for Agriculture and Fisheries.

The Hon. Rodwell Ferguson will be appointed Minister of Defence, Youth and Sports.

The Prime Minister will appoint Her Excellency, Ambassador Lisa Shoman as a Senator, and the new Minister for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade.

The Prime Minister will assume the portfolio responsibility for National Development into the Ministry of Finance.

The changes in Cabinet will take effect on Tuesday, June 5, 2007.

THE NEW CABINET (JUNE 5, 2007):

Rt. Hon. Said Musa – Minister of Finance, National Development and the Public Service

Hon. Vildo Marin, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries

Hon. Francis Fonseca, Attorney General, Minister of Labour, Education and Culture

Hon. Godfrey Smith, Minister of Tourism and National Emergency Management

Hon. Ralph Fonseca, Minister of Home Affairs, Public Utilities and Housing

Hon. Jose Coye, Minister of Health, Transport, Communications and Local Government

Hon. Sylvia Flores, Minister of Human Development

Hon. Michael Espot, Minister of Works

Hon. Rodwell Ferguson, Minister of Defence, Youth and Sports

Hon. Florencio Marin, Minister of Natural Resources and the Environment

Hon. Lisa Marie Shoman, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade.

MINISTERS OF STATE (JUNE 5, 2007)

Hon. Mario Castellanos, Minister of State (National Development)

Hon. Marcial Mes, Minister of State (Education)

Hon. Ismael Cal, Minister of State (Home Affairs)

Hon. Dave Burgos, Minister of State (Agriculture and Fisheries)

Hon. Servulo Baeza, Minister of State (Natural Resources)

Hon. Ainslie Leslie, Minister of State (Works).

## FOR SALE



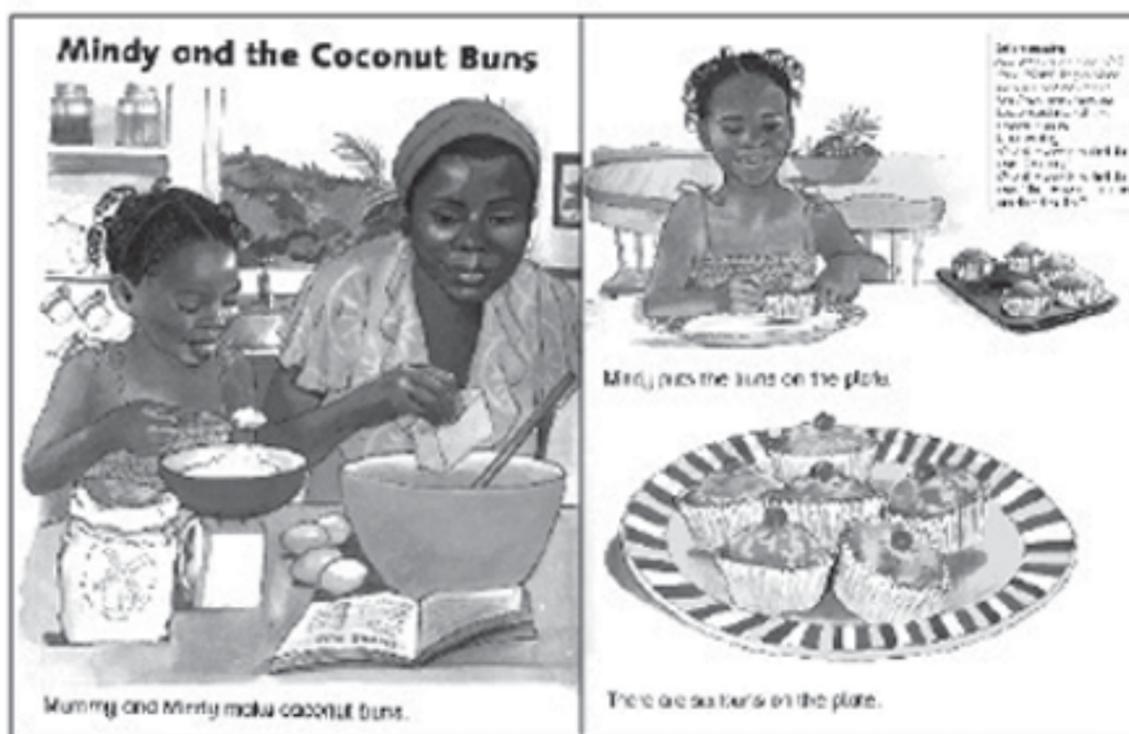
John Deere front-end loader 544B  
& John Deere Excavator 690B



Asking Bz \$85,000  
Contact Independent Weekly

# PARENTS

Ministry of Education is forcing our schools to use the Language Tree Readers. The two pages below are from the first story in the Language Tree Reader for Infant One. The only way our children will be able to read the story will be if parents read the story to them over and over and over. If parents read the story enough times, children will memorize the story. They will not be able to read the words in the story. Children will never learn to sound out words. Children without parental help may never learn to read.



BRC's Infant One Reading is used in more than 80% of the schools in Belize. BRC's Reading is widely used because children are learning to read by sounding out words. Ministry of Education Officials do not even want BRC's Reading in the schools. They know that if BRC's Reading is in the schools, no one will use the Language Tree Memorization Books.

**A Ministry of Education official said: We know that children will not be able to learn to read using the Language Tree Reading Book for Infant One.**

You answer the questions if you are not at a loss for words.

Why spend taxpayers' money to put these known to fail books in all our schools?

Why does MoE want to replace a very successful reading book (BRC) with a reading book MoE knows will not help children learn to read?

Why does MoE give a foreign publisher the sales for a book that they know will not help children learn to read and take away jobs from Belizeans?

The Ministry of Education Official continued: Because we know that children will not learn to read using the Language Tree, we are developing Fast Phonics. We know that Fast Phonics will help the children learn to read Language Tree.

The Ministry of Education had 12 schools use Fast Phonics this past school year. MoE has not tested children's reading in those 12 schools but they claim that everyone learned to read. The children in those twelve schools and children using BRC's reading should be given an independent reading test. MoE would not do that because MoE knows which group of children would read better. Teachers have said that Fast Phonics will not work.

We do not know how much taxpayers' money has already been spent on trying to write Fast Phonics. Much more than \$100,000<sup>00</sup> is a good guess. We do not know how much more will be used to complete the writing and art work for Fast Phonics. Much more than an additional \$100,000<sup>00</sup> is a good guess. We do not know how much taxpayers' money will be spent on printing Fast Phonics. A good guess is \$300,000<sup>00</sup>.

The Ministry of Education is willing to spend more than \$500,000<sup>00</sup> of your money to produce a book which is not as good as BRC's. It will be a waste because teachers will use BRC's Reading.

## OUTRAGEOUS

A paid ad

## Teachers and Principals of the 12 Fast Phonics Pilot Schools

You really have an awesome responsibility. Our children's ability to read in the coming years is in your hands. The Ministry of Education is claiming that Fast Phonics is excellent and all children learned to read when using it. MoE is claiming that Fast Phonics is much better than BRC's reading.

BRC is claiming that teachers are saying:

- Fast Phonics is too fast. After 8 lessons, children are lost.
- Only children with a lot of parental help will be able to learn to read using Fast Phonics.
- If children have two years of pre-school, it might work.
- It will never work in villages or on the Southside.
- BRC is better.

Both MoE and BRC have biased opinions. Only the Fast Phonics teachers know if taxpayers should spend one-half million dollars to put Fast Phonics in all the schools. Only Fast Phonics teachers know if Fast Phonics is so good that it should be Belize's learning to read book of the future. The Fast Phonics teachers and their principals must have the courage to speak out. Fast Phonics teachers must tell the media and the Minister of Education of their children's ability or inability to read using Fast Phonics.

