

The INdependent

Reform for the People

Vol. 2 No. 1

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Man and Woman of the Year

The INdependent Reformer Weekly is proud to announce our selections for Man and Woman of the Year. Our editorial board has chosen Jules Vasquez and Lois Young Barrow this year.

Jules Vasquez is widely recognizable all over Belize as the fearless Reporter and News Director of Channel 7 News. But this apparently sociable and fearless journalist was not always able to express himself, let alone put Prime Ministers on the spot.

Jules was born in Born Belize City in 1970 and went to school at St Catherine's Elementary School, St. John's High School and Sixth Form and Florida Atlantic University, where he dropped out at the end of his junior year to get an education from a TV station. In 1993 he started working seriously at his family owned TV station, Channel 7 - presently the longest serving broadcasting entity in Belize, dating back to 1981. In 1994 he started 7 News and he is still there.

He says his favorite teacher was his Kindergarten teacher, Zoila



Jules Vasquez

Ysaguirre, now deceased. With a perfectly straight face he says "The woman saved my life. I was



Lois Young Barrow

chronically shy, so intractable a condition it posed a serious threat to my continued education. The

problem? I couldn't get up the nerve to disturb the din of restless young minds and mouths to simply raise my hand to ask the teacher to ask the teacher a question. In a bustling classroom of more than 30 restive children, she found time and consideration to help me out of my shell.

Congratulations Jules Vasquez; the man who no longer fears disturbing others, but asks the questions everyone else seems reluctant to ask. Belize is better because of you.

And as for Woman of the Year, the Independent Reformer has selected Senior Counsel Lois Young (Please Turn To Page 3)

Boxing Day TKO: Belizeans get pumped, AGAIN!

At midnight on December 26, just twenty four hours after Santa delivered his goodies, Scrooge took over. Regular fuel prices jumped from \$9.37 a gallon to a whopping \$9.77. There was no public announcement, no "Merry Christmas Belize," just a price hike in the night. Interestingly, the price of diesel went up by only 1 cent, and premium not at all.

Probably because no one is buying it anymore.

The rumor mill had been working overtime over the Christmas and word was prices would go up as soon as the holiday was over.

Can we expect more price increases locally, even though world prices are falling?

If we take the words of the Director General of the International Monetary Fund seriously then not only is gasoline likely to go up but other taxes will also increase in 2007.

On December 20, Director Rodrigo De Rato y Figaredo, issued a letter to the "International Financial Community (Please Turn To Page 3)

Foreign Donors & Volunteers Intimidated by the Government of Belize

Contributed

The people of Toledo District, less than 20,000, have been involved with "self-help" projects to solve their economic problems and save the endangered environment for over 25 years. During that time, over \$60 million of foreign aid not counting counterpart funds from GOB has been spent in the Toledo District. USA Peace Corps has been stationing volunteers in the district for over 30 years.

Yet the last poverty assessment indicates that over 70 percent of the people are poor and over 50 percent are very poor. It is estimated, by international agencies that three out of ten rural children are malnourished to the point of mental retardation.

With all this financial and volunteer aid, how can the people of Toledo be poorer now than ever before? Many locals believe plans for the development and

conservation of the district's rich natural resources made in abroad, or even in Belmopan, were unrealistic and/or the consultants were not truly qualified to provide helpful advice.

The non governmental organizations, who actually received the aid from the funding agencies, say that they had no choice, if they wanted the aid, they had to accept the plans and the consultants. The government Ministers have also said they had no choice in the matter; the Peace Corps volunteers have also indicated they have no choice but to help the NGOs who asked for their assistance.

Year after year the funders provide the money, organizations like the Inter American Development Bank, Caribbean Development Bank, the European Union and many others. The NGO's sign contracts to implement the plans. The volunteers help them, and predictably, the results are the same year after year.

The government Ministers and Area

Representatives involved make the same old speeches to launch and keep track of the projects, the volunteers get their assignments and the money and work continues to go down the drain. All the while, the people become poorer. The resources continue to be lost, more and more foreigners come in with private sector money to take advantage of the many opportunities. Their claim of helping the local people and economy, is that they provide employment. Of course they do. How else can they get the work done? Too often the profits they make go out of the country, especially in the country's largest industry, tourism.

After more than a quarter of a century of this constant consultant failure, and the expenditure of many tens of millions, actually over one hundred million dollars, the people from all walks of life got together and developed a comprehensive eco-development plan, called the Toledo (Please Turn To Page 3)

Inside this Issue

Total Madness
pg. 5

**Fake Jobs
and Lies**
pg. 7

**IMF Roadmap
for Belize**
pg. 14

**Governed by
vested interests**
pg. 10

Editorial Note

Editorial Director

Meb Cutlack

Editor

Karla Heusner Vernon

Design/Layout

Marigold Enterprise

General Manager

Trevor Vernon

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Telephones:

(501) 225-3520

Email:

independent.newspaper.bz@gmail.com

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Dear Readers,

Happy New Year to you all and thanks for finding your copy of Independent Weekly so quickly after the holidays. We took a little break, but not much since the staff and I were working for most of it anyway and so were many of our contributors.

I would like to invite you all to consider submitting letters to the editor or even articles if you have something you would like to share. In this edition Richard Hulse takes exception to the way "Culture" is being promoted in Belize and likely to provoke some controversy, and hopefully a response from the people he's referring to in his piece.

Des Parrett has sent us a very interesting item on how electing people who think they know about economics is not the same as electing people who do, and we have another article which suggests that certain government policies are

being acted on in the south simply because people are too afraid to suggest anything else.

An international piece on Honduran society is very likely to cause many of you to compare their world to ours and the cartoon may do the same thing: the comparison being between the libraries of the people who are "in charge" and the ones the rest of us frequent.

I have to admit the most enjoyable part of this issue was selecting Man and Woman of the Year. Believe me, there was some back and forth among the editorial board members and some minds were changed then changed again. Jules Vasquez was a unanimous selection, but Lois Young Barrow is one controversial woman. Sometimes that is exactly the sort of person you need the most. Belize could certainly use more people like them both.

I would like to thank all our



vendors for their tireless efforts to get this new paper circulating. If this is the first issue you are reading, you have one of them to thank for getting it to you. And now they have two papers to push early in the week instead of just one. More business for them, and the publishers we hope.

Again, Happy New Year. Let's make 2007 memorable, starting this week, shall we?

Letter to the Editor

Babies die while friends get rich

Dear Editor,

Listening to the Minister of Health explaining the details of the Government of Belize's involvement in the Universal Health fiasco, its saddens me to know the extent to which he and his cohorts will go, and the

depths they would sink to gain political favour with a selected few.

It is a downright shame that the Government of Belize can bail out these 'favoured few' to the tune of millions of dollars, while that same Minister could not find a

measly \$10,000.00, comparatively speaking, for baby Kemora.

Such blatantly shameless conduct of the Minister – and his CEO – warrants immediate resignation.

Signed: T. Thompson

The INdependent Reformer

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Man and woman of the year

➡ (Continued From Page 1)
Barrow. The editorial board decided that her standing up at the BTL Annual General Meeting in September when a court injunction was being ignored, when a room full of board members and shareholders did nothing, is worthy of national recognition.

For her the issue was justice across the board. She told 7 News, "I am really, genuinely concerned

that the people of Belize see these bigwigs ignoring court orders and then they are forced to obey court orders; thrown out of their houses, land taken away, chattels seized for a small debt, fridge gone, sofa set gone, and all that sort of thing. And they will see that these people, because it is a wealthy company, can ignore an order of the court. That is what I am concerned with. I made that

very clear last night and I say it again: it is not about Prosser and Ashcroft, they both deserve each other."

In addition, not only did she take on BTL, she also took on the People's United Party, through an unprecedented injunction against the Belize Times. Her court action is forcing a newspaper which makes sport of maligning the characters of both public figures and

private citizens to think twice.

Lois continues to be a driving force behind the Association for Concerned Belizeans and demonstrates her concern for Belize every time she calls the morning talk shows.

For her contributions to Belize in 2006 and her relentless defense of Lady Justice in Belize, the Independent salutes Lois as our Woman of the Year.

Foreign Donors & Volunteers Intimidated by the Government of Belize

➡ (Continued From Page 1)
People's Eco park plan. T.P.E.P.P.

On September 12, 2003 representatives of all the democratically elected leaders of the Toledo District, who were sworn into service by the Chief Magistrate, along with the directors of the largest conservation, cultural and economic development NGOs, and the President of the Toledo Civil Society joined together and signed a memorandum of understanding in support of the further development of the People's plan.

Seeing this unanimous support for the plan, the US Ambassador to Belize authorized the US Peace Corps to also sign in support.

This document was sent to the Prime Minister who also provided a letter of support for the plan saying, "I am as anxious as you are to see the implementation of the Toledo People's Eco Park Plan." That was in March of

2004. The general manager of the Toledo Development Corporation, who fulfilling the vision statement of the Toledo Development Corporation to facilitate the responsible sustainable development of Toledo by and for the people of Toledo, organized the different groups and after repeated meetings with them drafted the memorandum of understanding, submitted the document and plans to the Ministry of Economic Development, where it was quickly put down.

The general manager and other political leaders realized that to further push the issue could endanger their position, so they were discouraged from doing so. The Peace Corps, seeing the plan was not supported by the Ministry of Economic Development, also backed down, refusing to allow the Peace Corps volunteers to help the further development of the People's Plan.

The ministry prefers to continue to promote the plans the funders and their consultants from abroad demand. The US Peace Corps continues to support the same kinds of projects that have failed so many times before. They know as the funders do, that in the private sector, if the way of doing business was failing they would quickly change it, or else they would go broke.

