

The Independent

Reform for the People

Vol. 1 No. 2

Tuesday, December 5, 2006

\$1.00

Election shuggga daddy(s)

Any number web play, these gamblers never lose

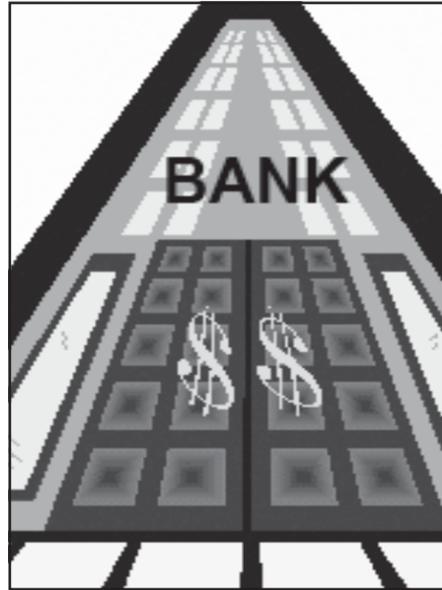
In 1999, the Political Reform Commission appointed by Prime Minister Said Musa reviewed the evils of unlimited campaign contributions and gave the highest priority for enacting legislation limiting the size of these "donations." According to the Reform Commission Report published in 2000, by unanimous decision, "The Commission recommends that campaign finance regulation be developed as a matter of urgent priority for implementation **before the next national election.**"

The "next national election" they were referring to was in 2003. But neither the People's United Party or the United Democratic Party made ANY effort to enact ANY campaign financing legislation.

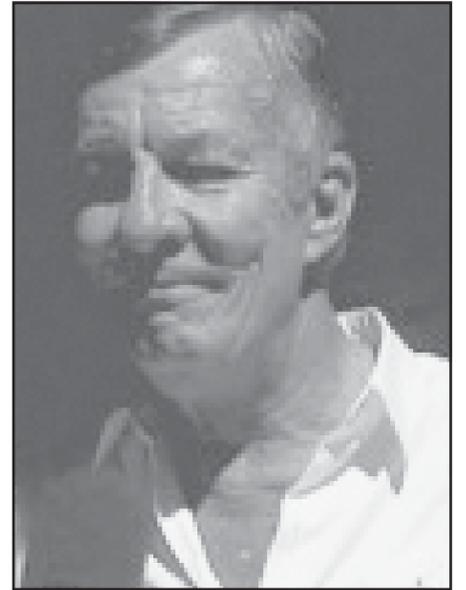
With another national election in the offing—perhaps within months—there still has been no move by either party to address the issue of campaign financing reform. In fact, by their own actions, the political parties indicate they are not in favor of laws that would uphold the people's right to a fair election.



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Sir Barry Bowen employs thousands of Belizeans.

Yet they continue to give lip service to the idea of changing how Belizean elections are paid for.

In the very first edition of the government sponsored television program, *Vision for 2025*, Prime Minister Said Musa told host Nuri Mohammed that he is committed to putting in place a campaign financing

law, one that will go as far as putting in penalties for its violation. He claimed he recognizes that the present system is capable of being corrupted by big money and that corruption hurts people on the bottom rungs of the social ladder.

That is fine talk, but why now? Why wasn't a campaign financing law put in place before the 2003 national election

as Prime Minister Musa's own commission recommended?

In the interview the Prime Minister further stated that guidance is "what leadership is about." Sadly, the Prime Minister has a habit of saying the right thing, then doing nothing. Or, worse, going off in the opposite direction. If the (Please Turn To Page 2)

Churches tackle corruption

The Belize Council of Churches is confronting corruption head on. This week they are hosting a regional conference and public forum on the theme "Corruption and its Effects on our Churches and our Democracies."

The week starts out with a meeting at Trinidad Farm to be chaired by Reverend Canon Flowers. Presidents and representatives of the Caribbean Conference of Churches and the World Council of Churches will be in attendance.

A public forum will take place at Holy Redeemer Parish Hall on Wednesday, December 5, 2006 beginning 7:00 p.m. Professor Neville Duncan will make a presentation.

The delegates will also look at other aspects of life in the Caribbean as it impacts on the life of our peoples. This is the first time that Belize is hosting such a

conference. The Council extends an invitation to all Belizeans

concerned about these critical issue to attend the forum.

It's Christmas time in the City



Christmas season looks bright as Belize Bank lights up Belize City (photo by Julia Heusner)

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Election shugga daddy(s)

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Prime Minister truly means what he said, he should **immediately** propose the necessary legislation. If the Prime Minister doesn't do so, it can only be assumed his statement was merely more political rhetoric and that he has no intension of providing political reform. Nor does he intend to provide the guidance he said "leadership is about."

Perhaps he is more concerned about what sponsorship is all about. After all, elections are expensive undertakings and campaign contributions help the party pays its bills. The problem is, following the election, it leaves them deeply indebted to their patrons.

The larger the contribution, the greater the influence over party politics and policies the financier has. What's more, this is not a one shot deal: the political party receiving the contribution will repay the debt many times over to ensure they get similar, even larger, contributions in the future.

Even worse, those with the most to gain, including narco-traffickers, give the most generously. They rely on their largesse with the politicians to ensure they can continue with the activities, legal or illegal, that provided the funds, which made the contribution possible.

It is often said (particularly by the Leader of the Opposition) that he who pays the piper calls the tune. During the 1998 election it was Ashcroft interests which paid the PUP piper. Ever since that election Ashcroft interests have certainly called the tune.

The question remains, do his interests call the tune for both Political Parties?

In the National Election of 2003, Barry Bowen interests contributed at least \$1 Million (that we know of courtesy a canceled cheque) to the PUP campaign. The PUP prevailed and Bowen has been generously rewarded. The reduced tax that a Bowen interest paid during the PUP's tenure is significant, accounting for the loss of millions of dollars in revenue—money that could have been used to pay interest on millions of dollars in international loans, which the middle class and the poor must assist in paying off.

The Bowen group's latest attempt to have the present proposed Shrimp Farm Bill passed indicates that they still call the tune, and would like it played even louder as Belizean prepare to go to the polls again.

We can only guess how much the Ashcroft interests put into the PUP campaign of 1998. But among the many rewards reaped after those contributions was a tax write off of \$13 Million. The Government has recently stated that it will give BTL yet another \$5.8 million dollar tax break. Again, we can only guess how much these interests supported the PUP since 2003.

Large campaign contributions are not exactly bribery, but some have the same effect. Therefore, there must be a limit placed upon political contributions so that the rich do not buy the elections while the middle class and poor pay for the results:

*No corporation should be allowed to contribute more than \$5,000 to a political party, or \$1,000 to a

candidate, during an election period or during any one year.

*The name of each contributor and the amount of the contribution should be made public within 48 hours of the contribution. All contributions should be made at least ten

(10) days before the balloting.

*There should be a severe criminal penalty for violation of any statute limiting political contributions. Such criminal penalties should also apply to the failure to report such contributions as required.

*Contributions by individuals should be limited to \$2,000. The criminal penalties should extends to both persons and corporations who directly, or indirectly through subterfuge, exceed the amount provided by statute or fail to properly report the amount.

And finally, who will be the financier of the next national election? Have the rewards been given in advance and has been enough money been received through corruption that an additional outside financier will not be necessary. Should one refuse to vote for the party that raised the most money and dances to the donors' tunes?

Political parties are adept in the use

of insinuations, half-truths and bold-faced lies. The theory is that if one tells a little lie, no one will believe it; however, if many people tell a big lie promises big results, every one will believe it. Certainly they will want to.