If Fast Phonics teachers do not speak out and a mistake is made, Belize's children will pay the price.

**Please speak out.**

## Parents, Teachers and Principals of Schools Using BRC's Reading

BRC's Reading and Math are designed to help all children learn. If you believe that your children have learned well using BRC's books, you must speak out. Write newspapers. Call talk shows. Let the Government know that you want BRC books used.

MoE does not know how to help non-privileged children learn. They do not even like books that help non-privileged children learn. MoE has convinced the Minister of Education that BRC's books are not good. MoE has convinced the Minister of Education that BRC's books are not widely used and not liked by teachers and parents.

BRC has tried to convince him otherwise, but has failed. You, the parents, teachers and principals may be able to convince him.

MoE/GoB has already bought foreign written and printed books that do not have anything about Belize in them. That cannot be stopped.

MoE/GoB is planning to spend about \$350,000.00 on developing and printing Fast Phonics for Infant One. Fast Phonics materials are designed for privileged children. Those taxpayers' dollars could be better spent buying books that will help all children learn.

If you are quiet, our children will pay the price.

A Paid Ad

# 'Fraid fi Derek



**By: Karla Heusner Vernon**

He seems an unlikely candidate for a hostage: A man of moderate income, family-oriented, active in his church. A man who loved music and drama, and organizing September Celebrations and church events.

Not the type of person one would expect to attract the attention of kidnapers, home grown terrorists whose tactics seemed more typical of an American movie than Belizean thugs.

But once upon a time, Derek Aikman was a powerhouse. He was the only man to ever beat George Price and the lead voice in the National Alliance for Belizean Rights, NABR's, fight against the Maritime

Areas Act.

But that was years ago, this is now. And recently Derek Aikman came out of retirement. Well, more like shot up into the air like a flare in the night...

And yet no one expected the to ever hear the news which flew across Belize and beyond faster than a BTL webcast: "Somebody kidnap Aikman!"

"..the abduction had nothing to do with BTL, and everything to do with the man himself."

Certainly he is good at overnight success, for seemingly out of nowhere, he spearheaded the Belize Covenant Movement, a group of citizens possessing both religious and nationalistic fervor. With less than a week's notice, he pulled off a "People's Poll," a nationwide, although unofficial, referendum on the Universal Health Services loan guarantee which sent a resounding 95% "Vote No" to the government in Belmopan. So dramatic was the result that the Prime Minister withdrew the motion.

For two days, everywhere and anywhere you went in Belize people, almost every email you opened, every text sent and received, someone was asking someone else: "Where yu tink Aikman dey? Yu tink Derek okay? Yu tink dis fake or real? Who dey behind dis now? Why dey pick up di man instead a sambady else?"

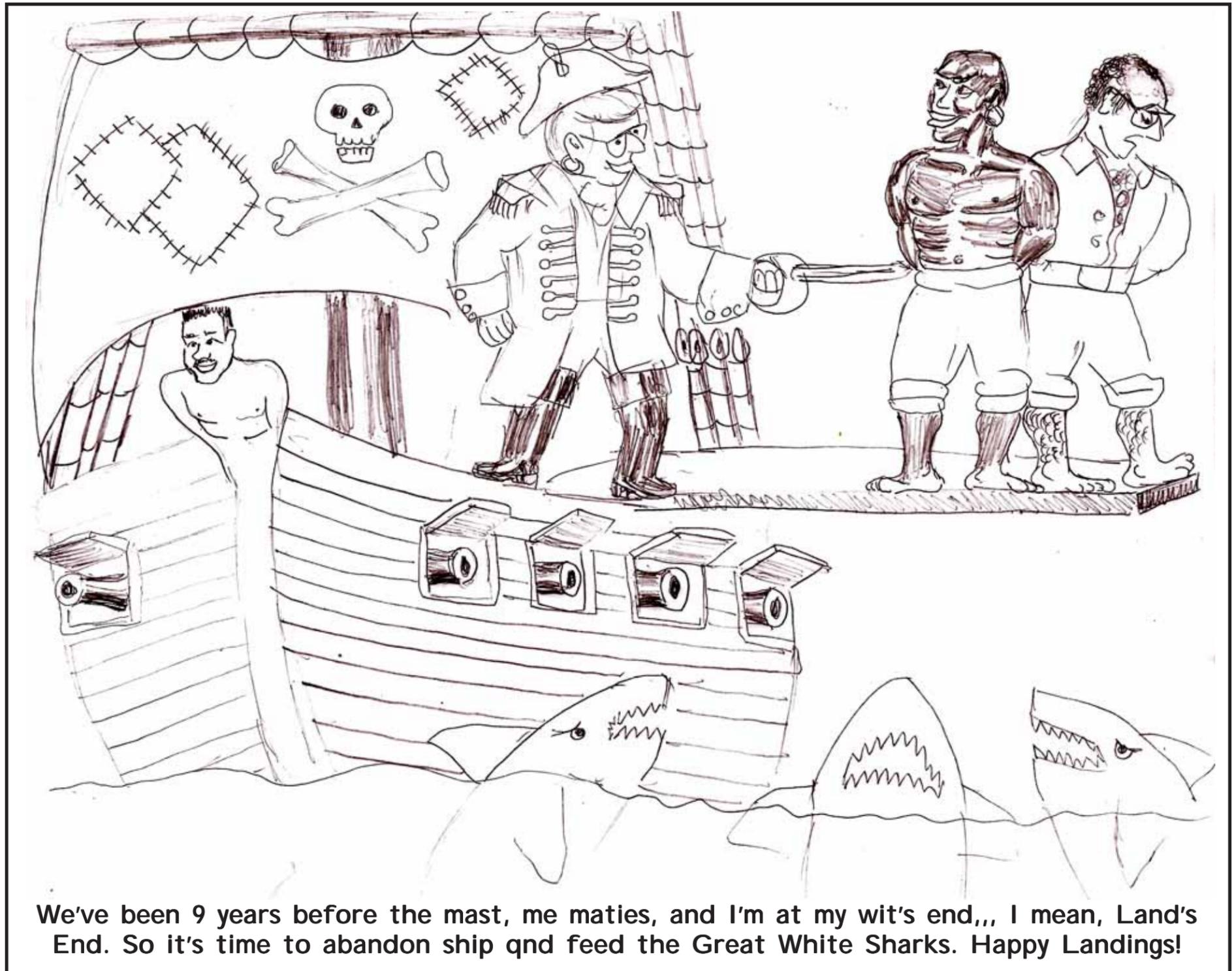
After a while, people just started calling him Derek, as if he were a personal friend of member of their own family. Soon enough, we stopped using his name at all, everyone just knew who you meant when you said "He."

The ridiculous question lingered, "What he gat fi do with BTL bill anyway?"

Even those who professed to believe it was a hoax, found part of themselves 'fraid fi Derek.' Afraid they would kill him, afraid we'd never find his body, afraid he would be maimed or mutilated, set on fire, made an example to terrorize and terrify anyone else who might dare to buck the system.

The call to KREM radio which he says his captors made so he could prove he needed thyroid medication was chilling. Anyone who heard it stood frozen and shocked. Unless he was an excellent actor, Derek Aikman was really being held; he might never see his wife and children again!

But held by whom? Surely not someone who cared about the BTL Vesting Bill. Political kidnappings are usually about some sort of prisoner exchange or funds or guns for rebels or something. Well, the ones we have seen in movies anyway. Derek had no control over the BTL bill or prisoners or (Please Turn To Page 7)



# 'Fraid fi Derek

☛ (Continued From Page 6)  
guns or funds or anything. The Senators would not be deterred, the government flunkies would support the bill, those with a conscience oppose it, those who had no backbone would not even show up. The GG would do as he was told and sign. Nothing new and no chance Derek Aikman could influence the outcome, any more than any of us could.