However the way foreign aid is used, they have no incentive to change. It is obvious they want the aid to be misspent and for the poor to stay poor. One definition of insanity is to do the same thing under the same conditions and to expect different results.

If the funders, NGOs, and the volunteers really wanted to change conditions here in Toledo, they would certainly give the People's plan a chance. So why won't they? It makes you wonder, doesn't it?

Boxing Day TKO: Belizeans get pumped, AGAIN!

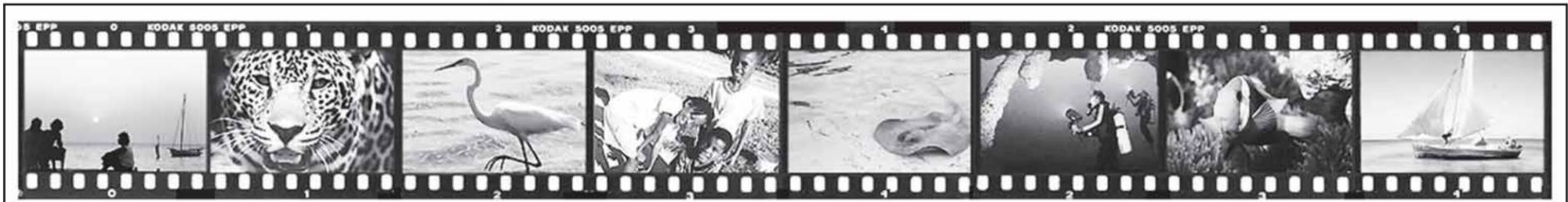
➡ (Continued From Page 1)
on the Belize Situation...at the request of the Government of Belize". (find the entire letter on page 14 of this edition).

This letter needs to be dissected as it is chock full of interesting nuggets. It is a roadmap for the future of the PUP government, for what we as citizen consumers can expect in 2007...for starters. The exact url is:

<http://www.imf.org/external/NP/pp/eng/2006/122006.pdf>

In the third paragraph, the Distinguished Managing Director writes: "Accordingly they [Government of Belize] are targeting a further increase in the primary fiscal surplus to 3.5% of GDP in FY 2006/07 and to 4.5% of GDP in subsequent years. This fiscal improvement would be achieved by saving the bulk of projected revenues from oil production, enhancing non-oil revenue collection, and restraining current expenditures."

(Please Turn To Page 15) ➡



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Thirty Minute Country

By: Karla Heusner Vernon

Many of us are basking in that post holiday glow; reluctant to take down the decorations, wrap them up and pack them away until next year. Perhaps you have several Christmas presents in their boxes under your tree, as yet unopened. Not only because you want to savor the season; but because you know full well the moment you take them out of the packaging they are on their way to being ruined.

Yes, many of us are trying to hold back the inevitable reality of Belize: you only have 30 minutes to enjoy anything.

The time limit on happiness begins with each step we take. Our streets are so hard on shoes I sometimes wonder why we bother. How all those ladies can wear high heels and get to work in one piece is a mystery to me. Once there, click, clack, the clamor of spike heels coming down the stairs. "Whoopa!—" slipped again by the Crystal water cooler. No water on the floor mind you, just raw metal on tile sliding you across the office. How well one recovers determines one's poise factor. "Ah nearly tumble down just now... heehee, what a ting."

Back to the shoe repair man again. For every \$40 spent on shoes, Belizean woman must spend \$20 tacking their heel tips back on again.

Just how many turned ankles can one woman endure before she has permanent elephant legs? Sit in parked car on any street in Belize and watch how many women's ankles twist dangerously as they make their way to lunch. One after the other, one side of them drops lower than the other. Ouch! Damn rough street got another one.

After the worst sprain of my life coming out of a pharmacy I swore never to wear heels again. I was strong in my resolve to defy the fashion world until a coworker pointed out I had been wearing flats.

Betting is heavier than at the casino as to how long the buyer can wear a pair of new, smart looking shoes from certain stores. I saw a friend limping down the street one day, the straps on BOTH her sandals had given way when she stumbled and hit a drain cover; another woman was mortified at her son's graduation when her dress shoes "burst" on the way into the ceremony. Admit it now, I know you too have hobbled your way to another shop or back home again to towards office colleagues hoping they had glue or staples or nails and could put you back together again.

Like imported automobiles, even "States" shoes depreciate the minute they hit Belize. Step outside your front gate and "Sheesh!" heel, toe, or entire

foot in a mud puddle, overflowing drain or septic tank, dog poop or soft earth.

The molds and fungi are insidious. Shoes, belts and purses change before your very eyes as you eye your closet. "The better the leather, the greener they get," goes the joke. One well-heeled gentleman planted his feet on a bar stool and both heels fell off! He looked in

power surges. Even those "guarded" by a UPS can be struck down by lightening flashes coming in through the modem connections on the wall!

Belize is hard on hard drives. So hard I see one manufacturer is even boasting its laptops are rugged enough to survive the rain forest of Belize. There was even an article featuring a scientific researcher hanging by ropes in the jungle studying some life form or another.

Most of us wish ours could just

"Okay, so we live under what the rest of the terms 'rugged conditions.'"

disbelief at the expensive shoes he had worn in the States for years, his favorite pair. Somehow the composite heels had just deteriorated until they crumbled away. He never found out what caused it.

Kind of like the mystery forces that invade our video cassette players, cds and dvd's. Not to mention the computers which just seem to draw moisture and warmth seeking critters, not to mention geckos and ants. If your computer survives the first year element attack, its not likely to withstand the

survive sitting on a desk in an office in Ladyville or San Ignacio or Orange Walk.

Okay, so we live under what the rest of the world terms "rugged conditions." Perhaps we should just accept our lot and live with it. Perhaps Belizean men and women should just stop buying nice things and nice clothes hoping we can actually use them. Wear fabrics that won't stick to us or get caught by some jagged piece of something on someone's door. Something impervious to mud splats sent our way by hapless drivers

passing by. "Sorry Mista! Ah neva mean fi wet you."

But no, we are a stubborn lot who will not relent in our quest to live like other people in other places. Our women still feel entitled after a hard week or month of work to get "made over" at a salon. To bask in the admiring eyes and compliments of other female patrons, to wonder if our better half's will love "the new you!" We should make him come with us, to see the fleeting beauty, but instead we make the fatal mistake of opening the salon door, leaving the air conditioning and getting smacked by a whoosh of wind or the frizz power that only 90% humidity can deliver to freshly coiffed hair. Half an hour later, we are our old selves again and greeted by "I thought you went to do your hair?"

Never mind.

Like people just arrived from the States only to realize their sweatshirts will no longer be welcome here and their skin will never be dry again, we sally forth from home each morning freshly showered and pressed and powered only to be drenched by isolated showers only on our side of the street, arriving tarred and feathered with dust and bird doo doo and mud in the rainy season and dust in the dry.

Everything, but everything seems doomed to rapid degeneration in Belize. Tourists actually think the national motto is "Dat? Dat no work no more." Followed by "Ah di wait for wan part come in fid at right now."

The satisfaction of working hard or establishing credit to purchased new (Please Turn To Page 13) ■■■

Attention farmers!

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Total madness

By: Trevor Vernon



Not all Belizeans with university degrees got a free ride at US and other foreign institutions of higher learning. I am, as many others are, living proof. Some of us actually had to

pay for our foreign education, thanks to a more transparent DFC and a wonderful individual, a former USAID rep. He made it painfully clear that he was not about to recommend me for any scholarships being earmarked for Belizeans because of my Royal Kriol status. Same kinds of stuff politicians still pull when trying to be populist... in an effort to rally voters, or set up their own children for life.

So, I paid my way with the aid of a loan guarantee and a loan from DFC. No special treatment, no complaints. And did I ever repay! That student loan for \$30,000 hung like an albatross around my neck for almost a decade. Back then 30 grand was serious money and there was no question IF you will pay, but HOW FAST... unlike what are seeing with the DFC malpagos these days. They apparently had/have no intention of ever paying off what they "borrowed."

Make you wonder what values their

parents ever imparted to them, certainly not the apparent "Royal Kriol" values I was brought up with. Like those who skip out on their loans then bawl haad time, I have little pity for the fortunate few who got somebody else to pay for their projects, their books, their tuition, and their every need. I really don't care to hear how hard life was (in school or business) and who didn't like you or the color of your skin. You took the scholarship or fellowship or loans to improve your lot in

"...I have little pity for the fortunate few who got somebody else to pay for their projects, their books, their tuition, and their every need."

life; stop biting the hand that fed you, will you? There are plenty of young people out there, even reading this right now, who wish they had the opportunities you did... if they could only GET a loan guarantee, especially a sovereign one.

I am sure my parents had something to do with my wanting to run away from Belize to go study abroad and wanting to get my second degree from somewhere outside the USA, and do the Europe thing. The older heads always seem to want their children to study law (or medicine) and/or go studying

half way across the world.

So to please others, I enrolled here and there in law study programs (three in all over the years) but wasn't impressed by the impressionable. My early hunches were that the study of Law leads to unspeakable predatory practices; I discovered I was right later on. Al-ham-du-le-la. Right away I realized I didn't need to suck the lifeblood out of the poor and disadvantaged to make me feel good and important. I'll leave that to others who apparently have had more exotic family values imparted to them. And, in fairness, it must be mentioned that they don't teach logic in very many other academic programs; so I guess, the study

of law does have some value after all.