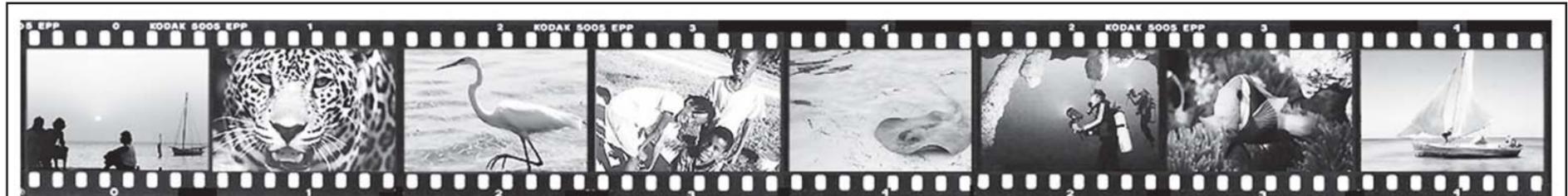
The communist philosophy takes lying one step further. It suggests that if you tell a lie often enough, people will believe it. It is these same, large political contributions that enable a political party to repeat its lies over and over.

So was another big lie of the 1998 campaign that there would be political reform?

We would have to think so, for certainly there has been no reform of significance. If there had been, the country would not be financially strapped as it now is. If there had been Political Reform, the big contributions that will be used to repeat the big lies would not be available during the upcoming National Elections.

But, without meaningful reform, the voters of Belize are bound to be lied to once more. (for a full copy of the report go to www.AmbergrisCaye.com/pages/town/FINALREPORTOFTHEPOLITICALREFORMCOMMISSION-complete.htm)

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Editorial Note

The staff and editorial board of the Independent Reformer would like to give you all a huge THANK YOU for the reception we received last week on our first issue.

We cherish all the congratulatory calls and emails. The warmth in the streets, the offices and schools as we distributed the paper was nothing short of phenomenal. It seems you embraced us before we even went to print and were just waiting for the paper to reach you!

Believe me, we are taking your comments and recommendations to heart and welcome each one.

We would also like to thank our colleagues in the Belize press corps for their support and publicity, especially Mr. Evan X Hyde, Adele Ramos Daly, Frankie Rhys and News 5.

Thank you to all our sellers in Belize City and the vendors in the districts who are working hard to ensure the people of Belize are



supplied with information from all media sources. You have generously opened your arms, and doors to this new kid on the block.

Special thanks also to the transport ground and air crews for their outstanding efficiency and expediency.

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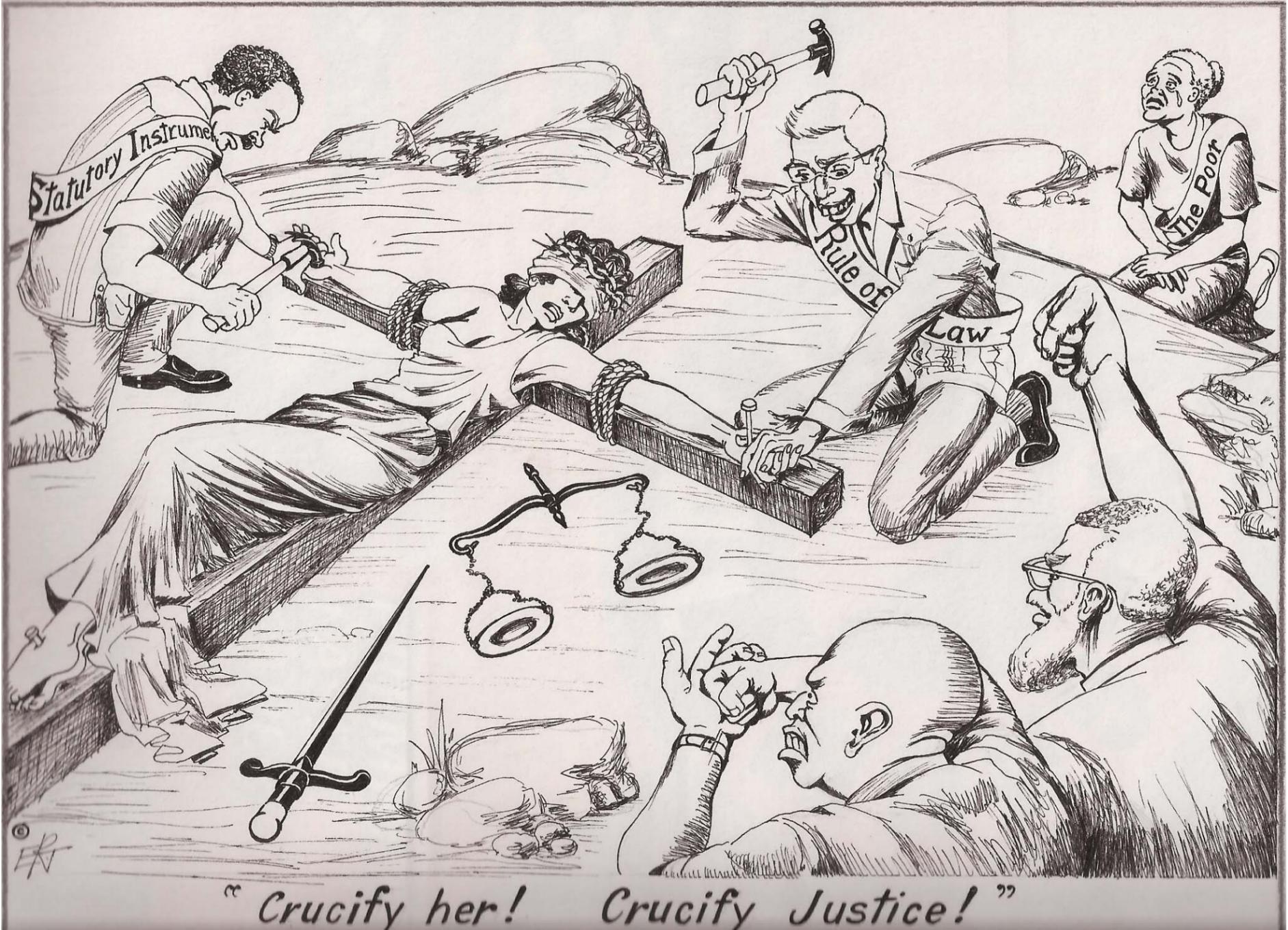
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Destroying Fish Stock For Shrimp

Adapted from: www.mercurypress.com

It is the world's most sought-after seafood commodity: some 3.5 million tons of the many-legged delicacy are pulled from the ocean's waters each year, with another 2.4 million tons raised on aquatic farms.

The popular seafood is a gold mine for poor countries feeding avid consumers in northern markets. Developing nations supply some 90% of the shrimp consumed in developed countries, to the tune of 8 billion US dollars a year. As a result, the jobs of hundreds of thousands of people in the developing world depend on shrimp. But the sector is also one of the world's most wasteful fisheries. In some places, for every kilo of shrimp that fishermen catch as much as 20 kilos of accidentally netted marine animals are tossed back overboard to die. Generally, 8% of all fish caught — just over 7 million tons — are discarded this way each year, estimates the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, FAO. Of that total, tropical shrimp trawl fisheries have the highest "discard" rate, accounting for 27% of the waste — 1.8 million tons.

New technology offers solutions Discards of "by-catch" — which are not only wasteful but can have broader environmental impacts on both specific fish stocks and entire ecosystems — have been a concern of FAO for years. "The capture of juveniles of valuable fish before they have the chance to reproduce constitutes a threat to the well-being of fish populations, while extensive removal of non-targeted fish is a threat to marine ecosystem biodiversity, thus impacting on the productivity of a fishery" explains Jeremy Turner of the UN agency's Fisheries Department.