So it seems pretty obvious to me I mean, how many other politicians or public figures in Belize at this time could galvanize over eight thousand people with only 2 days notice, mostly word of mouth minus expensive television advertising, and get them to the polls? How many politicians, from any political party, could get that many people to turn out of their volition, with no transport or food or financial incentive provided? Who else could get dozens of people to volunteer to man those polling booths for up to ten hours, to get schools and churches and community centers to throw open their doors and invite such an activity inside without the prompting of Elections and Boundaries or National Development or NEMO?

Maybe only Godwin Hulse could generate that kind of public support. Maybe. But the rest? Could any of them pull off such an audacious move, a longshot, a public relations gamble that hit the jackpot?

Much of it has to do with timing I suppose. Right now, more than ever, the nation of Belize is looking for a charismatic leaders, a spiritual and moral man who has been happily married to ONE woman for most of his adult life, who has intelligent, well mannered children who are totally devoted to their education and hobbies. Perhaps what also appeals to them about Derek, if the very thing that drove him out of politics, a bank attack by an institution controlled by the man many Belizeans now regard as the devil himself. Add to the mix the fact that Aikman dared to say "No" to Guatemala when so many our leaders were practicing appeasement and the larger than life story of how he rescued a child from a burning building, and you have an individual who has gone from cult hero to national icon. Become a beacon of hope in a hopeless land where more and more families are losing their homes, their income, their women and children to violence and men to reckless driving and gang violence.

Derek Aikman has walked onto a very different national stage than the one he left a few years ago. Both major parties are under heavy fire and numerous smaller parties have emerged.

He could fly under the flag of the VIP, PNP/WTP or the NRP and easily win a seat in the new government. Which division? Any division really, from Queen's Square to Fort George to Belize Rural Central. Take your pick.

Yes, there any number of people who would want to see him scared off the scene, sidelined or worse. New rivals, and old enemies. As one woman said to me the other day, "Derek no done pay fi defeat Price yet..."

This is not to suggest that anyone in Price's camp had him picked up. But the opinion illustrates a view, rather widely shared, that the kidnapping was carried out at the behest of someone at "a very high level." Perhaps even with the assistance of some branch of the police department or military. Someone who is not afraid FOR Derek, but afraid OF him.

At least one in every four people I spoke to during the disappearance believes this. It startled me to hear it. So frequently, and said with such conviction. After Aikman was released, a man shook his finger at me and said, "No mus police? How else would Crispin Jeffries know for certain the man would be found alive? You can't assume dey no when kill di man, unless you KNOW!"

Personally, I think Mr Jeffries's comment during the press conference at Raccoon Street was designed to intimidate the kidnapers, make them feel the Police Department could, and would, catch the perpetrators and free the hostage. A show of bravado, if you will. Entirely in character.

So was the inability of some police officers to keep their own personal prejudices to themselves during the investigation. Frustration over the lack of leads, or maybe their own incompetence when faced with such a bizarre situation also led some rookie officers to do such absurd things as visit Covenant members at one in the morning and ask for glasses of water so they could look under their tables and peek into rooms while the owner was in the kitchen. What did they think? That Derek was hiding right in Burrell Boom? Or that his body would be stuffed behind someone's entertainment center? Stupid.

But not damning enough to implicate the entire police force or high command as accomplices in this crime. Could rogue or fringe elements have been co-opted? Former Belizean military personnel? Possibly. None of us likes to think we have entered a new era now of state-sponsored kidnapping. But then, none of us wanted to admit when gangs invaded Belize City or we became a

major drug transshipment and money laundering center either.

Derek says he was asked to communicate to the police, the government and the people of Belize that he will not be the last person to be picked up. Specific threats were made to the lives of the Prime Minister and the Governor General. At least, this is what Derek says his captors told him. The one who spoke English with a Belizean accent, not the ones he says spoke only Spanish with "Central American accents."

These threats are similar to the ones made in a letter sent to media houses this week, including the Independent Reformer, on paper bearing the letterhead "The New Jihad." We will not reproduce a letter by a group which clearly fancies itself a terrorist organization or allow our paper to become a vehicle through which they can issue demands and threats, or attempt to conceal their identity or cloud their motivation by ridiculous statements about the BTL Vesting Bill. Pure smokescreen and I am not buying it. We here at the Independent may not support the actions of some of our national leaders, but we cannot condone death threats against them. Cartoons poking fun are one thing, death squads something else entirely.

The people responsible for Derek Aikman's unlawful detention are not

concerned with BTL or UHS or any other piece of legislation or loan guarantee. The only guarantee they seek is their own continued power to exploit the Belizean people and steal from the public coffers.

They can kidnap Derek Aikman, fire shots and set fire to Jose Coye's vehicle, light up Godwin Hulse's truck, throw people out of cabinet, detain cameramen and radio hosts who give them the finger in the House of Representatives, even whisk inquiry Chairmen away for medical attention from which they never return, take away people's land, fire them, smear them with filth and innuendo—but they cannot keep their finger in the dike for much longer.

For every single populist leader, for every outspoken critic and challenger who is threatened and intimidated, even driven away, there will be others to replace them.

Make no mistake, one of these days one of them will get through the mine field to the other side.

'Fraid fi Derek? They SHOULD be afraid--not only of Derek, but of all the Belizeans who were afraid for him while he was being held in the underworld.

Because the next time we won't just be voting no in a hastily called referendum.

## FOR SALE Schwinn 21-speed Cross-trainer bike



All aluminum rims,  
Shimano 'Alivio' brake  
calipers, pedal arms &  
derailleur gear, handle  
grip shifters, quick

release wheels & seat  
Asking  
\$500 O.B.O.  
contact Independent  
Weekly

# Belize's reef, not Mexico's - BTB counters beauty pageant claims

## Statement from the Belize Tourism Board

It has been brought to the attention of the Minister of Tourism and the Belize Tourism Board that on May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2007 during the live television broadcast of the 2007 Miss Universe Pageant in Mexico City, to some 1 billion viewers worldwide, Cozumel, Mexico was positioned as "... home to the second largest barrier reef in the world..." This deliberate misrepresentation of the truth has stirred strong local disapproval and international disgruntlement. The Belize Tourism Board shares the expressed sentiments of many Belizeans on such a blatant disregard for the people and country of Belize and is appalled by this gross distortion of the facts.

The Belize Tourism Board is the public-sector organization responsible for the marketing and promotion of the



*Belize's Barrier Reef is a principal attraction for tourists.*



*Miss Belize Maria Jefferies wore a Mayan costume at the Miss Universe Pageant. (photo courtesy Richard Holder)*

Belize tourism product. We are committed and determined to educate and share with potential visitors and friends, the rich diversity of our culture and the many natural and physical attributes that provide for a truly authentic Belizean experience. We recognize that the 185-mile long **Belize Barrier Reef**, hugging the entire coastline of the country of Belize is one of the country's most valuable natural attractions. Offering world class adventure to divers, sports fishermen and snorkel enthusiasts alike, the **Belize Barrier Reef** has set us apart from our competitors and has served as the foundation for Belize's vibrant and growing tourism industry. Due to the tireless efforts of the Government and people of Belize, in 1996, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recognized and designated the Belize Barrier Reef as a World Heritage Site.

These and other facts have been shared with the organizers of the Miss Universe Pageant in a letter addressed to them earlier today, expressing the collective views of the Government and people of Belize. The letter addressed to the Ms. Universe Organizing Committee and copied to the Ministry of Tourism in the host country, requests a formal retraction of this erroneous statement and clarification of the facts to the viewers of the Miss Universe Pageant. Additionally, an international press release will be disseminated to our media partners in the United States and Canada, later today, via the BTB's Public Relations Agency based in New York. The Ministry of Tourism has made contact with the Embassy of Belize in Mexico City in an effort to secure diplomatic support as well as to formally register the Government's grave concern on this matter.