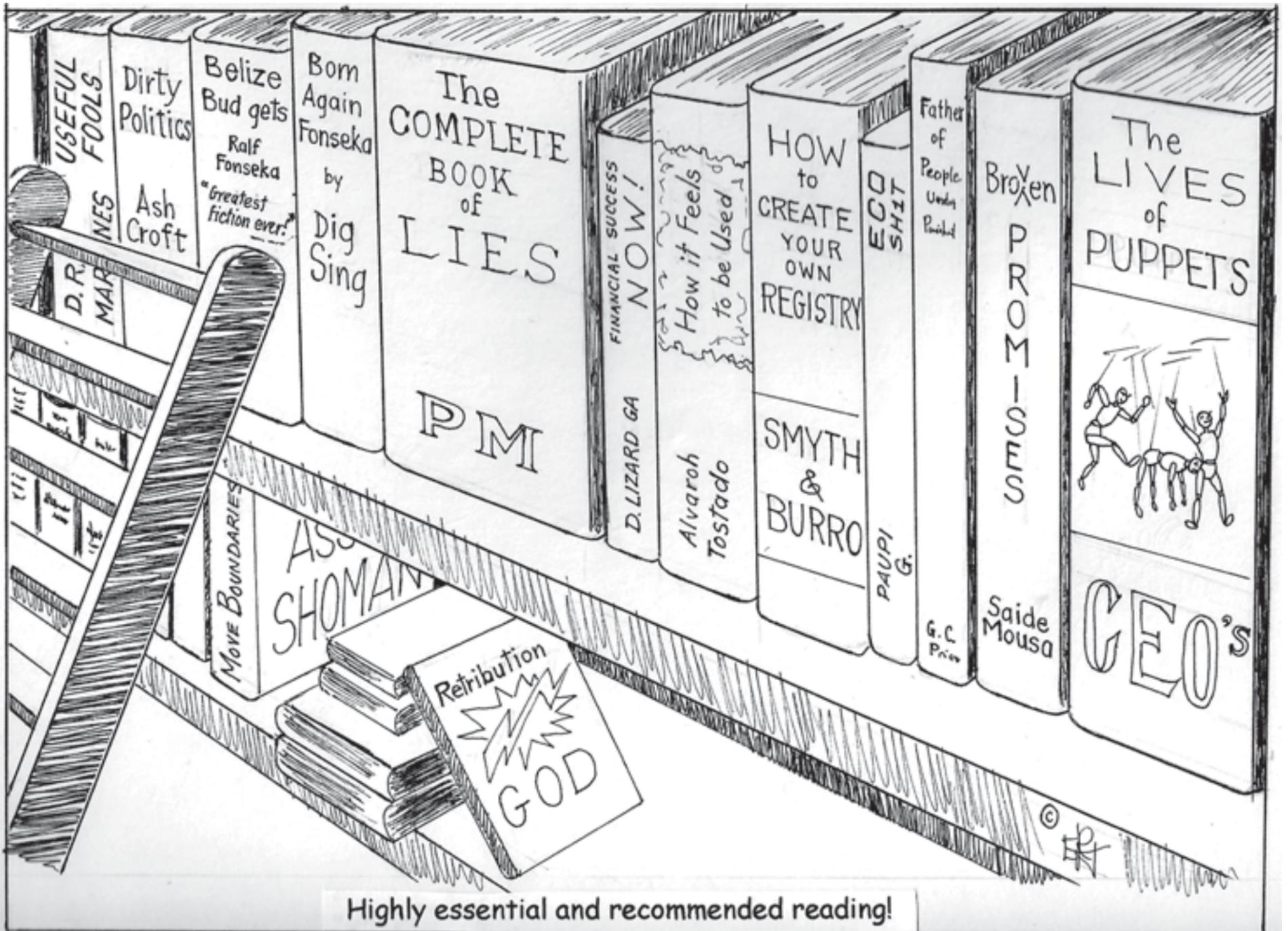
I drifted in and out of various fields of study as a major in foreign universities and elsewhere: economics, accounting, law, finance, international relations, until I found my calling: analyzing stuff. I have earned an MBA which I am absolutely proud of and use occasionally; but, don't find the need to rub in people's faces to make them feel smaller than they are. I paid the price by sacrificing resources and family time to get that piece of paper... because I accepted that education family value.

Now I am not into living my life for the older heads. I figured they had their choices to make and their lives to live (however challenging and hard) and I don't have the time or inclination to be critical of the generation that came before mine. I needed to find me, not my parents and many of my friends were faced with the same dilemma.

The point is really is to discuss parenting issues and the dilemmas that they/we face in passing on values. As a society we generally value a "good education", maybe not as much as say the Orientals who migrated here of late. It follows then that families generally tend to push the "good education" value on their offspring. While some families are better able to transmit this than others, oftentimes it is only to the favorite children for some jib cutting reason. In everything in life there are favorites. And no one person will be a favorite everywhere and at every pursuit. But the favoritism thing does help a child in instilling confidence to face the world when (s)he is no longer a child. That is not to say that a child needed to have been a favorite in the parents home to be successful; that confidence can be acquired elsewhere. And, in fact, many non-favored Belizean children are able to move away and make wildly successful lives in other countries.

There is a local saying that older generations espoused: that they are able to see the cut of a younger person's jib almost

(Please Turn To Page 6)



Culture of exclusion: *Belizean Theatre and Art*

A view from the street

By Richard Hulse

Often a small glimpse of nostalgia helps us to reflect on our present. In the not too distant past (1960's – 1970's) even though Belize was a relatively poor community, we were entertained by talented local singers. The collective "we"

"These concerts were clean fun, where an entire family could go and enjoy themselves - "whether you had money or not."

means people from a broad cross section of the society. There were these fabulous open air concerts and talent parades at the Memorial Park, The Roman Catholic Parish Hall, the Bliss Institute, etc. These concerts were clean fun, where an entire family could go and enjoy themselves—"whether you had money or not." People from all social and ethnic backgrounds were able to interact at these functions. The artists of the day stood out clearly as

professionals; in fact, they were world class.

Many of our current artists also measure up to any international standard, yet it seems clear that no attempt is being made to market them abroad, I should further say: not even at home. The question asked here is why? The main reason is that Belize has become a T.V.

culture, and if you are not on T.V. you are nobody—and quite frankly none of the T.V. stations air much local content, let alone artists. Unless it's to fill space before the news begins.

The main topics here are:

who qualifies as a cultural icon? And who decides that they qualify? As far as the Arts Council (under the several new abbreviations they use) is concerned, it seems like that is their sacred right, not to mention if you are not politically connected or politically correct in your speaking, every thing you do will be downplayed.

Many Belizeans have decided that "Dankeyman" is a cultural icon, but who really is Dankeyman? Where does he

come from? Although so many of us in Belize City plays his CD's, the quest for information about Dankeyman is overwhelming. Even the people who are selling his CD's (I believe pirated versions) don't know anything. So Dankeyman has the distinction of being a cultural icon who nobody knows anything of and who is making no money off his own music sales.

There are many other Belizeans who have to manufacture and sell their own music because they don't get any help whatsoever from the Arts Council. I don't think they even get encouragement. To cut it short, culture has vacated the Southside and portions of the Northside and taken up residence in Kings Park and Buttonwood Bay. Once you are not from these demographic areas, there ain't no help for you. If the Southside Artists are helped, they get the minimum assistance and maximum exploitation.

The performances that are being held at the Bliss Centre for the Performing Arts, are neither geared to, nor targeted for a wide cross section of the community. This is one of the major stumbling blocks against promoting culture, and which creates a culture of exclusion and extorts money from parents who are trying to show their children attention. Just the expensive vehicles parked at the Bliss, let you know who they cater for, with \$50

and \$60 performances which working Belizeans can ill afford. Proof once more that the performances are never intended for the average Belizean, even if he/she is a part of it. Culture now is a business, just like any other business: and the objective of any business is to make money.

Red carpet galas at the end of the year honouring classic Belizean artists are good, but surely the people they are putting up as contemporary artists leaves a big question mark over their heads. But at least they are Belizeans, unlike the "high falutin" sorts from abroad come to display their work or deformity. Although some of their "art" looks like ramshackle old junk, I am sure someone pays them, even though they don't want to pay Belizeans, or pay them very next to nothing.

The Belizean artists they bring from abroad and the other Latinos they bring from time to time are only fostering the idea that you have to come from abroad to be good, or if you go abroad that is the way you get accepted.

Sadly, there are also many rich Belizeans who will do anything, and pay anything, to make sure that they don't rub shoulders with the average Belizeans. So much for art, music and theatre being occasions for people from all walks of life in Belize to interact.

Total madness

➡ (Continued From Page 5) from birth. But I think what they are really seeing is a reflection of the treatment that young person is receiving in the home, at school, and while in the care of other family and family friends. However, that's only my impression.

The issue is how the "child-turned-parent" now transmits their values to their own young ones. If they themselves did not please their parents/care givers, then how can they expect to pass on their own educational ideas to their own child? Do parents today even see this as their role in parenting: transmitting values? I know many who consciously don't attempt to and others who simply turn to books for answers.

Too many parents today want to be their child's best friend for whatever reason and I find this frightening. Parents are not "best friends" to children who are then allowed to

run with "their own ideas" that they invariably picked up from TV... as much as being a guiding force until that child becomes an adult. Two adults can be best friends but not before.

In summary then, we as parents need to teach our children to be more responsible for their own lives and their own actions. And we have to be careful not to overly indulge our children in their every desire so as to better prepare them for their own adulthood, where every desire has a cost. And the only way you truly transmit values is by example, once you have a relationship with that child.