In 2002, FAO teamed up with the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Global Environmental Facility to establish a 9 million US dollars five-year project that aims to reduce unwanted by-catch in shrimp fisheries. As lead executing agency, FAO manages the project's activities in the field, working with trawlers, small-scale fishers, national fishery agencies and regional fisheries organizations to introduce new technologies and fishing methods designed to target only desired fish of a certain size while letting small juveniles and non-targeted animals, like sea turtles, escape. FAO is providing technical assistance to help fishermen modify their trawls and equipment and is holding workshops to train them in their proper use and to discuss changes in fishing techniques that can also help. The Organization is also working with local authorities to conduct sea trials on vessels fitted with high tech sensors and underwater monitors that assess the effectiveness of the new trawls and trawling methods in order to further

develop the technology. At the same time, FAO is helping countries re-draft their fishing regulations so that they promote wider use of the new technology. "There have already been some dramatic results, with by-catch being reduced by as much as 50% in some cases," reports Turner. This not only benefits local ecosystems and fish populations, making fishing grounds more productive, it also means financial savings for fishermen, since they don't need to spend as much time sorting and processing their catch.

In Asia, however, the situation is trickier. There, fishermen might earn as little as one US dollar a day, and by-catch is often not discarded — boat owners let their crews sell it for processing to meet demand for human and aquaculture consumption. "It represents an important source

of income for them," explains Turner, "so you have to do more than just give them new technology." Countries where FAO is implementing

the project are Bahrain, Cameroon, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Indonesia, Iran, Mexico, Nigeria, the Philippines, Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela. The Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC) is also participating.



Shrimp Trawler- Menace to fish stock



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Ketching & Killing Fisherfolk

By: Trevor Vernon



In kinder, gentler times fisher-men were taken into consideration by the taxman, on par with the well organized "Caneros" almost. Not so anymore. Things rough and only getting rougher for those who fish for a living in Belize.

Fishermen & women get no break with duty free or reduced duty fuel to deliver their product to the co-op. And

fisherfolk, by and large, don't have access to diesel powered boats. The diesel engines too expensive; unlike the diesel engine cane trucks.

Second, in kinder, gentler times fisherfolk were given, through their cooperative, a slight reduction on duty when buying outboard engines. This facility has been removed and professional fisherfolk must now pay the same rate of duty as the pleasure boaters. (Although we all know some of them get exemptions due to family and business connections...)

Fisherfolk have a hard enough time as it is with the robberies and "jackings"

on the high seas. Is it fair to for government to jack them too?

Subsidizing diesel by taxing it 50% less than gasoline, discriminates against the traditional fishing industry which numbers some 2,000 heads of household from around their country. If we estimate that each fisherman supports at least four family members, that is 8,000 Belizeans affected.

Consider this: a fisherman will consume approximately 50 gallons of fuel per week. At the rate GOB is currently taxing them, that's \$250 dollars a week per person in fuel taxes alone. Now this same fisherman/woman can only get \$2-3 dollars a pound wholesale for his fish. Therefore the proceeds from the first 25 pounds of fish alone go to Fonseca/Musa in gas tax, the next 25 pounds goes to the gas depot for fuel cost. He/she has to sell 50 pounds of fish before any money goes into his or her own pocket. And that's just subsistence cash needs. That's not counting prorated licensing requirements, depreciation of equipment (outboards come to mind), ice purchase, losses from theft, food, ice and other supplies.

In kinder gentler times, not so long ago, fisherfolk weren't burdened with the massive extra costs in licensing and outfitting their crafts or faced with excessive fines.

The typical boat owning fisherperson is now strapped, on average, with an extra \$300-500 per year in outfitting traditional fishing crafts with functional first world gadgets or face \$1,000 dollar fines and/or lose their boats!

If we look at the accrual basis of accounting to take into consideration these other factors, it's a wonder that fishermen make ends meet!

It is past time to cut our fisher folk some slack. Here's what the Government of Belize needs to do for our traditional fishing industry:

1) Give similar duty free exemptions on fuels to fishermen through their cooperatives AS IS CURRENTLY EXTENDED TO OUR proud and well organized 'CANEROS' in the north.

2) Give total duty exemption on all small outboards purchased by fishermen through the cooperatives. The precedent is there.

3) Ban all trawling inside our main reef. Penalty for law breakers: confiscation of all assets. Trawlers destroy 15-20 pounds of fish stock in order to harvest 1 pound of shrimp that can't even compete on the world market.

Government support of trawlers is not only shortsighted, it is discriminatory.

We cannot turn back the clock and go back to kinder, gentler times, but we can make the lives of Belize's fishermen and women easier and give them more incentive to continue supplying the rest of us with their daily catch.

INdependent ECO-WATCH

Chalillo Dam 2006 Update

By Sharon Matolla

Usually, I give a brief mention of the Chalillo Dam in the introduction of The Belize Zoo newsletter. However, because many of our readers and zoo members followed this provocative debate over the years it endured, it is time for a longer "briefing".

A few months ago, I visited a lodge located on the Macal River, some 20 miles or so downriver from the Chalillo Dam. The proprietor of the lodge and I went to the river for a swim. Rather than the blue-green waters I recall from a not-too-distant past, the river was the colour of mud. It smelled like machinery. The rocks were slimy.

When I made a few comments about the obvious decrease in water quality, she replied, "It's usually worse". Thanks to Fortis/BEL.

This very lodge is now planning to build an upscale swimming pool, so that guests can bathe in clean water as they enjoy the lodge's tropical ambience. In contrast, sadly, villagers who live along the Macal River, are stuck with a degraded river, one which promises to provide them with water which is unsafe to drink, bathe or fish in - Thanks to Fortis/BEL.

Tour guides from that area in Belize have complained to me that they often must "drag their canoes over bare rocks for long distances". Thanks to Fortis/BEL.

The only known nesting grounds for the endangered Scarlet Macaws of Belize are gone forever. Thanks to Fortis/BEL.

All of us who worked to try and stop this project were concerned about

rising mercury levels in the fish in this river. The official word from the Belize Health Dept., and the dam folks is that it is fine to eat the fish from the Macal River. Just don't eat too much.

If the economics of this project pops to the front of your mind, allow me to clear that one up for you, too. Fortis/BEL saw to it that our electricity rates increased 26 percent in early 2006. They continue to call for additional increases.

None of the above comes as a surprise. It was all predicted, based on a great deal of scientific assessment.

In 2007, renowned writer Bruce Barcott will see his book about the Chalillo Dam published by Random House. Entitled, THE LAST FLIGHT OF THE SCARLET MACAW, this story will bring to light the unfair and unjust development project called the Chalillo Dam. The book, in manuscript form, has already received an Honourable Mention from the highly-prestigious Lukas Award for non-fiction.

Hopefully, Bruce Barcott's book, and the continued efforts from The Belize Alliance of Conservation NGOs, BACONGO, the Belize Environmental Law and Policy Organization, BELPO, and others, will keep in steady view, the need to fight unsound development and the urgent necessity to protect our remaining natural resources. Here at The Belize Zoo, we remain proud of our strong stand taken against the Chalillo Dam. We will continue to broadcast a principled and just position on behalf of issues affecting our environment.



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Integrity Commission Needs Rethinking

By Meb Cutlack

As we near a possible election, one of most urgent problems facing Belize is the structure and the integrity of the Integrity Commission. Its lack of credibility comes about almost through no fault of its own. It has no teeth, has never had teeth and no government seems prepared to give it teeth!