"We are disappointed that the proper protocols were not exercised in this case", commented the Minister of Tourism, Godfrey Smith. "We will remain vigilant and steadfast in our effort to ensure that Belize receives a formal apology from those who were involved in this most unfortunate incident."

For more information on development and events in Belize's tourism industry, e-mail: [info@travelbelize.org](mailto:info@travelbelize.org) or visit our website at [www.travelbelize.org](http://www.travelbelize.org) and [www.belize tourism.org](http://www.belize tourism.org)



Current Issues

# Attack on Press Freedom and Democracy

**By: Meb Cutlack**

The BTL has sliced across the press freedoms of Belize and undermined our democracy in a way never before seen in Belize. In a totally shameless and arrogant manner, and in one swift move BTL has taken KREM radio station off its internet streaming, emasculating it nationally (it used the internet platform to broadcast into Punta Gorda, Placencia, Independence, and Corozal Town) and internationally.

According to the Amandala the reason for the action is "Because KREM Radio had to take a stand against Lord Ashcroft on the UHS and Belize Telemedia matters."

This action cries out to all of Belize and all Belizeans abroad, louder than ever, that the illegal giveaway of BTL in its illegal sale to Prosser and now the sudden, convenient and also illegal transfer to 'Telemedia' - without tax or cost - should never have happened.

It is imperative that BTL should be restored to a majority ownership by the people of Belize as soon as possible.

In taking KREM off the air, the Lord has signaled that the gloves are off. It's a bare fist fight from now on and all the rules of the engagement have changed. It is no longer a boxing match between a powerful 'champion', and an upstart contender from among the people, it has become a 'tag' fight.

The Lord only has a clever, small and darting Musa defending soft spots between his legs, the Times newspaper being waved to keep him cool, and Love FM crouched behind his corner. Our fighter 'KREM' has the crowd roaring on his side. Hundreds of citizens, once prepared to see a fair fight under Queensbury Rules, are now ready to jump into the ring with this media house.

The straw that broke the proverbial camel's back was just a tiny straw loaded only in greed, and without thought or consideration, but it was enough to bring the straining camel down and broken.

Three recent straws added to the burden of the people of Belize; the UHS scandal, the VACA dam extension (adding to the already huge financial burden of Challilo) and the Telemedia plot piled on the top, are three straws too many for the Belizean people to

bear.

These issues are going to bring you toppling down M'Lord - and Mr Musa with you. They will also bring about uncomfortable retribution for all the sycophants who sing your song.

Amandala: "While patriotic Belizeans have been making sacrifices, members of the Ashcroft Supporters Society, a.k.a. collaborators, have seen their benefits increase. Collaborators will now get the Belize Bank account. Collaborators will now get the Espat and Hyde Cabinet portfolios. Collaborators will now benefit from the KREM Radio crippling. It is important to identify collaborators. They are enemies of Belize, but they know how to talk and act as if they are friends of Belize."

Also from Evan X of Amandala: "In the battle being waged in the streets and the countryside of Belize between the Ashcroft Supporters Society and the people of Belize, it is KREM Radio which the Englishman considers more dangerous than the newspaper. There

are different reasons for this, but I will discuss these reasons another time. Suffice to say that at the book launching a couple months ago for the LOVE FM owner's literary effort, Lord Ashcroft showed up in the front row, and when questioned about it by Jules Vasquez, responded, "Anything for Rene!"

It is past the time for all Belizeans to

see the manner in which they are being ruled and manipulated, also acknowledge just who is pulling the stings and recognize who is piling on the straw. The camel minder no longer knows what he is doing. The camel boy is a silly little, dangerous, twerp!

*Twerp! ... "a person regarded as insignificant and contemptible".*

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# Making Things Happen?



**By: Trevor Vernon**

Everyone's been saturated with heavy news lately. Lots of hard news along with the usual police blotter type crime "around the inner city". So this week I'll lighten up and do the Joyce "stream of consciousness" thing without any heavy analysis, naturally with an exclusive Belize focus.

The big news that continues to dominate the consciousness of Belizeans everywhere is the Aikman kidnapping. Speculation is the order of the day. The semi-official whisper campaign coming out of government quarters is that Mr. Aikman is a master showman and that he staged the whole thing to make his comeback. I don't buy it, but some do. Mr. Aikman was back the moment 10,000 plus voters came out to vote country-

wide in a mock referendum two weeks ago. There's no question. Somebody needs to tell the security forces that this kind of thing is above their pay scale.

Lots of friends have been asking us to take extra precaution. Heavy stuff. While are not taking the kidnapping lightly there is no need for extra security measures as we see it. We have a wonderful and well trained police department. They just had a guy come back from a special course on handling kidnapping and hostage taking situations. I am sleeping better already but not turning off my security gadgets. What wonderful things this internet related technology is... and not really expensive.

And listening to Belize's robo-cop Jefferies elaborate on the competencies and brainpower of our proud men in blue, one gets a sense of utter calm and total control. This guy is mister take charge. When he speaks you know everything will return to a state of normalcy real soon. And exactly as super cop told us on Tuesday, so it came to

pass. What's there to worry about?

Things were super calm over the weekend with graduation season in full swing. The PM came back, over the weekend we hear, from stately commitments in Caracas and elsewhere ... with more money in hand. All things bright and beautiful. Bet Washington isn't too happy with the cozy Caracas/Caricom relationship but Washington isn't putting out like she used to and the Maximum Bolivarian Leader Chavez is.

The economic train will be moving again and real soon. This is the only opiate of the masses and this orange government understands it very well. Let it flow at the last minute. We need to get this private sector led economy back in gear. We have been losing a lot of foreign direct investment and related employment...and the hemorrhaging continues.

So what's there to worry about really? Things are looking up...just keep those foreign bills, acts, and Statutory Instruments flowing through the pipeline. Gifts and tax breaks to the big political donors.

The Aikman kidnapping was obviously politically motivated but it would be grossly unfair to say it was state sanctioned. The kidnapped man is back with his family and that's a beautiful thing. Jefferies, with the security forces, has things under control in the streets. The gangs have been sedated.

The US Government drops her hand with another million USD to support security efforts, institutional strengthening-wise. Chavez will give that a hundred times over. Taiwan is dropping her hand too. Clean money is flowing again, pouring in. The drug monies aren't flowing, all of a sudden, so drug related conflicts/crime are nonexistent. Yet the "parallel market" exchange rate remains "pegged" to the US Dollar. Just doesn't add up.

Jefferies making things happen...or not happen?

We are living in a beautiful country and soon we'll watch as the people get pumped with all sorts of opiates as we head full scale into electioneering mode, like the rest of the Americas.

## Money laundering fears trigger Grace Kennedy action

**By Dennise Williams**

Friday, June 01, 2007

**GraceKennedy boss Douglas Orane this week disclosed that fears of money launderers owning shares in the company had caused Grace to insist on knowing who were its true shareholders.**

Orane, the GraceKennedy CEO, moved a motion at Monday's annual general meeting to include a provision in the company's Articles of Association, which would allow GK to determine who were the true holders of shares and allow the company to impose sanctions where there was failure to disclose after appropriate notice.

"We want to know who our partners in GK are. It is like living in a condo with new owners coming in that you don't know," Orane told shareholders at the AGM, held at GK's harbour Street headquarters in downtown Kingston. "We see this provision as important in today's environment where money launderers are seeking innovative ways of disguising funds," he said.