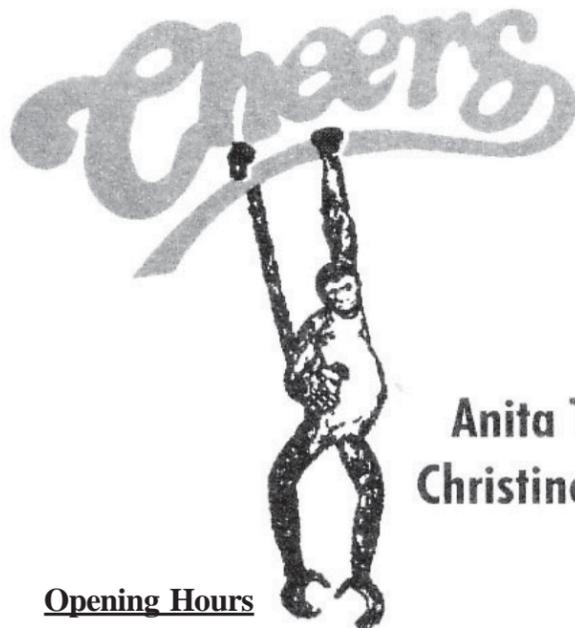
Naturally, this does not apply to the trust fund families who will leave untold wealth to their children that were reared by nice nannies.

Part of the solution for the less fortunate lies in a mixture of accessible loans, grants, scholarships, fellowships with a good loan guarantee program open to all. In a previous life I chaired a committee in the Technical Cooperation area of the OAS charged with drafting the statutes of a capital fund for fellowship that was seeded with US \$10 Million. It was general consensus that too many students across the hemisphere were

being excluded from higher studies due to lack of loan guarantees and such a fund, properly structured, and would seek to stem the adverse tide. (That program is now in place after the committee got approval from the General Assembly to proceed). I am a firm believer that a partial loan structure ensures a stronger sense of commitment and responsibility in the pursuit of the parents' dream for you. This, to me at least, teaches the more important value of being ashamed of setting out to steal or "borrow" with the expressed intent to refinance or downright defraud the good faith lender, or indeed, an entire nation state.

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Fake jobs and lies

By **Meb Cutlack**

Once more the Belizean public has had the wool pulled over their eyes. Promises of jobs, job, and jobs which never materialize. It has happened again and again and again and yet our people still half believe the lies dished out to them by the Musa government: Mollejon, Chalillo, BTL, Mahogany Heights, Ara Macao and now, Stake Bank.

In case you have not heard, there is the multimillion dollar tourism project on North Drowned Caye and Stake Bank Caye, which include the construction of a 4 mile long causeway from Belize City to North Drowned Caye.

Belizean developer Michael Feinstein has proposed to construct at least three five star hotels, a casino and marina and residential condos on the two islands linked to Belize City by the causeway.

The U.S. \$250 million development plan, dubbed the Ocean View Grand Development, also calls for the construction of another causeway that would link the two islands.

In October Feinstein presented an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) study on the North Drowned Caye development to the Department of the Environment (DOE).

Last week engineering experts from the Feinstein team met with some fifty concerned citizens at the Princess Hotel to discuss the project as part of a public consultation process for the approval of the EIA study on North Drowned Caye.

Concern was expressed about the North Drowned Caye development, especially as it relates to the mangrove in that area, because the mangrove islands form an important buffer zone protecting Belize City from storms and also from ocean surges.

According to The Reporter newspaper, Acting Chief Environmental Officer, Martin Alegria, said not much vital information has been provided about the proposed causeway, which is of major concern to the department.

The department, he said, wants an in-depth geological data study to be conducted on the sea bed to determine if it would be able to withstand such huge structures as contemplated in the development plan. There is also concern about the height of the causeway, which according to the EIA study, will range from 9 feet to 30 feet above sea level in some areas to allow for bigger vessels to pass.

Feinstein plans to construct the two-lane causeway from the Marine Parade Boulevard on north side Belize City

The North Drowned Caye development, which will involve 515 acres of land, calls for the construction of a 260-room hotel, a casino, a marina and residential units among other amenities. According to the EIA study, an ocean beach estate on Drowned Caye will take up 95 acres of the island while a marina village will take up 26 acres.

The size of the casino and its conference room is estimated to be 25,000 square feet and the project concept is for the

development of a quiet, isolated community.

Extraordinarily the Stake Bank development has already been given export processing zone status, meaning that locals will not be allowed to go on Stake Bank Caye!

Plans call for the construction of a major marina that will be able to dock as many as four cruise ships at any one given time and cruise ship passengers will be able to commute to Belize City and places beyond,

Fortis. Then, in total control the dam, they assumed the right to sell electricity to BEL (their company) for whatever price they chose.

Nothing changed when they built Chalillo (amidst the same pattern of lies about the geology of the area and denial of a major earthquake fault line exactly where the dam is placed) - and with huge teams of foreign laborers.

Hundreds of 'jobs' are part and parcel of false government promises which go with every huge international "project". These also

"...locals will not be allowed to go on Stake Bank Caye!"

using the causeways.

As Usual, Feinstein says the development will bring employment for Belizeans and should boost Belize's economy.

And that's what all these projects amount to; Promises! Promises! Promises, and huge profits for local cronies and foreigners who spend nothing in or among Belizeans - who are even banned from going to Stake Bank.

Remember Mollejon? It was supposed to provide hundreds of jobs for Belizeans .. it didn't. Instead it employed hundreds of Chinese laborers. It was built amidst rumours of huge cash rake-offs and of design faults.

And sure enough, soon after it was completed it was almost washed away.

Originally Belize and BEL (then government owned) had an interest in Mollejon. The dam was sold and sold again and, by the time Fortis Inc. of Canada ended up with it, the dam was wholly owned by

involve massive pay offs to cronies, huge bites out of tax payers money and corrupt construction and finance deals

Remember the BTL/Intelco fiasco? That's another example of a long running saga of government corruption lies and double dealing.

Remember the promise over the new city of Mahogany Heights? More jobs again! A huge housing project to employ thousands to build a new city for those in need of housing! A project to ease overcrowding in Belize City! All lies, lies and lies again. Instead a German/Salvadoran company moved in its equipment, with hundreds of Salvadoran laborers, to build the new city out of illegally imported paper and plywood sections.

These simply rotted as quickly as the new city itself which, with its newly built but rotten structures, soon became a small neglected rural slum!

What did it cost? The land itself, although

known to be unsuitable for housing, was bought from a crony for an inflated \$10,000,000 after he had only paid a token for it. It was sold without proper title so that to this day the home owners have no title and probably no hope of title!

Total cost? Ranging upward to \$200,000! And that just the beginning of the so called PUP 10,000 house target which allowed ministers throughout the country to mint fortunes from housing 'deals' to build a few inadequate tin roofed shacks in the districts.

Then there is the Ara Macao Resort! Just don't believe government or the promoters when they say they will review the project to meet objections. Even in its first stage it will demand 15.35 megawatts of electricity, more than half of what is currently used in both Belize City and Ladyville combined!

The hastily done Environmental Impact Assessment carried out by a group 'friendly' to government is described as "...very superficial and lacks specific details needed to make a meaningful determination as to the magnitude, duration, scale and geographic extent of the project's impact..."

The project will also consist of two nine-hole courses, including 59 private golf course houses and a club house and accommodate:

* A 67-acre marina for up to 400 boats of up to 100 feet, dredged to 12-foot deep.

* A casino and night club 106,250 square feet to be used by 1,000 people (not locals).

* It will include over 250 structures including,

* Hotels: One 260 room 3-storey condo hotel with 100,000 square feet of common area

* Villas: 296 in 74, 2-storey buildings

Condos: 458 in 38, 4-storey buildings.

They will say: "We don't intend to build it all. We will revise it to suit the area!" Don't believe them!

Remember the tourist Village?

Remember the airport?

Remember the Printers?

Remember the new Port?

Remember Pena's village?

How many more broken promises will the PUP hand out?

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Main & Church Streets, walk down
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TOPICAL TIDBITS

Drowning at Sea



Death by drowning, or simply from going missing, is becoming a major concern among critics of the cruise ship industry.

These vessels are above all ground rules and float free of international law when drowned or missing passengers are concerned. They simply sail on without obligation of police investigation or even of reporting losses locally. This leaves friends and relatives in a legal limbo with no possibility of finding out the cause of death of their loved ones. Too easily the cruise liners shrug off drowning deaths as "suicide".

Sea and River safety

Our own safety laws relating to the sea and rivers needs tightening up as incidents of losses and drowning inland and on the Cayes continue on an almost monthly basis. It is up to lodge owners and tour operators to fully brief their customers on the dangers of sea currents and of raging waters on our rivers. The recent heavy rains left several canoeists, unaccompanied by guides, tipped out and stranded in western rivers. All were rescued by alert canoes with guides but there's no doubt that in some cases, when the rivers are swelled and furious, lodges should ban non guide canoeing.

Watch that passport

Don't let your passport decline in

appearance! Extraordinarily, a Belizean took his out-of-date passport for renewal recently and was fined \$20 because the old passport was not in good nick! Where would they seek for money, money, money!

The art of hypocrisy.

A journalist we know was recently chastised on his lavish and inaccurate praise for the Musa regime. "It served



he said, "I needed a favor!"

GST yet again!

Not only is it crippling, beyond recovery, many small businesses throughout the country, GOB tax department doesn't know what it is doing. If it expects every small business to issue proper receipts it must issue the correct receipt books. In Cayo the GST office can't even advise its victims which receipts are correct and which are not! "Killer GST" makes the old VAT look very good indeed and also makes the lies and hysterical screeches of the PUP when it killed VAT as phony as all their other promises and pledges. Oh, and that border tax, which is also killing small businesses, means a young couple must pay \$70 US just to leave Belize. Money that could and should stay with lodges and businesses and not go to enrich the coffers of the Government and the often incompetent Border Management.

Emergency in Cayo.

It was one of those situations which cried out for a quick coordinated response from "emergency" crews but alas, when an electric line blew in the heart of San Ignacio the other day and showered the surrounding traffic and pedestrians with sparks and green flashes, minutes dragged into 10 before a fire engine appeared and that time doubled before a single policeman appeared or BEL cut off the power. A fire works show which only luck stopped from turning deadly.