It is a totally useless commission as it exists today. Members of parliament, highly ranked public officers, all of whom are supposed to submit details of their wealth - including homes,

businesses and assets in Belize and abroad— when entering public life, simply ignore the order and are not penalized, not even by publication of their names.

Again and again members of the commission plead that they would be able to do their duty if they were given the authority to summons miscreants to force compliance and explain themselves. Because the Pup will certainly not be a party to enacting forceful legislation, perhaps the Ombudsman or the G.G. should point

out the criminality involved in not submitting accurate information of one's assets.

There are mountains of evidence about the misdeeds of various ministers and their deputies. Even going back as far as Dito Juan, a simple investigation of the extraordinary growth his own and his family's asset growth would reveal enormous rises in material wealth. He was a mere amateur when you get to persons such as the infamous Ainslie Leslie.

The whole charade of ministers declaring their initial wealth becomes a total farce when considering Mr. Leslie's reign as Deputy Lands Minister. He evolved a technique of signing conveyances to all and sundry (usually family and friends), not registering these transfers, and then finally registering when a third party appeared with a lot more *dinero*.

It worked like this: Mr Leslie would sign a conveyance to a friend or his son for \$X,000 and then the conveyance would be remarketed to a third party for \$XX,000 or \$XXX,000. I have no fear of repeating this accusation publicly because I published exact details of several of these phony transfers several years ago in The Reporter and Mr. Leslie merely shrugged.

Independent candidates in the next election should make a point of stating their willingness to declare all of their personal assets and, a general and non-public description of the wealth of all members of their family. Of course all PUP and UDP candidates should be urged to do the same, but such a declaration from them is about as likely as snow at Christmas in Belize.

Teeth, Teeth and Teeth is what the Integrity commission needs and teeth is what all parties should pledge before the next election.

Topical Tidbits!

PUP snaps up INdependent

First sales on our newspaper soared unexpectedly when PUP Minister's drivers and other PUPs circled town buying us up. We are very cheered by this obvious vote of confidence in our newspaper and will happily give the PUP a better than retail rate if they wish to order from us in advance.

Fortis Scores Again

A person worked his way through the usual long line to pay his electric bill at BEL in San Ignacio had a nasty surprise when he reached the window. He was told he had to pay a reconnection fee of \$10 even though he explained that his electricity had not yet been cut off. He was still forced to pay the fee and told if he did not, his electricity WOULD BE cut off!

Village Councils Speak Up

Leaders of rural Belize converged last weekend at the Agricultural Show Grounds in Belmopan for the Annual General Meeting of the National Association of Village Councils. According to Channel Five, "among the resolutions passed at the AGM are requests to all political parties to refrain from partisan politics into village council elections, the appointment of village water boards by village councils, not central government and passage of legislation to village councils to collect trade licensing fees."

Northern highway; a disaster waiting to happen!

That's nothing new, as the potholes get daily worse, but what the powers that be should be careful about is the stretch from the Haulover Bridge to the airport road. It is just waiting for a really bad and probably fatal accident along its riverside length. They should be careful because there were once yellow guidelines, centre and sides, of this road but they have faded and have all but disappeared. Any night accident along this section could put the powers that be in court on a heavy "injury" and/or "death by negligence" charge.

It's a pleasure to drive on those splendid roads between Buttonwood Bay and Princess Margaret Drive. And, what mansions and superb houses abound in this area! Of course, they must be owned and built by our new elite of the PUP hierarchy and their cronies but its careless of them to build such fine roads When the south side roads still look like New Orleans after the hurricane. Someone is going to notice and maybe vote away from the PUP.

"Sad little figure!"

That's how one diner described our PM's exit from a restaurant recently. He waved happily to the people still at table, waved again and his happiness disappeared. Nobody waved back and only a very few raised their hands an inch or two above the table. He did not see that but he should take comfort from the fact that a few did care - an inch or two!

Election speculation!

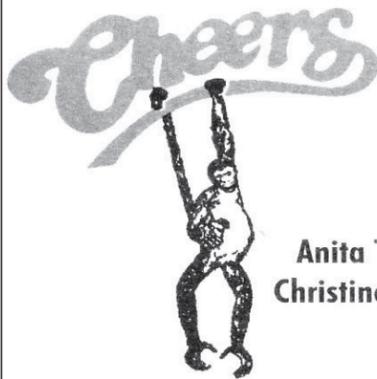
No, we know nothing of what is in the air and no Idea of a date for the election. There is however one huge hurdle ahead for the PUP. If they don't go to The country before the end of March all their bills are going to catch up with them and make the unmentionable become a reality! Yes, a considerable devaluation against the dollar! That's about their only reality as the big international banks refuse further lifelines.

Our sincere "Get Well" greetings to Robert Leslie.

We hear that Robert Leslie, long time PUP Cabinet Secretary is ill. We wish him a very sincere "get well!" because here indeed was a tried and true Belizean who has served Belize faithfully - a- no-doubt hard task at times - considering the nest of vipers around him.

Jim Hyde passes

It is with great sadness and respect that this column notes the passing of Jim Hyde. He was also a true and proud Belizean who served his country faithfully, both in public and private service and, as our ambassador to Washington. Rest in Peace, Jim!



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

San Pedro Lagoon (G35) Large water front parcel on San Pedro Lagoon. One acre only \$70,000.00 US.

Commercial/Condos/Homes

Downtown Commercial Property (R47) Best commercial location on the market right now. Corner property on 'Front Street' in down town San Pedro. The property presently contains three businesses and two private residences, but has the perfect location for ocean view hotel, office building or condos. Seller may accept Belize Dollars. **Price \$994,500.00 US.**

Belizean Shores - Located 3.5 miles north of San Pedro Town Center - beautiful resort - great investment! All units fully furnished. **(R45) Unit 5B. \$220,000.00 US.**

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

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

Back Street Home (R35) 2 story, wooden home. Lower level-2bdrms, 1 bath, open living, kitchen & dining area. Upper level-3brms, 2 baths & 2 kitchens. **\$250,000.00 US.**

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

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- * preloaded games & downloadable ringtones
- * video capture & playback
- * poc quick connection



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A 1200

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MOTOROLA

Pink L6

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Why Belizeans should pay attention Regional & International News

Air Jamaica lost US\$120 million

Air Jamaica recorded a loss of just under US\$120 million (approximately J\$7.8 billion) during 2005, the airline's financial statements for the calendar year have confirmed.

According to the statements, which were tabled by the minister of finance and

planning, Dr Omar Davies, in the House of Representatives yesterday, the airline lost US\$119.9 million in 2005, compared to US\$99 million in 2004 and, as of December 31, last year its current liabilities exceeded its current assets by US\$92.1 million.

The increased loss was

primarily due to a huge reduction of approximately US\$80 million in its operating revenues, mainly in terms of passengers and to a much lesser extent in terms of freight.

The airline's accountants suggested, in the report, that its continuation as a going concern will depend on continued support from the Government, as well as obtaining necessary funding and future profitability.

However, the losses could have been a lot more, as the figures showed dramatic cuts in

operating expenses, including flying operations, maintenance, passenger service, aircraft and traffic servicing and promotion and sales. Foreign exchange earnings also fell by almost 50 per cent.

The airline suffered a loss before government grants of US\$138.9 million, but gained government grants of US\$21 million.

The airline's chartered accountants - Mair Russell Grant Thornton - drew attention to the fact that *"the company continued to sustain losses"*.