"The risk is that shareholders of the company could one day find that significant shares of the company

held by these persons," added Orane.

He further proposed that sanctions, such as the withholding of dividend cheques, be implemented to force disclosure.

But John Jackson, GK shareholder and financial analyst, spoke passionately against such a move.

"There might be a case where a person simply chooses not to disclose who they are, not because they are doing anything wrong, and then the next thing they know, they are excluded from receiving dividend cheques. I cannot accept that," said Jackson.

In support of Orane's proposal, GK director John Issa took to the podium and questioned why anyone who was an upstanding citizen would not want to be identified as a GK shareholder.

Jackson then attempted to have a motion moved to stop the amendment but Karen Chin Quee Akin, GK company secretary, said that since the amendment had been duly circulated, the financial analyst's motion could not stand. Orane noted that Jackson had the right to vote against the amendment, which he did, but was the only one to do

so.

Another shareholder took GK executives to task on several issues presented in the notes to the Financial Statements.

First, there were questions surrounding the receivables, which had increased significantly during the year under review. Indeed, as at December 31, 2006, trade receivables stood at nearly \$1 billion, a 60 per cent jump from the \$378.1 million booked in the corresponding period of 2005.

Fay McIntosh, GK chief financial officer, was at pains to explain the reason for the robust surge, but admitted that there was room for improvement in the company's collection methods.

"It is a tight market. Our collections are something that we are working very hard at," said McIntosh.

Don Wehby, chief executive officer of GK Investments, noted that part of the increase in trade receivables was due to outstanding receivables from the GraceKennedy Remittance Service.

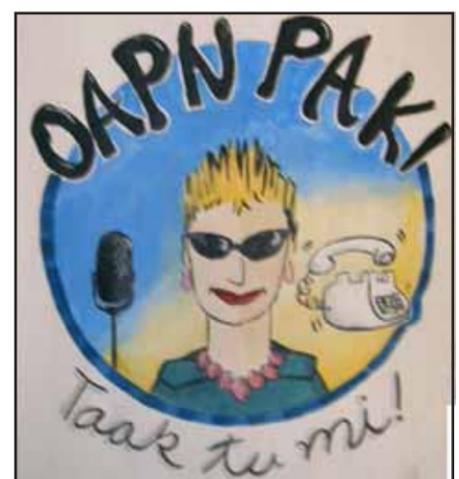
Secondly, the shareholder questioned the \$728.2 million from pensions that was recognised in the

profit and loss account.

To this, Orane's response was: "Over the last 20 years, GK's defined benefit pension plan developed a large surplus. In fact, our pension is twice as large as what is needed, actuarially, by retired GK workers and soon to be retired workers."

The GK head added that, "now, under the IFRS rules, a portion of the surplus must be recognised as profit. And we cannot ask the GK Pension fund to write us a cheque for the surplus. The only way that we can get it back is a contribution holiday where we don't contribute to the pension for several years."

*provided by Grace Kennedy Belize Ltd.*



# Justice in the Land

*Statement from the National Reform Party, NRP*

What about justice? As the saying goes, "Don't let your rights become wrong." Every now and then a case comes up that shows the level of justice we have in the land. For example, Christine Perriot's case; imagine as a union leader she cannot get her rights upheld? Naturally the question arises, what about the common man or woman? Such a case becomes an insult to our society, especially to those who know our laws and the working people.

Another common saying is, "Only free people can set people free." When a police man does not listen to your case, don't be silent; or when your tax money is wasted, don't be quiet; and when the country's future is at stake, don't be quiet.

Every justice system needs a judge. Every judge has the Constitution and many books of historical cases to guide him. On the other hand he goes by what the leader of the country and people want. He uses the information you give him. So, if corruption takes control of our society, it will always start from the top. Once it has penetrated to the majority of the body of people, they cannot change unless the leadership is removed. This is easy to explain.

A corrupt leader cannot afford for his leaders under him to be corrupt also. The problem is he cannot stop them. Eventually they become like him, and the society at large becomes corrupt. That is when the dance ends and music stops.

A judge in Cayo years ago said something unforgettable. He said that there is a written law, but along with it there is what we is called the spirit of the law. We definitely need both to have justice working for us.

A newspaper article read: "Good laws on paper will not protect us from a bad government." That is so true! If being smart, educated, and vocal only could do it, we would be in far better shape a long time ago.

The spirit of the law is not as evident as the law on paper but more sensitive. We have many written laws that many of us don't even know about. They are not regarded or enforced. But if we disregard the spirit of the law, there is more of an immediate reaction. Our

Prime Minister found that out lately. He did some things against our law a n d constitution for years. Then one day he touched the spirit of Belizean people, by saying, law or no law, you have to pay what I signed for. He quickly found out that he should never have said nor done that. Overnight, over 90% of the people were against him. That is the unwritten law in action, if people speak up, much can be accomplished.

Smokey Joe of the Amandala wrote "I am not talking to you tongue stretchers who get allowance to talk about others, because if you cannot see it yet, your days are numbered. Check the world, brother man. The power of God is moving. The Ice Age is now turning into a heat wave. As I have said, money and material things here have taken the place of God. This is turning our so-called poverty stricken youths into thieves..."

Thinking about justice and what comes along with it: 1) The Belizean people at this time don't know if anyone is listening to them. One thing is sure that everyone is disappointed of a cowardly leadership. 2) The Belizean people don't feel that there is compassion for them, with all the pressures upon them, the hardships in daily life, which is the result of corruption. 3) The Belizean people don't understand love anymore, because of the loss of trust, the betrayal and lawlessness they witness on a daily basis in the streets and among the leaders.

Thousands of people have lost their jobs. Contractors have lost their contracts. Trusted arrangements have been broken. People have lost their savings, their land, their houses, their family with no hopes of ever getting it back. Most of them keep quiet and do not speak up. Others who have spoken continue without any results. Many are waiting years for the courts to decide. Some have suffered wrong judgments.

Belizeans are very disappointed at the indifference of their leaders. Why? We went with all the best promises and plans. Then we get disappointed without explanation. That hurts. That is a very insulting

let down. For a good example just read Tom Greenwood's letter in the Independent Reformer, Amandala and Reporter. He was brave enough to vent his anger and frustration and put his thoughts in writing. What about the thousands that keep it to themselves? There are many similar stories from the different political administrations of '93, '98 and the 2003.

Let us try to look at today's situation from a historical point of view, if that is possible.

When we were awakened after the last elections, with all the promises being made of a good Belize and economy that was going to be strong, everyone knew that our assets and properties were being sold to bring constant cash money; and while the music was being played, we were told it is alright to borrow as much money as possible from other countries and not to worry if we do not see any auditing done for 13 years of our cash flow; we were made to believe it was alright to raise our commodity 100%, that is a must too, in order to rise up to a high level. We were also told to pay more than double into Social Security for our safety of the poor and sick people; and our fuel prices raised up 100% for better roads.

We say but wait, UDP brought us to the road of starvation. Then PUP came and said UDP have money, but it is far too much. Let us handle it. Today we owe four times as much, plus our assets have been sold; taxes have been raised even when dozens of grants from other countries have been given; the booming of the tourism and its forthcoming tax income, and now we must hear we are broke. Then we hear we cannot even pay the interest and as a result all contracts stop! Some never get their money they have already worked so hard for, and finally go broke as well.

At this pace, in a short period of time, say six months, many businesses in the country could go down by 50%.

Today we are told the worse yet. This one not only tingles our ears but sinks our hearts. We were made aware that our PM signed millions of our tax money over to private institutions and we found out that he is use to this and has been doing it

anytime he wants to without going to the House for approval. And so, many millions have gone through the cracks already while so many are broke and looking for a remedy to our economy. Then we hear a word worse yet, you must pay and don't ask questions. Don't ask for estimates or records.