Also in Cayo

It's becoming a long running farce as downtown and uptown traffic on Bullet Tree Road continues to be rerouted around three blocks when Sacred Heart Junior school is letting students in or out. The diverted traffic has to pass a busy playground and the busy route to another area school. It would take very little for the land rich school to construct a simple safe set-down area along its fence side and a flag boy to do away with the problem which led to the diversion in the first place.

Up Mexico way

Mexico is planning to create mixed police units and check migration status of the population in southern border areas and it could effect Belizeans traveling north. As part of that program, from Jan 1, Guatemalan citizens will be able to request to enter Mexico as local visitors and temporary agriculture

workers, and if they violate those rights they will lose their rights and be sanctioned.

Annually two million people cross the southern border from Guatemala and Belize to Mexico and vice versa, and of them 400,000 enter the Aztec nation illegally.

That old Brit/Saudi/ Wahabbi connection.



According to UK press reports, an investigation into allegations of bribery involving

a large British defence contractor and Saudi Arabia have been quashed. Mr. Blair took personal responsibility for stopping the inquiry into a multibillion pound Saudi arms deal, saying that "If we had allowed this to go forward, we would have done immense damage to the interests of this country."

His concern for the national interest might, of course, have been to counter Saudi threats not to buy British fighter jets if the probe continued.

It's another example of the old and still intact Brit/Saudi/US deal, which allowed the extremist Wahabbis to create the Taliban, the Al Qaeda, saw that all Saudi royal family were quickly evacuated illegally from the USA after 9/11 and continues to turn its usual blind eye to corruption and human rights abuse in the antique kingdom.

Belize Economics

By: Des Parrett

I went to see the Old One who lives at the ruins. I had a question for him. Our government kept telling us about how Mr. Ralph was educated and had lots of knowledge about economics. So I asked the Old One, "how come Mr. Ralph came up with all these ways to borrow so many millions and millions of dollars, but we are now worse off than we were before we borrowed all that money, and we don't seem to have anything to show for it?"

The Old One smiled and then answered. "You should not consider education, knowledge and wisdom as the same thing. Education teaches us facts. Knowledge is the facts we learn. Wisdom is the ability to use our knowledge to effectively solve problems. There are a lot of smart and educated people who lack wisdom, and unfortunately that seems to include those who have controlled our national economic policy in the past.

"I have never known of a politician who was elected for his wisdom, but politicians seem to think if they were smart enough

to get elected, they must be smart enough to do any job. Our controlling elected officials sort out the juicy high paid minister's positions amongst themselves, with little or no consideration as to their abilities to handle the jobs, instead of seeking highly qualified people for the critical positions. A person is generally considered to be "highly qualified" because he possesses the wisdom to get the job done effectively. Mark Espat is about our only politician who has a history of effective management in government, but he stands out like a searchlight in a cave."

I asked the Old One if the proposed billion dollar restructure bond would solve our financial problems?

The Old One frowned then continued. "Minister Espat himself has said that the Belize restructuring scenarios are 'at the outer edge of what forecasts show as being affordable for the country.' What he is saying loud and clear is the proposed desperate bond solution is too costly and too late.

"There are three serious issues to

consider.

"First: Let's stop and look at the simple economics of a billion dollar bond. We have a population of less than 300,000 people, of which 60% are less than 15 years old. Our unemployment figures are never published because they are so bad, but being generous in our calculations, we still have less than 100,000 people working. Just on the face of it and without all the other costs, the restructure bond is only a Band-Aid on a jugular hemorrhage, but it will still create a \$1,000,000,000 debt for 100,000 working people to pay off. That is \$10,000 for each working person just for this bond, with additional costs for the bond issue. BUT that is only the beginning. Interest on the bond is significantly greater than the annual increase in our earnings as is at least an additional \$45 million a year for the first few years and \$85 million after that until 17 years have passed... and then we have even higher interest plus we have to start paying back the billion dollars at \$125 million a year. And... while all this is going on, the government has already borrowed a

lot more money that also has to be paid back.

"Second: Certainly the only justification in our present circumstances for borrowing such a large sum would be if the proceeds were used to generate sufficient returns in the future to be self-liquidating, but our experience to date hardly justifies this hope.

"Third: Our "D" credit rating is so low it has to look up to see whale poop. For some time now we have not been able to service our existing loans, and had to borrow money to pay the interest on what we already owed. Any buyer of the bonds will know that we are in default, and the probability of Belize repaying the bonds is less than a politician disclosing all of his income sources. It is obvious we can't handle our existing debt, yet... we are proposing to add another \$45 million a year. The only possible buyers would be those with a strangling political noose, such as Venezuela, Cuba or Taiwan. We have already lost our ass and now we are trying to sell our soul. There may of course be some (Please Turn To Page 11)



Editorial

STAR Newspaper dated Sunday December 17, 2006

(Printed with permission of the author)

TENS OF MILLIONS – THEN HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS – NOW IT'S ONE BILLION!!! In post independent Belize, successive People's United Party (PUP) governments have embarked on a program of reckless borrowing with hardly any tangible benefits for the masses of the Belizean people.

The reckless borrowing, first in the ten of millions of dollars, began during the 1989-93 era of PUP rule with the arrival of the unelected PUP financial guru, Ralph Fonseca, the nation's defacto minister of finance, under the wings of Prime Minister George Price. How can we forget that era's series of borrowings at ridiculously high interest rates such as the Italian line of credit and others, to fund bloated contracts like the commercial center at the foot of the swing bridge, the customs house in the Port Loyola Area and the city center, all in Belize City? That series of reckless borrowing resulted in the shortest-lived government ever in the political history of the nation. General election was called 16 months before it was constitutionally due with then prime minister George Price's infamous "job done" pre-election proclamation.

The PUP was booted out of office and a new United Democratic Party (UDP) government was faced with the task of nursing the nation's devastated economy back to health. The exercise resulted in the implementation of some unpopular decisions primary among which were the downsizing of government's bloated workforce and the implementation of the Value Added Tax.

By the time the UDP left office in August of 1998 the overall national debt stood at a manageable 500 million dollars. In came the PUP Government headed by a new prime minister in the person of Said Wilbert Musa, with the now elected Ralph Fonseca as minister of finance. It did not take long for the reckless borrowing to resume only this time in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

The 2003 general election campaign came with unprecedented massive campaign financing and lavish spending on propaganda items in every district town and larger villages. These items included expensive "love fests" overflowing with cheap beers and free food for all along with live entertainments featuring Supa G, the caliente dancers as well as expensive political advertisements on television.

The massive spending resulted in the return of prime minister Said Musa and the PUP to government. Within days of assuming the reigns of government, the party's chief campaign financier, Barry Bowen was handsomely

rewarded with the slashing of excise duty on his beer from \$12 per gallon, under the previous UDP government, to a measly \$1.80 per gallon. Despite this huge reduction in taxes, the price of Bowen's Belikin beer and stout increased and, with the added windfall of surplus revenue, Bowen embarked on a massive expansion project. New, bigger and more sophisticated route trucks were pressed into service. The added finances also gave birth to the erection of impressive Bowen distributions centers such as the one near Esperanza Village in the Cayo District and in other parts of the country. In the words of PUP's own cabinet minister Cordel Hyde, this singular decision, on the part of his new PUP government, resulted in the decrease of government revenues from an annual \$25 million to

moratorium on borrowing. We borrow too damn much."

Then in last Friday's sitting of the house of representatives, the nation was treated to Mark Espat rising in support of government's intention to embark on the historical borrowing of ONE BILLION DOLLARS. This is the very same Mark Espat who, only a few months earlier, told the nation in the very same house of representatives that "we cannot continue to borrow from Peter to pay Paul". He has taken a full 360 degrees turn. How interesting indeed. Furthermore, only a few days ago we witnessed the same Mark Espat signing off on a \$25 million loan from the InterAmerican Development Bank and in the process telling the nation that the proceeds from this loan will not be going into any projects.

"...the borrowing has evolved from increments of tens of millions to hundreds of millions and now to a whopping ONE BILLION DOLLARS. In the words of prime minister Said Musa "that's billion with a 'B'."

a measly \$4 million per annum.

In his 2005 contribution to the budget debate, Cordel Hyde publicly recommended that the taxes on beer be restored to the \$12 per gallon rate as it was under the UDP "and let us collect the 25 million dollars", said Hyde. The PUP, in campaign mode for the 1998 general election, lambasted the UDP government for presiding over the nation's foreign reserves which they said stood at "only" three months of imports.

Today, after eight years of PUP rule, that very same foreign reserve stands dangerously at two weeks of imports while the national debt has ballooned to 3.3 billion dollars.

With the national economy in shambles, prime minister Musa was forced by other members of his government to remove Ralph Fonseca as minister of Finance. In terms of present times, the borrowing has evolved from increments of tens of millions to hundreds of millions and now to a whopping ONE BILLION DOLLARS. In the words of prime minister Said Musa "that's billion with a 'B'". Call it a direct loan. Call it the floating of bonds. Call it the acquisition of finances at concessionary rates. Call it whatever you want, a lemon by any name is just as sour. If it is not a grant, then it's bad news for the Belizean economy as any more borrowing will only serve to further mortgage the future of Belizeans yet unborn.

Again in the words of PUP minister Cordel Hyde "We must put a

How on earth did we reach the point whereby elected politicians can shamelessly utter these words to a nation feeling the pinch of ailing economic conditions where 44% of its citizens are living in poverty? Amidst widespread poverty, government finance officer Joe Waight tells us that 85 million dollars in additional loans is coming into the country. - \$25m from the IDB - \$25m from the CDB - \$25m from the Republic of Venezuela and \$10m from the Republic of China on Taiwan ALL of which will be used, said Joe Waight "to help support Belize's balance of payment" with not even a dime directly touching the life of a single poor Belizean.