St Kitts-Nevis to get first shipment of asphalt under Venezuela oil agreement

BASSETERRE, St Kitts: St Kitts and Nevis Minister of Public Works and Public Utilities, Dr Earl Asim Martin, says the twin-island Federation will begin benefiting from the PetroCaribe Energy Cooperation Agreement it signed with Venezuela, when the first shipment of asphalt arrives in December.

Martin, who has responsibility for energy, said he has signed a one-year fuel supply agreement with PDV Caribe, a subsidiary of Petróleos de Venezuela, SA (PDVSA).

Under the agreement, the Venezuelan state oil company will supply 21,000 barrels per month of by-products, such as jet A1, diesel, fuel oil and asphalt.

PDVSA's Refining Vice-President and the President of PDV Caribe, Alejandro Granado, announced that the fuel supply will start on January 1, 2007. The total figure includes 1,700 barrels of asphalt per year, the first cargo of 400 barrels arriving at the islands on December, together with the shipments that are going to Dominica.

"St Kitts and Nevis joins the group of Caribbean countries that are making true the initiative for integrating and uniting people under PetroCaribe's Energy

Cooperation Agreement, operated by PDV Caribe," stated Granado.

Martin commenting on the social impact of the supply agreement said it will allow "major savings in resources that will be used to drive projects that will improve the standard of living of the people of these islands."

The supply agreement is governed by the conditions set forth in the Energy Cooperation Agreement with PetroCaribe, signed on June 29, 2005, and ratified by the bilateral agreements signed in Montego Bay, Jamaica, on September 6, this year.

PetroCaribe is an energy cooperation initiative proposed by the Bolivarian Government of Venezuela, with the purpose of solving the differences in access to energy resources, in an equitable and fair manner among the countries of the Caribbean.

PDVSA estimates it will achieve a 5.847 million barrels-per-day production capacity by the year 2012.

On January 1, 2007 Venezuela takes control of 32 oil fields, putting an end to disguised concessions granted during the oil opening, and advancing towards full national sovereignty over natural energy reserves.

New warrant for ex-Mexico leader

A judge in Mexico has issued a warrant for the arrest of former President Luis Echeverría on genocide charges.

A judge ordered the arrest of Mr Echeverría, 84, over the killing of up to 300 students in Mexico City in 1968.

The latest ruling in a long-running affair came just four months after a court dismissed the charges, saying the killings happened too long ago.

Mr Echeverría was interior minister when troops opened fire on protesters days before the Olympic Games opened.

In July, a judge ruled that the events of 2 October 1968 fell outside Mexico's 30-year statute of limitations, ruling out a trial.

But prosecutors successfully argue that Mr Echeverría had effective immunity until he left office on 1 December 1976, and the statue should be considered from that date.

Because of his age, Mr Echeverría would be likely to face house arrest, but there was

no confirmation whether the warrant would be used immediately.

He was originally placed under house arrest in June, but released after the July ruling.

Juan Velázquez, a lawyer for Mr Echeverría, said he would appeal against the latest decision.

Mr Echeverría was interior minister in 1968 at the time of the killings in Tlatelolco Square in Mexico City.

Human rights activists say up to 300 people were killed in the shootings, although officials said the death toll was just 30.

Mr Echeverría denies allegations that he posted snipers on scores of buildings and gave orders to shoot anti-government protesters, and disputes that the deaths on 2 October 1968 constitute genocide.

Mr Echeverría was president from 1970 to 1976 during which hundreds of people died or disappeared during the "Dirty War" on leftists.

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Dam (WeBAD)**

**applauds the start of the
INdependent Voice of Belize**

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Anger

Karla Heusner Vernon

“Whop! Buff! Bam” again and again he punched her, pushed her down, dragged her by her hair. “You stupid, sorry creature, what makes you think you have any say in this house? I am the man, do you hear me? No one dares to challenge me! If you don’t like the way I run things, then go live somewhere else!”

The children cowered under the covers, they could hear the beating. Again. It’s almost every week now, the abuse, the ridicule, the arrogant boasting.

They tried calling for help once. From uncle. But he did even worse, holding Mama down and doing something nasty to her. Then he invited his friends in to take turns at her.

The children cried for days after that one. Mama didn’t say or do anything. Except try to cover her bruised face with makeup. Then, inexplicably, she went with Papa to a party and they both came home kissing and hugging and smelling of rum. They locked themselves in the bedroom and soon everyone could hear the bed creaking.

Brother got angry and smacked little sister when she tripped over his foot. “You stupid girl, watch out where you’re stepping.”

“Leave her alone fool!” said middle brother. But he got cuffed too for his trouble. So he turned on Sister. “It’s all your fault, why do you have to fall on people all the time.” She started to bawl. “Leave me alone, leave me alone, you’re just as mean as Daddy. I wish someone would come and make all of you go away!”

Many of us have been wondering lately why it is no one in Belize ever seems to get mad at the people responsible for the mess we are in. Instead of going after the top brass who embezzle our money, we rail up at the incompetence of the public officers who filled out the forms. Instead of having high society murderers arrested, we print sexy pictures of the Director of Public Prosecutions and call for his head.

When the children fail the PSE worse than can be reasonably expected from a nation of bright children, we blame the teachers rather than the examination being given or the people who continue to impose it. Rather than stop the GST from being imposed, we hurl obscenities at merchants who charge it.

We practically screech at gas station attendants when our \$20 doesn’t even get us a quarter of a tank anymore, instead of protesting the 43% tax being charged on fuel. When we have to buy yet another tire for our car, fix our cv joints because the roads are so bad, we curse the rain for making the potholes worse, instead of Central Government which has diverted money away from necessary things like road maintenance.

When people die at the hospital due to lack of personnel or supplies, we

Mismanagement

condemn the medical professionals instead of the administrators and ministry.

I could go on, but you get the idea. Like little children who cannot stop their grown up father from using their mother as a punching bag, we hide under the covers, cover our eyes and close our eyes tightly, as if doing so will make it all stop and cause him to magically vanish.

I used to be furious with all the Belizeans who would not stand up to Daddy and do something to save Mama Belize. But then I realized that maybe they think they are not old enough, or big enough to do it. Somehow they have not noticed they are no longer immature and small, that the country itself is well past le-

gal age. That somehow people don’t understand what the saying “when good people do nothing, evil flourishes.” Or if they do, they think it only applies to good people in other lands.

Oh, we will show them at elections, you say. I hate to be the one to point this out, but didn’t we say that the last time? And what happened? We don’t even know. All we do know is we were flabbergasted at the results.

There is no guarantee it will not happen again. That the very people beaten down the hardest will not dress up and go to the dance with Daddy and come home tipsy and lovey-dovey again.

And then what will we grown children do? Continue to turn on each

other because we feel helpless? We cannot wait for elections to try and remove the threat to the thing we love most. Elections can be bought, and people can cheat. Worst of all, the people we rely on most, our fellow Belizeans, can let us down and vote for the wrong people. Either because they are greedy, are stupid, or just so used to hiding in the bedroom they are afraid to come out into the living room and face a house in which Daddy is no longer in control.

Don’t think we can call Uncle. That only brings more trouble.

It is up to us now, the children of Belize.

Are we man and woman enough to drive Daddy out and take care of Mama? If we aren’t, they maybe WE are the ones who should go live somewhere else.



OAS Takes Off The Gloves In The Fight Against Corruption

“Democracy is not a luxury or an issue of ideology; it’s a fundamental precondition for social and economic development,” Huguette Labelle, Chair of Transparency International, said today at the Organization of American States (OAS), as she headlined the seventeenth conference in the Lecture Series of the Americas.