Belize is our jewel. A story was told in a radio program lately where an African farmer had a big farm. He got interested in the jewel business. He wanted to find diamonds. He sold everything and traveled all over the land searching and finding nothing. And finally he drowned in a river, a poor, broke, discouraged man. Someone else bought the farm and found an ugly looking stone in the same river where the previous owner had drowned. He set it on the shelf until someone told him, that's a diamond. You will see it after you shine it up. He found out he had a diamond mine under his feet. It became the biggest diamond mine in all of Africa.

Now to all of us in Belize, the question is: what we will do with our jewel? Leave it on the ground, put it on a shelf or shine it up, or go around the world to find stuff that glitters, that someone shined already to try to buy it with borrowed money. Or will we trade our mine with one stone that glitters?

The NRP does not believe in selling your tools to buy food; or selling your land to buy a luxury vehicle. Instead, let the produce of the land pay for it. A local magazine said it so right, **we don't inherit the earth from our ancestors, and we borrow it from our children.**

At this time we see that the older people are worried about our future. The workers are tired of a high cost of living. The youths are waiting for things to develop. The children are hungry and want their nutrition, but the main thing is, will we see justice done in our country?

The NRP wants what everybody wants, justice. Add to that some common sense, and education along with information.

Belizeans need another chance to free themselves from bondage, hunger, and crime.

NRP not only knows that we are in trouble, but also has an answer.



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# A Nation in Bondage



**By: Gus A. Perera**

“The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is a servant to the lender.”

Proverbs 22:7

In early Greek culture, many people were under compulsory service, some due to economic hardships, and others simply because they were offspring of slaves, and some due to the spoils of war. The Greek culture looked at these people with scorn. Their plight was not a subject of social conscience; they were simply overlooked in the social structure. Slaves were not considered part of the state.

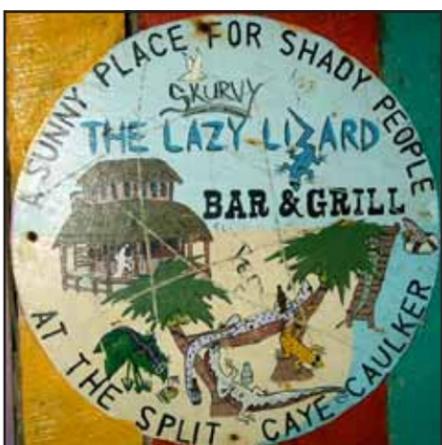
Because economic hardship or indebtedness could lead to enslavement, borrowing was not something to be taken lightly for even the failure to return a borrowed item had some serious implications. The following story illustrates this point.

“One day the guild of prophets came to Elisha and said, ‘you can see that this place where we are living under your leadership is getting cramped — we have no elbow room. Give us permission to go down to the Jordan where each of us will get a log and we’ll build a roomier place.’”

The story continues: “*Elisha said, ‘go ahead.’ And he went with them and they started chopping down trees. As one of them was felling a timber, his axe head flew off and sank in the river. He cried out, ‘Aye it was borrowed!’*” (*The Message, 2 Kings, 6*)

The young student panicked because he realized that, until such time as he returned the axe head to the lender, he was under compulsory service or bondage to the owner of the axe. For all intents and purposes, he had just become enslaved.

Let us spool back for a moment to



the 1998 general elections. The PUP campaigned on the promise to “*Set Belize Free.*” Judging from their pledge to “*build 10,000 new homes and create 5,000 new jobs*” one had to assume that their approach to managing the economy would have been expansionary – investment and growth.

In reality, what the PUP did was introduce the concept of “*deficit spending*” or “*growth economics*” as their new approach to managing Belize’s fragile economy. According to the PUP, and as they have said so many times before, they inherited an economy in recession from their predecessors – the UDP. In their minds, an in normal practice, deficit spending should have stimulated economic growth without the need to impose further tax burdens on the Belizean worker.

The main goal, it would appear, was to increase economic output tied to investments in varied infrastructure projects. However, and because these investments could not be funded from the traditional tax revenue base, the PUP government chose to go the route of floating bonds.

And this is where Belize’s economic nightmare began. According to the *Wikipedia Encyclopaedia*, “*the most important burden of bond loans is the interest that must be paid to bondholders, which restricts a government’s ability to raise its outlays or cut taxes to attain other goals.*” It further states: “*most of the government debt is owned by the rich people, so that a rising debt can raise demand for the funds supplied by the rich, encouraging income inequality.*”

While deficit spending might be bearable in cases where sound investments are made, it can become a yoke on the back of a nation if the monies are used for wasteful expenditure, and bad investments. In the case of Belize, the latter has been the case.

Instead of the government acting as a **facilitator** for investment and growth, it took on the role of **main protagonist**. Most of the investment funds were concentrated within the ranks of a handful of party loyalists and favourites and this gave rise to one financial failure after another. Nine years after promising to “*Set Belize Free*” the PUP has achieved the opposite; they have borrowed their way into bondage

One of the true measures of successful stewardship is when a government can leave an inheritance of prosperity for at least two generations. By doing so, it gives each generation an opportunity to grow the wealth they inherit for future generations and thereby create a truly prosperous na-

tion and people.

Sadly, this is not the case. Belize is a nation in bondage to its lenders. Belize now has debts that future generations will be paying for, even though the benefits will not accrue to them.



**ARIES** (Mar. 21- April 20)

Those close to your heart may be difficult to reason with. You need an outlet that will not only stimulate you but also challenge your intelligence as well. Physical limitations are possible if you aren’t careful. Try to accommodate them without infringing on your own responsibilities. Your lucky day this week will be Tuesday.

**TAURUS** (Apr. 21- may 21)

You may have problems with skin, bones, or teeth if you haven’t been taking proper care of yourself. You could lose money or precious belongings if you aren’t careful. Use your charm, but don’t sign or agree to anything. Be prepared to make compensations and adjustments. Your lucky day this week will be Tuesday.

**GEMINI** (May 22-June 21)

You need to get down to basics with regard to yourself. Try to deal with the problems of those less fortunate; however, don’t allow them to make unreasonable demands. You are best to put in some overtime rather than get involved in family gatherings. You need to concentrate on the areas where you can make a difference. Your lucky day this week will be Sunday.

**CANCER** (June 22-July 22)

Your ideas are right on the mark and your work commendable. Any capricious behavior will confuse loved ones and your mood swings will result in loneliness. Get busy putting your place in order. You must avoid gossip and focus on what you have to do. Your lucky day this week will be Sunday.

**LEO** (July 23-Aug 22)

You may want to take a trip; however, before you do, make sure that your car is serviced properly. You are best to be accommodating for the time being. Sudden romantic infatuations won’t be lasting. Do things you enjoy instead of being a chameleon. Losses are likely if you have left your financial affairs in other people’s hands. Your lucky day this week will be Saturday.

**VIRGO** (Aug. 23 -Sept. 23)

Unexpected visitors are likely. Be prepared to do your chores early. Opportunities will come through behind the scenes activities. A residential move may be necessary to get a better job. Your

Belize in 2007 is a borrower nation that has become a slave to its lenders. The cry of 1998 therefore echoes even more thunderously -- “**Set Belize Free...Set Belize Free...Set Belize Free!**”

ability to add a sophisticated touch will help you capture the look you’re after. Your lucky day this week will be Tuesday.

**LIBRA** (Sept. 24 -Oct. 23)

You need to fulfill your needs and present your talents. Turn things around, make sure that they do their share. New partnerships will develop if you join investment groups. Stabilize your own position by locking up your savings. Your lucky day this week will be Tuesday.