How did we reach the point when we can swallow the pronouncement that

disbursement of the second \$15 million of the IDB loan hinges on "the orderly liquidation" of the nation's only institution for development financing and the retrenchment of employees of that institution?

Notwithstanding, some level of comfort must be given to the Belizean people and so it came in the form of Mark Espat promising the "opening of a new financing window" whatever that means. "primarily to finance student loans" said Espat.

Obviously recognizing that some degree of hope must be given to comfort the sometime militant student population, the promise came in the form of an institution dubbed "development financing limited" For some reason this promise reads like a page torn from Tony Quinn's book under the heading "Tell them what they want to hear.

Have we actually forgotten when, a few months ago, during the heights of raising fuel prices, former Mexican president Vicente Fox was brought to our shores and with the full concurrence of prime minister Musa, hoodwinked us with the false hope of cheaper fuel price by way of the establishment of Mexican fuel stations in the country. And so we hanged our collective hopes on Fox's singular promise. We returned to our respective corners. We lapped our collective tails between our legs.

Today, we remain saddled with high fuel prices. The presidency of Vicente Fox has gone into the history books and we are yet to see a single Mexican fuel station established anywhere in the country.

It is often said that "a promise is a comfort to a fool."

The year just ending was not an easy one, all political parties will be in full campaign mode in the New Year and so the combs will begin to fall to the floor. Take that which is rightfully yours. We have been punishing for much too long. Remember the promises of cheaper light, water and telephone rates? Listen to the promises as they are made because at the end of the day, none of us are fools.

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HONDURAS: Governed by Vested Interests

By Thelma Mejía *San José, Costa Rica - Monday 18 December 2006*

TEGUCIGALPA, (IPS) - Traditionally powerful families and drug traffickers have enormous political influence in Honduras today, according to analysts.

The elite families, which have gradually taken over party structures and decision-making posts in government, "are the groups that have what we could call 'legal' power," political scientist Ernesto Paz at the public National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH) told IPS.

"But then there are the others, who work behind the scenes and have links to organised crime, especially drug trafficking, which has a strong presence in this country," he

added. "These groups, which not only paralyse, but influence political reforms needed in this country, are generating a crisis of governability and weakening the party system," he said.

Paz and other analysts who talked to IPS said the families that exercise the greatest power in Honduras are Jewish or of Arab descent, and are involved in economic sectors like the "maquiladoras" (export assembly plants), energy, telecoms, tourism, banking and finance, the media, the cement industry and trade and commerce.

The study "Real Integration and Groups of Power in Central America" by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation of Germany says these vested interests have taken over the spectrum occupied by political parties in the region.

The study differentiates between "business governments," like that of El Salvador, and "pro-business governments" like the ones that have ruled Honduras and the rest of the countries in Central America, in which the link between government structures and the private sector have been less direct than in El Salvador. Investor Miguel Facussé Barjum, his son-in-law Fredy Nasser, energy magnate Schucry Kafie, and banker and industrialist Jaime Rosenthal are the most powerful men in Honduras. Another influential businessman is the Cuban-born José Lamas. c

Nasser and Kafie control the country's thermal energy industry, and Nasser's business interests include concessions to

operate the country's main airports, as well as shares in telephone companies in Guatemala.

Influential businessmen in the media, whose influence has grown since the 1990s, are Rafael Ferrari; Carlos Flores Facussé, a former president (1998 2002) and the nephew of Miguel Facussé; and Jorge Canahuati Larach.

Jesuit priest Ismael Moreno said these groups "are so interrelated and closely linked to the Honduran political system, where their meddling is very strong, that it can be stated that they handpick presidents

and other authorities, dictate the news agenda in the media, and are the main contributors to political campaigns." "The repetitive presence of certain last names in Congress and the executive branch is not fortuitous," Moreno, director of the Jesuit Reflection, Research and Communication Team (ERIC), told IPS. "They know how to intervene, request and demand. The state would seem to be at their service, and governments are seen as an instrument for obtaining power and profits.

"If they used to do a better job disguising their ambition, in the last decade they have gone over the top, and it would seem that this plundered and ruined country still has meat to chew on," he added.

Of Honduras' seven million people, 65 percent lived below the poverty line and 53 percent in extreme poverty in 2005, according to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

A presidential adviser who asked to remain anonymous for security reasons told IPS that "these groups are insatiable, they make one request after another. Two months ago, in a meeting with President Manuel Zelaya, they told him that in the 1980s, the most important political decisions were put to consultation in the military barracks, but that now they were here, the businesspeople and the media."

"You are only temporary, while we are permanent, they said. We want to be consulted about decisions, we want contracts and to participate in the public tenders, we want to express our opinions

on some appointments of public officials, and we want official advertising contracts, they added," according to the source.

Since then, the Zelaya administration, which took office in January 2006, has had friction with some of the country's most powerful business groups, because the cabinet includes members of the Jewish business community headed by Rosenthal, which is at loggerheads with the country's most influential families of Arab origin.

Rosenthal, who has run unsuccessfully for the presidency four times, belongs to the governing Liberal Party and has interests in areas like the media, the cement industry, beef exports, banks, insurance

who has interests in the timber industry. His camp includes business leaders involved in the tourist industry, biodiesel manufacturing — which has strong backing from the present administration — and the thermal energy industry.

Unconfirmed reports have also pointed to links between the government and members of the Guatemalan business community, who allegedly contributed substantially to the president's election campaign.

According to the governing party deputy to the Central American Parliament, Gloria Ouelí, this scenario "endangers the stability of the political

parties, because penetration by these groups is so overwhelming that we are being left without

"penetration by these groups is so overwhelming that we are being left without any true political leaders."

and telecoms. He played a key role in Zelaya's campaign.

His son, Yani Rosenthal, is now minister of the Presidency, in charge of coordinating all the ministries and the most important portfolios of public administration projects and credits.

Given Zelaya's marked differences with some power groups, who is he governing with?

With the Rosenthal family and another business sector not linked to the traditional structures, who intend, together with the president, "to set a distance between themselves and those who have exploited this country for years," said the presidential adviser who spoke to IPS.

This group is apparently led by the president's chief of staff Roberto Babún,

any true political leaders."

"It's not that their participation is a negative thing, they should participate. But they should let the politicians govern and not the other way around, that is to say, govern the politicians themselves, as we are seeing in practice. We should re-think how to modernise the political system and make political parties less elitist and more open to civil society and social participation," she said.

What most concerns Ouelí is what she calls the coopting of the party system by drug traffickers, about whom she says there are "strong indications that they have financed political campaigns. Political parties must open their books and give the public information about who finances (Please Turn To Page 11) 

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HONDURAS: Governed by Vested Interests

➡ (Continued From Page 10)
their campaigns, and in return for what," she said.

Alfredo Landaverde, an expert on drug trafficking issues and adviser to the state on security, said that "narco" penetration in Honduras can be seen in money laundering, car theft, forgery of documents,

trafficking of arms and persons, and the activities of "maras" or youth gangs. Drug trafficking has been seen in Honduras since 1977, although the country was mainly used in the past as a transit point. However, in the last decade, this has changed, as indicated by the seizures of enormous quantities of cocaine by the

police — more than 3,000 kg so far this year.

According to the governmental Honduran Institute for the Prevention of Alcoholism and Drug Addiction and Dependency, drug use is on the rise, and a majority of youngsters between the ages of 15 and 19 have tried some kind of illegal drug, especially cocaine.

The Institute reports that in the 1970s, local drug consumption was largely limited to marijuana. But cocaine, as well as crack, now both circulate widely. "And since 2002, small amounts of ecstasy and heroin have been seized, although their distribution is still limited," says the Institute.

Landaverde said drug trafficking activity is concentrated on the Caribbean and Atlantic coasts in the north and northeast, and in the extreme western part of the country. According to the UNAH Observatory on Violence, these are the regions with the highest levels of violent crime.

Drug traffickers launder their profits by "investing in luxury homes, ranches, companies and fishing boats, as well as small and medium-size businesses. But they also do so by investing in politics," said Landaverde, who clarified that there are no official statistics on money laundering in the country.

Two months ago, Marvin Ponce, a lawmaker with the leftist Democratic Unification party, stated that there were

legislators who had gained their seats with drug trafficking money, although he did not dare name names.

A former mayor from a town in Honduras told IPS that at least five mayors in the western provinces of Copán, Lempira and Ocotepeque had financed their campaigns with drug money. But "if I reveal their names, they'll kill me the next day," he said.

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) reported that around 100 tons of cocaine move through Honduras annually, while domestic consumption levels have soared in the last few years.

Most of the cocaine comes from Colombia and is on its way to the United States, according to the Honduran police and the DEA.

The DEA plans to establish an anti-drug military base in 2008 in the Atlantic coastal region of Mosquitia, one of the main drug trafficking points in Honduras due to its remote jungles, which are unconnected to the rest of the country by road.

The drug lords evade justice by means of bribery, threats and murder, said Landaverde.

Both the economic elites and the drug traffickers are consolidating their hold on power thanks to the fragility of democracy in the region, which "is in crisis," in the view of Paz.

"In the case of Honduras, one of the solutions to keep the state from remaining trapped in these networks is the construction and creation of citizen networks that strengthen society," the political scientist argued.