Speaking to diplomats, students, academics and civil society representatives on “*Beyond Words and Paper: Why the Americas Must Act Against Corruption*,” Labelle highlighted the interrelation that exists between poverty in the Americas and corruption.

“*Corruption does not make a country poorer just by undermining its economy. It makes the poor poorer,*” she explained, “*because part of their meager earnings, their nonexistent disposable*

income must pay for basic services which otherwise should be free.”

The keynote speaker underscored the need for international organizations, civil society and citizens to work together to demand accountability and transparency in the region. She warned that influence is exercised through a number of methods, noting that “*campaign financing, trafficking in influence, control of information and at times extortion are all tools of the abuse of power for private gain.*” She added that “*as a result, public policies are seriously distorted and resources misallocated.*”

The head of Transparency International acknowledged that many countries have established formal democratic systems after a number of free elections have produced a new generation of leaders, “*many of*

them elected on anti-corruption platforms.” However, she cautioned that “*no country has a total monopoly on transparency.*”

Labelle lauded the OAS for steps it has taken, including the adoption of the Inter-American Convention Against Corruption, and she called on the states parties to implement all of the treaty’s requirements. “*It is time for this generation of Latin American leaders to publicly account for progress in fulfilling these obligations,*” she said. “*By doing so, they will reassure citizens across the hemisphere that they are moving beyond words and paper and are acting against corruption.*”

Welcoming Huguette Labelle on behalf of OAS Secretary General José Miguel Insulza, the Assistant Secretary for Administration and Finance, Frank Almaguer, recalled that 2006 was declared the Inter-American Year of the Fight against Corruption. “*The OAS is the premier regional forum for multilateral dialogue and is dedicated to promoting peace and prosperity in the Western Hemisphere,*” he said. He underscored the importance that the Secretary General has placed in the fight against corruption. “*Fighting*

corruption strengthens democratic institutions and prevents distortions in the economy, improprieties in public administration and damage to a society’s moral fiber,” he said, citing the 1996 anti-corruption treaty.

Transparency International is a civil society organization dedicated to the fight against corruption around the world. Huguette Labelle, a citizen of Canada, was elected to chair the organization in November 2005. She is currently Chancellor of the University of Ottawa and Vice President of the Council for the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

Created by the OAS Permanent Council to promote democratic principles and values in the countries of the hemisphere, the Lecture Series of the Americas invites recognized speakers to address key hemispheric issues, such as the strengthening of democracy, human rights, social development, hemispheric security and the fight against poverty. The conferences are being held thanks to financial contribution from Peru’s San Martin de Porres University, as well as support from the governments of Greece and Qatar.

Totally for Teens “How NOT to take Exams”

You should not attempt these things during an actual exam!

The following is meant for entertainment purposes only.

1. Bring a pillow. Fall asleep (or pretend to) until the last 15 minutes. Wake up, say “*oh geez, better get cracking*” and do some gibberish work. Turn it in a few minutes early.

2. Get a copy of the exam, run out screaming “*Andre, Andre, I’ve got the secret documents!!*”

3. Walk in, get the exam, sit down. About five minutes into it, loudly say to the instructor, “*I don’t understand any of this. I’ve been to every class all semester long! What’s the deal? And who are you? Where’s the regular teacher?*”

4. On the answer sheet (book, whatever) find a new, interesting way to refuse to answer every question. For example: I refuse to answer this question on the grounds that it conflicts with my religious beliefs. Be creative.

5. Run into the exam room looking about frantically. Breathe a sigh of relief. Go to the instructor, say “*They’ve found me, I have to leave the country*” and run off.

6. Do the entire exam in another language. If you don’t know one, make one up! For math/science exams, try using Roman numerals.

7. Bring things to throw at the instructor when s/he’s not looking. Blame it on the person nearest to you.

8. Turn in the exam about 30 minutes into it. As you walk out, start commenting on how easy it was.

9. Comment on how sexy the instructor is looking that day.

10. Bring one pencil with a very sharp point. Break the point off your paper. Sharpen the pencil. Repeat this process for one hour.

Joke: A professor was giving a big test one day to his students. He handed out all of the tests and went back to his desk to wait. Once the test was over, the students all handed the tests back in. The professor noticed that one of the students had attached a \$100 bill to his test with a note saying “*A dollar per point.*” The next class the professor handed the tests back out. This student got back his test and \$56 change.

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What 'THE INDEPENDENT' Stands For

By: Meb Cutlack

I have had a **'love affair'** with Belize for the past 27 years. Like all love affairs, my **'affair'** with Belize has had its ups and downs. In my experience as the editor of the Tuesday Beacon, then the Belize Review, and as a columnist for The Reporter newspaper, I made a great number of political judgements which I admit, for the most part, in the end, turned out to be incorrect.

I backed the UDP against the PUP in the early 80's, supporting the idea of free enterprise and an expanding eco-tourism industry. My disappointment with the UDP because of its sloppy leadership led me to back the PUP in the hope that a new and young leadership would emerge. It did not happen and the old guard PUP stalwarts laid down a new high water mark in graft and corruption.

I took my support back to the UDP in 1993 (not a great present for them I admit) but I became totally disillusioned with the party when, with the Toledo timber deal cooked up by Dito Juan and other happenings, it became obvious that corruption was on the rise within the UDP.

I ask now who amongst us (except diehard UDP's) did not envisage the young, reform minded government the PUP presented in 1998 as an answer to all our prayers? Of course we were wrong and it did not take long for it to sink in that once more all our hopes were dashed. Said Musa's PUP, for all its promised reforms and transparency, turned out to be more authoritarian and even more corrupt than any government that had preceded it since Independence.

I suppose this was all clear from the start, the signs were there, but like so many of you, I just did not see it until the Musa/Fonseca combo made it clear their executive power was absolute and that so called **'democratic'** government in Belize was no more than a sick joke. At this point. It is obvious to me that no Belizean government could be anything but a **'pretend'** democracy as long as the second chamber, the senate,

is appointed and not elected.

It is also very obvious today that neither of the two main political parties, not the PUP nor the UDP, want an elected senate. They both want the status quo to continue and their right to rule Belize as an oligarchy to remain unfettered by an elected second parliamentary chamber – an active independent Senate.

By the same crooked token neither party has shown any inclination at all to stop government ministers and their cronies treating all the lands of Belize as their own private Christmas grab bag. They may preach land reform but neither party has spoken of any intention of relinquishing their ill gotten practices of handing out land like poker chips to themselves,

their friends and their cronies.

Land reform is on top of The Independent's list of priorities and such reform must take land distribution away from the Cabinet and Belmopan and hand it to the regions. Why should a greedy and/or corrupt minister in Belmopan decide who gets a huge land grant, or even tiny slice of land, in Toledo, Corozal or elsewhere? The power of land distribution should be handed to regional land committees made up of representative of all political parties, a business representative and a local church representative.

The only agenda of **'The Independent'** is reform, removing total power from the oligarchies which have ruled since independence

and returning power to the people of Belize.

Our newspaper, as its name suggests, is free of all political party or financial group support. In fact, we are financed by donors who stipulate we not be party affiliated.

We congratulate all members of the Belizean press corps who have managed to stay the course and not allow their newspapers, radio or television stations to be hijacked by partisan interests and refused all bribes from campaign financiers. We are honored to join you.

Most of all, we are thankful that the eyes of Belizeans are now opened and people are prepared to embrace reform, despite any and all errors in their own political judgments, or willingness to believe that changing governments would change Belize.

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Is Cruise Tourism Our Future?