**SCORPIO** (Oct. 24 - Nov. 22)

Don’t be shy; show your abilities! Interaction with colleagues will only be upsetting. Travel will promote romantic connections. You should be in business for yourself. Your lucky day this week will be Friday.

**SAGITTARIUS** (Nov. 23 -Dec. 21)

Make changes in your domestic scene. It might be time to shake a leg and do a personal makeover. Your charm will attract someone special. Don’t let your anger consume you and don’t allow important matters go unattended to. Your lucky day this week will be Saturday.

**CAPRICORN** (Dec 22.- Jan. 20)

Read between the lines when signing contracts. Delve a little deeper if you really want to know the score. Keep your ears open, especially to those who care about you. Moneymaking opportunities will surface. Your lucky day this week will be Tuesday.

**AQUARIUS** (Jan. 21 -Feb. 19)

You have been going through a period of change that no doubt caused problems with your loved ones. Be honest with yourself before getting involved with someone who is likely to lead you on. Your outgoing nature will win hearts. Property deals will pay big dividends. Your lucky day this week will be Friday.

**PISCES** (Feb. 20-Mar. 20)

Don’t get involved in expensive entertainment that involves gambling. You can get a promotion if you put in a little extra detail. Try to bend to their wishes if you want to avoid conflict. Don’t go overboard; start small and work toward building it up slowly. Your lucky day this week will be Monday.

# TOPICAL TIDBITS

Well now we know why the BTL Vesting Bill had to be pushed through the House of Representatives and the Senate—so that when the Chief Justice ruled this week in Prosser’s favor, he would be left holding an empty crocus bag... which is exactly what happened. Jeffrey Prosser gets to have his board meeting at BTL, only, now get this, THERE IS NO MORE BTL. Rumor is Belizeans we won’t be SMART for much longer, when Belize Telemedia Ltd (the artist formerly known as BTL) refuses to renew its contract to interconnect with their system. If that happens, the PUP promise of bringing competition to the telecommunications industry will be broken and cell phone users have to go back to being “duncey.” What they going to do next, cut off the cable companies providing internet? Then we will truly be in a game of monopoly.

## Belizeans mistaken for Illegal Aliens?

While thousands of proud grads are receiving diplomas and certificates this month, one group of students missed their graduation because officers at an immigration checkpoint out west demanded they show their passports.

When they could not produce the documents, the students were detained so long the ceremony was over by the time they got to the school. Now here is the perplexing part: it was a group of Kriol kids, not Hispanics or Asians or Caucasian looking foreigners speaking foreign languages. We can only imagine the tongue lashing they must have given the officers at the checkpoint. *Maddafya*.

Can’t imagine how the officers mistook them for illegal aliens, unless of course they themselves are not fluent in Belize’s lingua franca. Wonder if the officers have

proper documents, and work permits..? Notice a lot of foreign personnel popping up in certain security firms.

The Department of Immigration has since apologized to the students for causing them to miss this very special ceremony, and for lack of discretion on the part of their personnel. Guess some immigration officers will be sent back to school for a little cultural sensitization training. Can you spell B-e-l-i-z-e-a-n?

## New Airport Road and Intersection

It’s a lovely strip of highway, the new cutoff to the PGIA, but you have to wonder why it is we can never seem to get things right. The 90 degree turn onto the northern highway is poorly planned and confusing with lines painted all over the place and an island popping out of nowhere with no reflective paint on it... another accident waiting to happen. And can someone please put a booth for people waiting for shuttles or rides to the airport out there, right now everyone is lining the highway out in the hot sun or

darkness.

And while ministry of works—or somebody—is at it, can y’all go back and finish the job of fixing the piece of highway that slid off into the river around the Courtenay’s? An unsightly mess anyway you take it, from the roadside or the riverside. At least cut off the jagged steel jutting out of the top and finish casting the posts, will you? We’ve paid enough in gas taxes since the accidents happened at that site to pay for a whole new highway already... and there is enough steel brought in for Stake Bank making its way to the black market to build that bridge across to the Western Highway too. Don’t think we don’t know about that guys.

**Opposition Leader, Dean Oliver Barrow**, quits his law firm to focus on the Party he leads and we suppose, to get the Lord off his you know what. He hedges when making the separation announcement from his private law practice. Doesn’t want to irritate the Lord, it seems. Might need an extra million or two to shore up the campaign? Can’t say we blame him.

Campaigns can get expensive, if we are to take the word of the leader of the National Reform Party (NRP) from a presentation he made during their launch. Barrow has said nothing of what a general election campaign will cost the UDP and where they or the PUP will get the “50 to 100 million dollars” that NRP talks about.

## DFC Commission Hearing Report

Aren’t we supposed to get a report from the DFC Commissioners on the proceedings that concluded a couple months ago? What’s up with that? And the Senate hearing report? Is that Dead in the water too?

## Third Party Alliances & Coalitions

We would like to see the grand alliance efforts massaged a bit more. We have got to check our egos at the door if we are to dispense with the super corrupt government. Don’t we? Come on third parties, Belize deserves a grand alliance.



Can anyone explain how this illegal garbage dump in palencia came into to existence despite the vigilance of the Dept of the environment and helath Dept.?

# OAS reports Crime & Violence harm Central America’s development

Commending the latest international findings on how crime and violence harm development in Central American countries, the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), José Miguel Insulza, said the study will provide important tools to help the OAS more strategically focus its action in this area.

Insulza made the comments today during a press conference at OAS headquarters, where the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Antonio María Costa, unveiled a report entitled *Crime and Development in Central America: Caught in the Crossfire*. Insulza remarked that, while uncovering no new major trends, the findings do provide a great deal of data that could help shape long-term

international cooperation designed to address problems arising from crime and violence in the Central American countries.

According to the OAS Secretary General, in grappling with the issue of crime, the link should also be made in policy discussions on development and democracy. He said the information in the report also brings to light the undeniable links between crime and poverty and, at the same time, reinforces the OAS in its efforts to combat illegal drugs and terrorism, part of its multidimensional security agenda.

Costa, for his part, explained during the press conference that the study—the product of broad-based consultation on the effects of crime and violence—seeks to break the “vicious cycle” of the severe

impact of crime on security, stability and development. He added that underdevelopment is also a major cause of vulnerability to crime.

The document stresses that all of the countries studied—Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama—are affected to varying degrees by drugs, crime and underdevelopment. Several of the countries are vulnerable because of socioeconomic factors related to income disparity, uncontrolled urban development, widespread poverty, a relatively young population, easy access to large quantities of weapons and an unstable post-conflict environment, among other factors. As well, according to the report, their particular geography puts the countries at risk: they

are trapped between the world’s largest coca producer—Colombia—and the largest consumer of cocaine, the United States.

The OAS and UNODC intend to use this study as the basis for cooperation among the countries of the region and other international organizations on strategies to tackle crime, corruption and drugs and the effect of these on development in Central America and the Caribbean.

Besides the senior UNODC officials, Central American ambassadors to the OAS were on hand for the presentation of the study. Also distributed was a previous study on the situation in the Caribbean countries, entitled, “Crime, Violence and Development: Trends, costs and policy options in the Caribbean.”

# Eco-Watch

## Oil "Fever" in Belize

A release from Belize Institute of Environmental Law and Policy, BELPO.

In May, Oilwatch Mesoamerica staff member, Alicia Casas, visited Belize to monitor the oil development in Belize. The visit covered the three districts of the country where oil activity is occurring - from the Sarstoon Temash National Park (STNP) in Toledo, west to Spanish Lookout and Georgeville, in Cayo, and up to the Rio Bravo in Orange Walk.

Oilwatch Mesoamerica was accompanied by members of its Belizean partner, Belize Institute of Environmental Law and Policy (BELPO), and by environmental institutions and local people in the different areas.