Belize Economics

➡ (Continued From Page 8)
crazy entities who feel that they could use the bond to foreclose on the economy somehow, but the bond issue makes total nonsense from a commercial point of view. "If it somehow did happen to find a "taker" the bond is storing up a disastrous burden on the Belize population in 17 years time....when of course the responsible politicians will no longer be around. The repayments would have to come from taxation on our workers, though it appears the prospect of the bonds ever being repaid are pretty much nil. No doubt a "rollover" in 17 years time is what the government has in mind, but with an already heavily indebted economy a rollover could be a pipedream. "Fourth: The billion dollar bond does not correct the causes of our disastrous economics. OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM HAS FAILED US! It has failed to provide justice for our people. It has failed to supply a decent education system for our children.

It has failed to keep our borders secure. It has failed to make proper health care available (take a look at the dreadful hospitals in PG and San Ignacio). It has failed to give us an accounting of how our national money has been (mis)spent for years now. It has failed to give us a properly trained police force we can call upon for help, instead of one that is often worse than the criminals. It has failed to create jobs for our people. It has caused a 300% increase in our cost of living over the last 10 years while failing to increase our wages. In short our political system has failed our people just as surely and dramatically as Communism failed the Russians."

The Old One shook his head. "Our system has long been a tool for the vested interests, and corrupt politicians," he concluded. "We have sunk into a type of Fascism under the guise of democracy where our people now serve the government instead of the government serving our people. There must be a change, and that change must come soon.

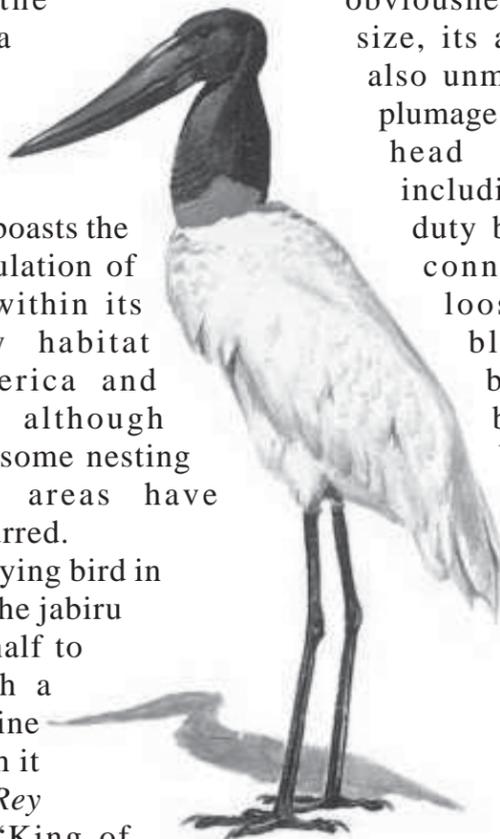
Jungle Walk

The Jabiru stork is Belize's biggest bird and one of the most easily recognized. This week, Independent Weekly gives you some more information on this fascinating creature, courtesy Jungle Walk field guide by Katie Stevens.

January is the time of year when the jabiru stork (*Jabiru mycteria*) begins refurbishing last year's nursery in preparation for this year's brood. No mean feat; constructed of large sticks intertwining, the jabiru nest is a platform as many as 8 feet across! It perches high in a tall, often dead, usually lone tree within a pine ridge or above the jungle bush. This overexposure of its whereabouts made this otherwise shy bird an easy target in the pre-protection

days when the jabiru was a commodity in the markets of Belize. Luckily, today's Belize boasts the healthiest population of these storks within its eight county habitat (Central America and Mexico), although destruction of some nesting and feeding areas have inevitably occurred.

The largest flying bird in the Americas, the jabiru is four and a half to five feet with a wingspan of nine feet. In Spanish it is known as *El Rey de Ellos*, or "King of them all"; in Belize it is demoted to "fillymingo" or even to "turk"! Aside from the



obviousness of its outsize, its appearance is also unmistakable. Its plumage is all white, its head all black—including the heavy duty bill; these are connected by a loose skinned black neck bordered below by a bright red band, comprising a simple but tasteful ensemble—all things considered. No one ever implied that the jabiru is just a pretty face!

The immature jabiru is an appropriate

brownish gray.

The storks feed in wetlands, around swamps and ponds, sometimes flying several miles in search of a favored food. These are many to choose among: fish, frogs and snails, reptiles and small mammals. Snakes seem to be high on the list of delectables, perhaps because the appetite which is worked up in the process of preparation. The jabiru will take a 6-foot snake and shake it, throw it up into the air and catch it, thrash it and bash it and finally tear it to pieces. Which it then eats with relish (but rarely piccalilli).

Jabirus come in solitary pairs which snare the duties of parenthood but, when the nesting season is over, they fly north with their young (2-4) to join up with the flocks of southern Mexico.

A Christmas Story

by Emory King

Here is a true story which happened over the Christmas Season a couple of years ago. A little old lady, obviously very poor, was trying to buy a Christmas ham. The shop was crowded with people pushing each other and calling out to the assistants behind the counter. Several small boys were scrambling around, under everybody's feet.

Unable to shout very loud she hoped to get the attention of one of the clerks by waving. She clutched her worn bag in one hand and waved with the other.....

Finally one of the clerks leaned over the counter. "What for you, lady?"

"One small ham", she said. "The smallest ham you got."

The young man went away and rummaged through the boxes of hams, first weighing one and then weighing another and at length came back with a ham and said, "Eleven dollars and twenty-five cents. Ok?"

The old woman bit her lip. "No. I am sorry. Don't you have anything smaller? I have only ten dollars."

She turned away with a hint of tears in her eyes.

The owner, who was at the cash register during the whole episode, told her to wait and called back the clerk. "It's all right, boy. Give her the ham for ten dollars."

With the ham safely in her shopping bag at her feet the old lady removed a worn ten dollar bill from her cloth purse and handed it to the owner. "God Bless you, sir", she said with a catch in her voice.

"That's all right", the owner said gruffly, a little embarrassed to show his Christmas spirit before the crowd of customers.

Suddenly someone shouted, "Stop that boy," and the old lady realized one of the little boys had grabbed her bag and run away.

He was fast and smart and before anyone could take action he was up Water Lane and gone.

Now the tears really came down the old woman's face and she wailed piteously. And wrung her hands. And started out of the shop.

"Come on boys," someone in the crowd shouted. "Let's help the lady." He waved a dollar in the air. Soon another hand went up and then another. And within a minute the money was collected and paid and another ham, a little larger than the stolen one, was forthcoming from the boxes.

And the owner even gave the little old lady a new bag to carry it in. Perhaps we haven't all gotten money-mad and cold to the needs of others.



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CONGRATULATIONS!



Proud parents Lisa & Albert V. Hoare Sr. attending the graduation ceremonies of their eldest child Ghislaine Hoare.

Ghislaine graduated magna cum laude, from Florida Southern College this December 16th with a Masters of Business Administration. Congratulations from her parents, family, and friends. Much success with your future endeavors.

Thirty Minute Country

➡ (Continued From Page 4)
appliances is as short lived as the appliances themselves. From power surges to power struggles in the home, how many family are still paying for items

New Years resolution for Primary schools in Belmopan!

Belmopan have joined forces to develop a Computer Literacy Initiative in time for the New Year. Currently there is no computer teaching within these primary schools and this project will initially give over 3,000 pupils access to resources and skills needed in the developing age of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).

The program will establish an essential long term and sustainable ICT presence within these schools where thereafter the Belmopan project could be the basis for further expansion to other Belize primary schools. The project will embrace the local community by running training classes for parents and providing access to the computer services. Development of these networked computer laboratories will enable the creation of an Educational Intranet that can be used as an educational resource and information portal for pupils, parents and teachers.

The benefits of such a scheme would give children basic computer skills for when they graduate from primary school which can then be developed in secondary school. Teachers will have access to a much wider spectrum of resources for their classes with the use of the internet and the administration of schools will be much more efficient with the use of the computers and Intranet. With only 13% of Belizeans having access to the internet compared to over 60% in America there is a drastic need for an ICT presence in schools to keep up with the needs for computer literacy in further education and future employment. The community will be influenced by this project as parents will have the ability to learn and develop their computing skills and enjoy the variety of benefits of being connected! The overall aim is to build Belize's competence of Information and Communication Technologies to bridge the gap of the digital divide.

Funding is being sought from the Commonwealth Foundation campaign 'Commonwealth Connects' and the key to being successful with the application is Partnerships. The project is solely run by volunteers, the support of parents and the Belize University who will work to maintain the computer laboratories as part of the sustainability. To develop the initiative it needs more support and collaborations which are vital to secure funding and to sustain the program. If you have any business propositions or partnership schemes that you feel will be of interest please contact the project leader, Fiona Fraser.

By working together we can ensure that the Primary Schools of Belmopan keep their New Years resolution!

that stopped working just months into the contract?

How many of us are sitting on sofas that looked so beautiful in the showroom, but which barely survived the transfer home; which, within days of arrival began to boast rips and tears and stains, providing well upholstered dens for baby mice and lizards?

How many lovingly selected cups and saucers cannot ever be placed upright for fear of some droppings dropping into them? Brand new, shiny kitchen cupboards last exactly 30 minutes before one of the hinges falls off, the draw pull stops pulling or they become dark scary places where pots and pans go in, but

never come out the same, where wildlife of any size may emerge in the night and scare the beejeezus out of your pet dog or cat or hubby seeking a nighttime snack.

I almost had a heart attack when I opened the washer one morning to find a baby iguana opening his mouth aggressively at me. To the day I have no idea where he/she went. He/she just disappeared "down there somewhere." I recently sold that washer, but harbor the secret fear that the new owner will meet a fully grown iguana some day when she sets out to hang out the wash. It's a guilt I must live with.