Reproduced with permission from Business News America - By Michael Ford:

Belize's Department of the Environment (DOE) could give approval to two terminal construction projects at the Port of Belize worth some US\$45mn by around January, Belize chief environmental officer Martin Alegria told BNAmericas.

The department has currently formed a committee to review the environmental impact assessments (EIAs) for the two separate projects.

The first is a multipurpose construction project at the port's Belize Cruise Terminal and Free Zone, to be carried out by Belize Cruise Terminal, a joint venture formed in July 2005 between local port operator Belize Port Ltd and the Miami and London-based Carnival Corporation (NYSE, LSE: CLC).

Belize Port Ltd has controlled 100% of operations at the Cruise Terminal and Free Zone since purchasing from the government a US\$40mn, 30-year lease in 2002.

The project is slated to take 24 months to carry out, costing some US\$25mn, Alegria said, and includes the construction of two cruise terminals to accommodate as many as 3,000 tourists a day from ships arriving at the port.

It would also encompass a 338-acre Free Zone for commercial merchandizing businesses and light manufacture and assembly, according to



an EIA on the project from local consultant Tunich-Nah.

The Free Zone includes 160 one-acre industrial lots and 209 quarter-acre commercial lots, as well as a 10.25 acre plot for a hotel, according to the Belize Ports Free Zone website. Works at the port also include expansions to the Low Berth docking facilities for sea-bound domestic freight, the EIA states.

Meanwhile, Miami's Royal Caribbean Cruise (NYSE: RCL) is planning a separate US\$20mn project with local developer Stake Bank Enterprises to construct two more off-shore terminals, also with a capacity for some 3,000 cruise ship passengers a day.

Combining capacity at existing terminals with the proposed new ones, the port's total cruise passenger capacity will reach 8,000 people per day, said Alegria.

The EIAs for both projects have been sent to the DOE and are currently being reviewed by an appraisal committee.

The Stake Bank/Royal Caribbean EIA was submitted in August and could be approved sometime around December 2006, while the Belize Port Ltd/Carnival EIA was submitted in October and would be approved no earlier than January 2007, Alegria stated.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROVERSY

Environmental issues have become particularly important for both of the port projects.

While Tunich-Nah's EIA states that the Belize Port Ltd/Carnival project will have only "minor impacts" on the local community relative to its social benefits, advocates such as the Audubon Society have debated this claim.

Audubon advocacy manager Tanya Williams-Thompson indicated to BNAmericas that both the Belize Port Ltd and Stake Bank projects have engaged in unsanctioned activities at the port.

In the case of the Belize Port Ltd/Carnival Cruise Terminal and Free Zone, "land reclamation activities have continued unabated" in spite of a stop order from the DOE, according to a statement from Audubon.

In addition, dredging and land reclamation have been conducted on Stake Bank without the necessary permit from the DOE's Geology and Petroleum Department and mangrove clearance was also conducted there without a permit from its Forestry Department, the statement added.

Dredging has been conducted at the

Belize Port Ltd project for the last four years, while Royal Caribbean began dredging at its Stake Bank cruise terminal in December 2005, Williams-Thompson asserted.

Members of the local Port Loyola community believe that this has caused lower fish yields and possibly a higher risk that flooding will occur, she added.

The DOE has previously found that Carnival and Belize Port Ltd were engaging in illegal land reclamation and brought them to court for such activities. Prime Minister Said Musa intervened before the trial and issued a pardon to the companies in exchange for their consent to carry out an EIA before engaging in further activities, Alegria said.

The DOE also found that Royal Caribbean and Stake Bank were engaging in dredging activities in March 2006 and offered them a pardon if they agreed to carry out the EIA.

Both companies complied and have carried out the EIA, added Alegria.

"Since the [Audubon] release [early November], both [companies] have submitted EIAs. Within those projects they require further works in terms of dredging and land reclamation, so the [government] agencies could look at charging them fines before they obtain the permits for such activities," Williams-Thompson said.

"The companies are a little more compliant now but the separate agencies like the Geology and Petroleum, and the Fishing Department might want to discuss penalties for these companies' violations in the past. However, that's up to the separate agencies," Alegria added.

COMPANIES RESPOND

"The Port of Belize initiative is still being evaluated from a number of factors and a decision on whether the project will continue or the extent of our involvement has not been determined at this time," Carnival public relations director Joyce Oliva told BNAmericas.

"The project will offer great opportunities to my fellow Belizeans in areas of construction, operation and services, and will broaden the opportunities of those involved in retail and tour operations, as well as investment opportunities in the adjacent Free Zone development," Belize Port Ltd and Belize Cruise Terminal chair Luke Espat was quoted as saying by The Belize Times Weekly in 2005.

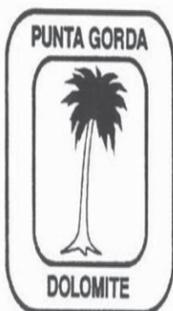
Construction for the Cruise Terminal and Free Zone project will employ at least 2,000-3,000 people and will retain some 500 transient and 250 administrative workers upon its completion, said Alegria.

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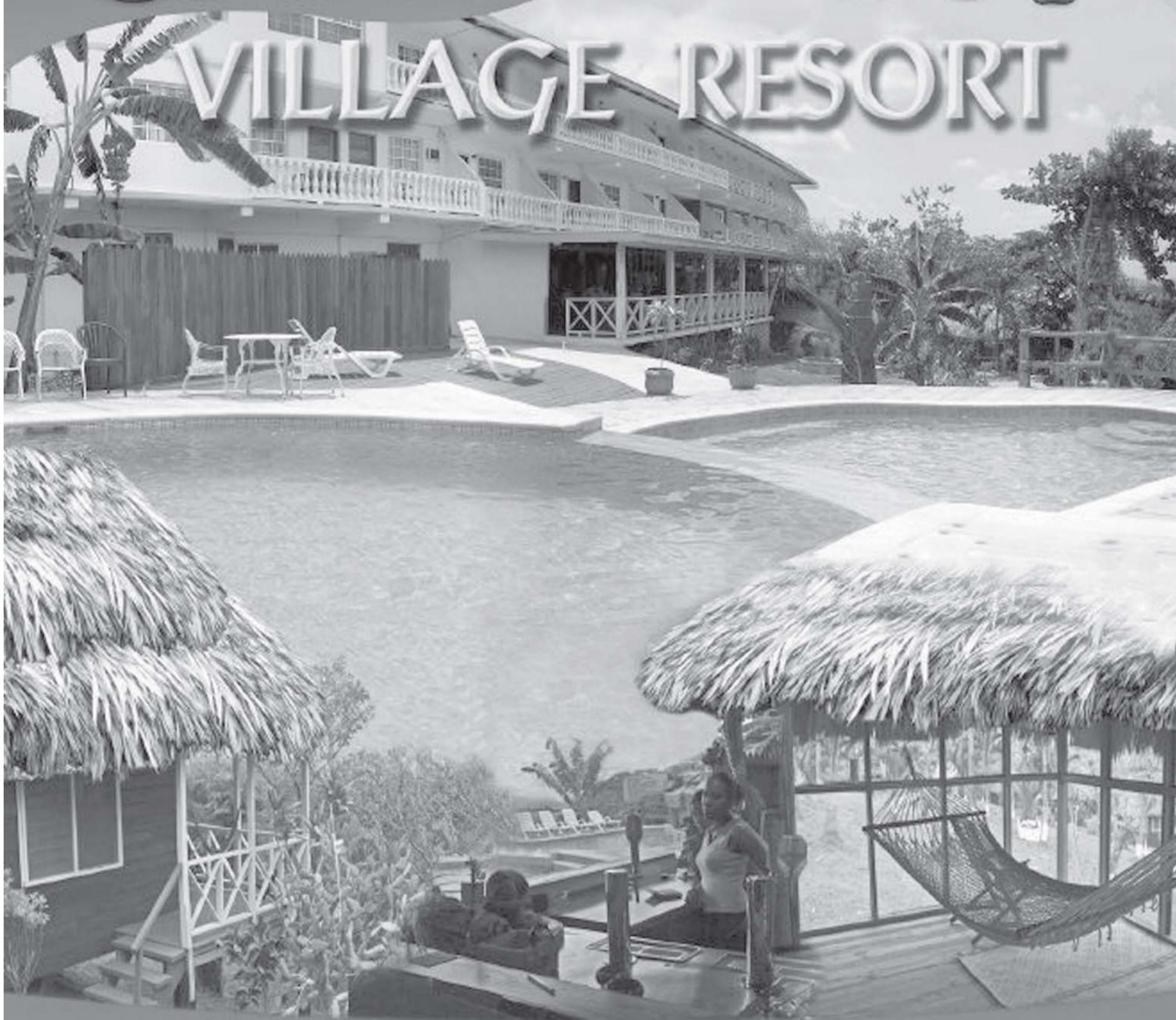
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A Bit Of Ancient History Lesson