Two Guatemalan members of the Mesa Ambiental Qeqchi (MAQ) participated in the meetings in Toledo.

"We could confirm the rapid expansion of oil activities and projects, and to our surprise, the lack of environmental concern of national and even local authorities", said Casas. "It is as if Belize has never heard or known the experience and burdens of oil projects around the world, and specifically in the Mesoamerican region- Guatemala and Mexico".

### Debt and revenues

Experience has shown that the economic benefits from oil revenues that Belizeans seem so optimistic about, have never been used for the benefit of the communities or in the national interest in other countries with oil. On the contrary, these very skimmed revenues (in the name of competitiveness), have usually gone to pay for debt that politicians and authorities made bigger after the oil boom. These experiences have been extensively documented in Ecuador, Venezuela before Chavez, and Guatemala. In the Belizean case, it comes as no surprise that the Universal Health Service (UHS) debt may end up being paid by the Petroleum Development Fund that was recently put in place.

### Environmental impacts overlooked

Regarding the environmental impacts, it is alarming that Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations have been recently amended so that oil exploration does not need an EIA, even in protected areas. In an era where there is rising awareness of climate change, where there are increased efforts to protect biodiversity in high biodiversity spots, like Belize, when alternatives to oil dependency are being sought, Belize is doing quite the contrary by letting these companies rule the game. "We believe protected areas are at serious risk, because there appears to be no intention to protect them from oil expansion and

its impacts", said Candy Gonzalez, member of BELPO and former BACONGO representative on the National Environmental Appraisal Committee (NEAC).

### Meeting with communities and organizations

During the visit, several meetings took place with related institutions and organizations, and Casas made comments on international rules for oil development: "Even the Convention on Biodiversity and some IUCN regulations have clearly stated that the figure of Protected Areas means that extractive industries like oil and mining should be left out."

### Sarstoon Temash- illicit seismic testing coming from Guatemala

Greg Choc, SATIIM's Executive Director, recently alerted authorities to incursions into Belize by Guatemalans carrying out oil exploration activities. He said, "While SATIIM is managing the STNP and has been consistently fighting off Guatemalan illegal exploitation of the vast resources of the park, the government seems to be giving unfettered access to an oil company registered in Guatemala to conduct seismic surveys using Guatemalan labour force."

Casas said, "We went up the Sarstoon River and documented, in detail, the encroachment because it is a very delicate situation- that the seismic lines are being set inside the park and are part of a straight line that obviously comes across the river and coming from Guatemala". There is potential here for a binational conflict and it appears that oil companies have no regard for established boundaries and will continue with their plans even if it means breaking the law.

### Guatemalan Experience is shared in Belize

Members of the MAQ shared the

burdens and struggles of the Queqchi people in Guatemala in relation to oil exploitation. Arturo Chen Bin, MAQ member, said "We founded the MAQ because we realized there was a big concession in a communal protected land. We have been resisting all these new concessions a year and a half ago and we have managed to ban this specific concession in communal lands. In Guatemala we have very bad experiences of oil development in the Alta Verapaz, and Peten. The communities have not seen the benefits but have all the pollution left in their land". Another MAQ member, Abelardo Bon, met with people in Conejo Village. "I have come here because we are all part of the same culture, you as Queqchies must know our experience and use it to make a wise decision, before it is too late".

### Rio Bravo Private Reserve at risk too

On the other side of the country, in Rio Bravo, Edilberto Romero, Executive Director of Programme for Belize stated, "We were taken by surprise with this oil project in our Rio Bravo Private Reserve, we are studying about the impacts that have been documented in other countries with similar biodiversity, and cannot take lightly the potential impact that it will have on our ecotourism, research activities and archaeological sites."

### Ecotourism vs Oil Activities

An estimated 1 out of 4 Belizeans works in tourism related activities making this a matter of great economic importance. Ecotourism (which is the kind of tourism Belize is known for), and oil extraction are not compatible activities. "Costa Rica is a clear case of a country that had to choose (through a national debate that took place from 1999 until 2002), and chose wisely to continue

environmental protection, not only for the sake of it, but because it makes perfect economic sense for the sake of ecotourism", Casas explained.

Meanwhile, environmental and conservation institutions in Belize will be coordinating efforts to define a common strategy to advocate, in Belize and internationally, for a limit to oil projects in Protected Areas.

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For Oilwatch Mesoamerica, Alicia Casas in Costa Rica at (506) 253 3629 or [casasali2002@yahoo.com.mx](mailto:casasali2002@yahoo.com.mx)



# Nature's Way Guesthouse

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**hill 75 yards to Guesthouse.**

# Guest Gallery



*This quash shyly pokes his head out of his tree trunk home. (photo by Bill Taylor)*



*Don't We all?!*



*These sea grapes add a splash of colour to the tree as they ripen. (photo by Bill Taylor)*



*The pristine beauty of these tree blossoms demanded attention (photo by Leslie Kearns)*



*Belize observed Disabilites Week on May 27 to June 2 with a parade thru Belize City streets on Friday (photo by William Ysaguerre)*



*Guest Gallery is open to readers of all ages, this painting is by Emily Rose Vernon, 5*

# A Crisis in Morality

By: Justin O. Gringo

It appears that Belize is now reaping a harvest from a number of common acts that most civilized people would regard as immoral, if not illegal.

## Stealing.

In the Middle East, stealing is not just a crime, it's a sin. First offense, cut off your hand. (So that you'll have to wipe your butt with the same hand you eat with. A serious punishment in a land where water for washing is scarce.) Brand your face to identify you as a Thief. Second offense – cut off your head.

Veterans returning from Iraq tell me that you can leave tools laying out. No problem. Here in America, I see all the lawn furniture and gardening tools on porches and marvel. In Belize, of course, they would be gone in a day.

Politicians steal big time and are admired for their cleverness. At least until the people realize that the money belongs to THEM!

## Lying.

I used to buy lots of things at a shop I liked to call "The Wal-Mart of Corozal" because they had just about everything. I went in to buy some little electronic thing, and I remarked that "if it didn't work, I would just bring it back."

"NO," said the owner very sternly, "YOU HAVE TO TEST IT HERE, BEFORE YOU LEAVE. IF YOU TAKE IT, HOW DO WE KNOW YOU DIDN'T BREAK IT?"

Well, he should know, because I'm

the customer, and the customer is always right. But not in Belize, it seems. This attitude is common among all of the shop-keepers. The customer is not right, he is probably lying.

The Police have the same attitude. You go in to report a crime committed against your person, and their question is "HOW DO I KNOW YOU'RE NOT RUNNING A SCAM?"

Because, I think, I am a victim, and the victim (like a suspected perp) is presumed innocent. Presumed to be a victim. Not so in Belize. Victims and Suspects are treated alike. Guilty until they can prove their innocence.

A respected senior politician is kidnapped, and everyone – including the Police – believes that he is probably lying; that it probably is a scam.

## Denouement.

We dismiss these things with a wry grin, with the thought that "That's just the way it is in Belize." But, as you sow, so shall you reap. The pigeons are coming home to roost. The piper must be paid.

We have borrowed money from the international bankers, and now, our sources of funds have dried up. Our credit is no good. Everyone at the top lies. They lie in secret, so that it can't be proved. But, how can you negotiate internationally when the other players know that you always lie?

Diogenes searched Ancient Greece in vain for an Honest Man. How do you think he would feel in Belize?

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# Back to the Future

➡ (Continued From Page 1)  
warning to the Lord?

The timing, however, could not have been better for Aikman to be reactivated. These are times of grave injustices. The boys have been running a train on this economy and publicly. The gang rape of Belize & her people has the populace longing for a government with some semblance of morals, of common decency. And a man who sings patriotic songs in church might just be the savior they are looking for....

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