Just as I live with the remorse of not

taking better car of my car. Of not sleeping in her every night to guard her against gas and hubcap thieves and window smashing vandals. Of not getting out and personally inspecting the road for potholes the size of graves in front of Lord's Ridge Cemetery and trenches the size of bank vaults across the Lord's Bank Road. I am sorry, so sorry, my trusty Corolla that you are rusty, corroding in the salty air and choking with red dust. That bits and pieces fall out of you at random and you rattle like an old Landrover.

I apologize to you and all the other items I brought her, or bought here. You deserve a better, longer life.

Belize does not like to be called a third world country. But surely we are a 30 minute country. If you really like your Christmas presents, I suggest you leave them in the box. They're safer in there.

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(12/06)



ARIES

(Mar. 21-April 20)

Be prepared to neutralize any threats. Praise will be yours if you have been pursuing your goals. Your main concern will be to spend as little as possible of your own cash in the process.

TAURUS

(Apr. 21-may 21)

Use your charm, but don't sign or agree to anything. Focus on your domestic scene. Get together with friends or relatives. Be sure to take care of any minor ailments.

GEMINI

(May 22-June 21)

This is a wonderful day to look into courses or hobbies that interest you. Travel for business will not only bring you valuable information but also profits as well. You can win if you're open and up front with your boss.

CANCER

(June 22-July 22)

You can enjoy your involvement in organizations that make charitable contributions. Travel will be fun and entertaining. It's time to reevaluate your motives.

LEO

(July 23-Aug 22)

Offers of joint ventures are likely. Romantic opportunities are evident if you get involved in large groups or organizations. Take care of the needs of elders in your family.

VIRGO

(Aug. 23 -Sept. 23)

Take a long look at your present direction and consider your professional options. You can sort out any differences you have in an amiable manner. Be careful if a friend asks you for advice.

LIBRA

(Sept. 24-Oct. 23)

You may be upset if someone has borrowed something that belongs to you. You can expect changes in your financial situation as well as in your status. Accept the inevitable.

SCORPIO

(Oct. 24 - Nov. 23)

Fitness or weight loss programs will help your self esteem. Be innovative. However, be careful with luggage; it may be rerouted.

SAGITTARIUS

(Nov. 23-Dec. 21)

Try to be precise in your communications. You can make money if you concentrate on producing services or goods that will make domestic chores easier. This will be a good day for research and for sitting down with some good, informative reading material.

CAPRICORN

(Dec 22.- Jan. 20)

It might be best to work on your own; if possible, do your job out of your home today. Try to join groups of interest such as ballroom dance classes or perhaps an internet organization. This may not be the time to lend or borrow.

AQUARIUS

(Jan. 21 -Feb. 19)

Don't avoid your true feelings. Old friends may not like your choices. Broaden your horizons and look into programs that will teach you awareness and relaxation.

PISCES

(Feb. 20-Mar. 20)

Uncertain get rich quick schemes will not be as lucrative as you anticipate. You must try to help. The knowledge you have will enhance your reputation.

IMF roadmap for Belize 2007

To the Members of the International Financial Community:

At the request of the Government of Belize, I would like to inform you of recent economic developments in Belize and the country's relationship with the International Monetary Fund.

Over the past two years, the authorities have made commendable strides in correcting serious macroeconomic imbalances based on their adjustment strategy. Tax measures and primary expenditure cuts have led to a sharp improvement in the central government's primary balance, which has moved from a deficit of 3 percent of GDP in FY2003/04 (April to March) to a surplus of 3 percent of GDP in FY2005/06. At the same time, monetary policy was tightened through the sterilization of social security deposits and increases in reserve requirements. These measures have contributed to a narrowing of the country's large current account deficit.

However, these efforts alone will not be sufficient to bring the economy back onto a sustainable path, and for this reason the authorities are undertaking further adjustment efforts during FY2006/07 and beyond. Accordingly, they are targeting a further increase in the primary fiscal surplus to 3 percent of GDP in FY 2006/07 and to 4-4 percent of GDP in subsequent years. This fiscal improvement would be achieved by saving the bulk of projected revenues from oil production, enhancing non-oil revenue collection, and restraining current expenditures. A prudent

monetary policy stance will be maintained in order to underscore the authorities' commitment to the fixed exchange rate regime. Structural reforms are envisaged to support macroeconomic tightening. These reforms center on the fiscal area (a e.g., tax reform, pension reform, public debt management), monetary policy implementation, financial sector regulation and supervision, and improved economic statistics.

Even with this additional adjustment effort, as well as the additional official financing that is being provided by multilateral and bilateral lenders, large fiscal and balance of payments financing gaps would remain in 2007 and beyond. It is against this background that Belize has sought to engage with its external private creditors to achieve an orderly and cooperative debt restructuring. High participation by private creditors in the debt exchange offer that was launched on December 18, 2006 would help support orderly macroeconomic adjustment, restore fiscal and external sustainability, and establish the conditions for strong economic growth.

The International Monetary Fund has welcomed the progress the authorities have made in addressing Belize's serious macroeconomic imbalances in the context of a homegrown adjustment strategy. Nonetheless, Belize's situation will remain vulnerable for quite some time, allowing little room for slippage in implementing the policy framework. We stand ready to continue to assist the authorities in implementing and monitoring their financial and structural adjustment policies, and to provide technical assistance as needed.

Hunt for good food

With Anthony Hunt

Li Chee

Freetown Rd., Belize City

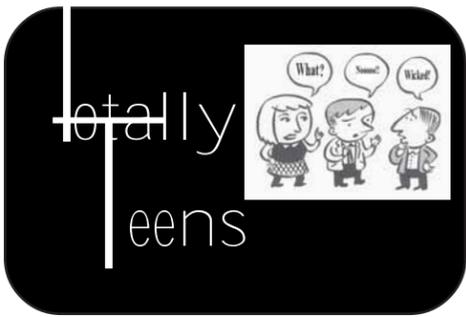


Opposite the Old Technical College, Li Chee (a.k.a. Freetown Kentucky) offers quality, sure value, speedy service and unequalled atmosphere. For just five dollars you can get several pieces of fried chicken (a.k.a. greasy bag, nice-n-nasty) well seasoned and deliciously cooked to order with enough fries to keep you within the Atkins diet parameters.

Li Chee's production line is as close to a KFC production of cooked order as you get. The paint work and fixtures may leave a lot to be desired, and lines will be long at all times but just holler a carefully constructed few words, "Five dollar bress", chop up, fries, latta peppa" and don't lose sight of your objective, to get outa there with a steamy hot styrofoam package of Li Chees.

One US customs officer in Miami once asked (in a southern accent), "Did you bring any of the Lee Chees?". So no matter whether you are rushing home to Vista Del Mar with no time to cook, or need to take a remembrance of home to your kin in NYC, stop off at Li Chee, keep your head down, muscle into the crowd, and get what you deserve. It is as close to chicken heaven as you can get, and the word is spreading worldwide.

Fly Tropic Air - Fly Tropic Air - Fly Tropic Air
"The Airline Of Belize"



Caffeine and Energy Boosting Drugs: Energy Drinks

What are energy drinks?

Energy drinks are beverages like Red Bull, Venom, Adrenaline Rush, 180, ISO Sprint, and Whoopass, which contain large doses of caffeine and other legal stimulants like ephedrine, guarana, and ginseng. Energy drinks may contain as much as 80 mg of caffeine, the equivalent of a cup of coffee. Compared to the 37 mg. of caffeine in a Mountain Dew, or the 23 mg. in a Coca-Cola Classic, that's a big punch. These drinks are marketed to people under 30, especially to college students, and are widely available both on and off campus.

Are there short-term dangers to drinking energy drinks?

Individual responses to caffeine vary, and these drinks should be treated carefully because of how powerful they are. Energy drinks' stimulating properties can boost the heart rate and blood pressure (sometimes to the point of palpitations), dehydrate the body, and, like other stimulants, prevent sleep.

Energy drinks should not be used while exercising as the combination of fluid loss from sweating and the diuretic quality of the caffeine can leave the user severely dehydrated.

Know what you're drinking. Energy drinks are not necessarily bad for you, but they shouldn't be seen as "natural alternatives" either. Some of the claims they make like "improved performance and concentration" can be misleading. If you think of them as highly-caffeinated drinks, you'll have a more accurate picture of what they are and how they affect you. You wouldn't use Mountain Dew as a sports drink. And a drink like Red Bull and vodka is more like strong

coffee and whisky than anything else.

What happens when energy drinks are combined with alcohol? Energy drinks are also used as mixers with alcohol. This combination carries a number of dangers:

- Since energy drinks are stimulants and alcohol is a depressant, the combination of effects may be dangerous. The stimulant effects can mask how intoxicated you are and prevent you from realizing how much alcohol you have consumed. Fatigue is one of the ways the body normally tells someone that they've had enough to drink.
- The stimulant effect can give the person the impression they aren't impaired. No matter how alert you feel, your blood alcohol concentration (BAC) is the same as it would be without the energy drink. Once the stimulant effect wears off, the depressant effects of the alcohol will remain and could cause vomiting in your sleep or respiratory depression.
- Both energy drinks and alcohol are very dehydrating (the caffeine in energy drinks is a diuretic). Dehydration can hinder your body's ability to metabolize alcohol and will increase the toxicity, and therefore the hangover, the next day.

If you are between the ages of 11 and 18 and would like to express your opinions email us at:

independentnewspaperbz@gmail.com

Boxing Day TKO: Belizeans get pumped, AGAIN!

➡ (Continued From Page 13)

That is a serious warning for Belizeans in Belize by the IMF, no less. Fuel prices have already gone up...just six days after the DG's release, without any official releases being

issued, at least, not in Belize.

But there is more there in Dcotor Rodrigo's letter. I'll sit back and let the pundits dissect it then we can talk. But you can't say you weren't forewarned. Can you?

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