Contributed:

The question was asked recently, "Is the cruise ship industry a boon for Belize or a Trojan horse?"

Well in case you did not see the recent movie "Troy" here's a little recap of what happened circa 1200 BC.

The Greek siege of Troy had lasted for ten years.

The Greeks devised a new ruse: a giant hollow wooden horse. It was built by Epeius and filled with Greek warriors led by Odysseus. The rest of the Greek Army appeared to leave, but actually hid behind



Tenedos. Meanwhile, a Greek spy, Sinon, convinced the Trojans the horse was a gift despite the warnings of

Laocoon and Cassandra; Helen and Deiphobus even investigated the horse; in the end, the Trojans accepted the gift.

In ancient times it was customary for a defeated general to surrender his horse to the victorious general in a sign of respect. It should be noted here that the horse was the sacred animal of Poseidon; during the contest with Athena over the patronship of Athens, Poseidon gave men

the horse, and Athena gave the olive tree.

The Trojans hugely celebrated the end of the siege, so that, when the Greeks emerged from the horse, the city was in a drunken stupor. The Greek warriors opened the city gates to allow the rest of the army to enter, and the city was pillaged ruthlessly, all the men were killed, and all the women and children were taken into slavery.

From The Association of Realtors

Press Release

November 29, 2006

The Association of Realtors and Developers of Belize announces that on Thursday, December 7th, 2006 Minister of Natural Resources the Honorable John Briceño will address the Association's membership on Government's initiatives to improve order and efficiency in the sale of land in Belize.

The Minister's remarks will come at 12:30 p.m at the Sibun Bite Bar and Grill, Old Belize, following the Association's regular monthly meeting at 11:30 at the same venue.

The Association of Realtors and Developers of Belize, formed September 5th now legally incorporated

is a grouping of over thirty five (35) Belizean real estate and land development companies and individuals whose purpose is to raise the professional standards and make the business of the real estate sales more transparent and convenient for purchasers and sellers alike.

The December 7th meeting is open to all members and features a luncheon, at a cost of BZ\$55.00 plus a cash bar. Prospective members are invited to attend but their membership must be financial prior to the meeting.

For further information contact the Administrator, Ms. Linda Muñoz at telephone 223-6766 or e-mail mbsolutions@officeservices.bz.

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(Mar. 21-April 20)
Don't get upset. There is not much you can do to alleviate the problem, but consider putting some extra work into your house. Cultural activities will prove to be quite enlightening for everyone. You are best to work behind the scenes on projects that require detail or precision.
Your lucky day this week will be Wednesday.

TAURUS

(Apr. 21-may 21)
Your ability to be practical in business will help. You should be on the road. Someone you work with may be trying to make you look bad. Invite friends or relatives into your home.
Your lucky day this week will be Friday.

GEMINI

(May 22-June 21)
Get rich quick schemes will not be successful. You can help sort out problems that friends are facing. Include friends and family members in your redecorating plans. You can make money if you work on personal investments.
Your lucky day this week will be Saturday.

CANCER

(June 22-July 22)
Opportunities to show your worth will enhance your reputation and bring possible advancement. You should get out and enjoy social events where you are likely to meet new potential mates; however, don't over spend. Rethink your motives and make the necessary changes to yourself. Resistance leading to conflict will only make it twice as hard to turn the situation around.
Your lucky day this week will be Monday.

LEO

(July 23-Aug 22)
Family outings should include visiting friends or relatives. You are best to do something energetic with friends instead. This is a great day to beautify your living quarters or to entertain at home. Don't let any money slip through your fingers this week.
Your lucky day this week will be Tuesday.

VIRGO

(Aug. 23-Sept. 23)
This is a great day to start that new health regimen you've been talking about. You will expand your circle of friends if you join groups. Things are looking up. You have two choices; Get out on your own, or bend to your mate's whims.
Your lucky day this week will be Friday.

LIBRA

(Sept. 24-Oct. 23)
Throw yourself into your profession. Keep a lookout for any individuals eager to confront you with unsavory situations. New hair, new outfit, new you. Do not borrow or lend money or belongings to friends or relatives if you wish to avoid any hassles.
Your lucky day this week will be Saturday.

SCORPIO

(Oct. 24 - Nov. 22)
Don't bend to the pressure. Your versatile mind and common sense will allow you to come up with various solutions. Don't hesitate to voice your opinions when it comes to matters pertaining to work. Travel will be favorable. Resist overspending on luxury items.
Your lucky day this week will be Thursday.

SAGITTARIUS

(Nov. 23-Dec. 21)
Set your goals and stick to your guns. Your boss may be on the rampage and you certainly don't want to be the one to take the brunt of a bad situation. Plan a trip to the country or take a drive to the beach. Uncertainty regarding your direction is likely.
Your lucky day this week will be Monday.

CAPRICORN

(Dec 22.- Jan. 20)
Your home may be in an uproar and you are best to stay out of the line of fire if at all possible. Think twice before eating spicy foods; you may have problems with your stomach. Keep your ears open, especially to those who care about you. You need to get out and challenge yourself.
Your lucky day this week will be Friday.

AQUARIUS

(Jan. 21 -Feb. 19)
Try to include the one you love in your plans this week. Those you live with may be experiencing problems. Your determination and sheer desire to do your own thing will be successful. A female colleague may cause problems for you.
Your lucky day this week will be Sunday.

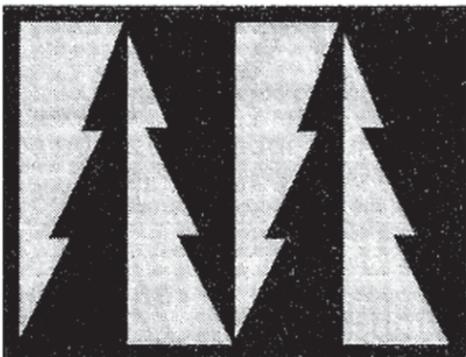
PISCES

(Feb. 20-Mar. 20)
You may be sensitive concerning friends and their situations. Someone you care about may not be too pleased with you. You mustn't make promises that you won't be able to keep. Accomplishment is yours if you direct yourself accordingly.
Your lucky day this week will be Friday.



Francesca Sharp, lead dancer in Belizean Nutcracker with Director of the Vista Dance Studio, Sistie Fairweather Harmes on opening night, November 24, 2006 at the Bliss Centre for the Performing Arts

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