

Belize's leading newspaper

Mandatory US\$18 travel insurance for tourists

The Belize Hotel Association has rejected the travel insurance mandate, saying the justification for such a requirement has not been "satisfactorily established."

BELIZE CITY, Mon. Jan. 17, 2022
 The Belize Tourism Board (BTB) announced a new travel insurance mandate last Thursday in a press release. The new requirements go into effect on February 15 and apply to all tourists visiting the country. The release from the BTB states, "all



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PUC extends deadline for comments on electricity rate increase

BEL wants to refrain from changing the current rates until after 2023



Andrew Marshalleck — Chairman, BEL

BELIZE CITY, Mon. Jan. 17, 2022
 On Friday, the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) extended the deadline for public consultation on the proposed electricity rate increase outlined in the Final Draft of the BEL

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Legal Year 2022 commences

During her presentation, Attorney General Hon. Magali Marin-Young announced a restructuring of the high courts in Belize and recasting of the roles of the Chief Justice

BELIZE CITY, Mon. Jan. 17, 2022
 The opening of the new legal year 2022-2023 took place this morning with a virtual commencement exercise coordinated and produced by the Government of Belize Press Office, using the court's new virtual judicial management system, APEX. The virtual commencement featured all the typical pomp and circumstance associated with the opening of the new legal year and featured important announcements of new judicial



Hon. Madam Michelle Arana – Chief Justice (Ag.) and Hon. Magali Marin-Young – Attorney General, Belize

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Customs officer, 43, dies in RTA



Rudolph Williams – deceased

(See story on page 4)

New CEO at MOHW; new Deputy Governor at Central Bank



Dr. Julio Sabido -- new CEO, MOHW

by Khaila Gentle

BELIZE CITY, Fri. Jan. 14, 2022
 Both the Ministry of Health and Wellness (MOHW) and the Central Bank of Belize announced new administrative appointments this week. Over the past few days, the Ministry of Health selected Dr. Julio Sabido as its new CEO. And while the

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CITCO fine-tunes portfolios

BELIZE CITY, Mon. Jan. 17, 2022
 Today, the Belize City Council announced a change in the portfolios assigned to the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, and various Councilors. The fine-tuning of portfolios is being done after the council has been in

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Local welder shot dead by gunman who entered room
(See story on page 13)

Belizean students receive Cuban medical scholarships

Thirteen Belizean students received scholarships through the Cuban government

by Charles Gladden

BELIZE CITY, Mon. Jan. 17, 2022

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Science, and Technology, in collaboration with the Embassy of the Republic of Cuba in Belize and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Immigration, held a ceremony at the House of Culture on January 13, 2022, to officially recognize thirteen scholarship recipients under the Cuba-Belize Scholarship Programme 2022. Ten of the thirteen awardees this year will be majoring in medicine, while two will be pursuing a degree in nursing, and one will be majoring in psychology.

Speaking at the award ceremony was the Minister of Education, Science, and Technology, Hon. Francis Fonseca, who highlighted the generosity of the government and people of Cuba despite the illegal and

unjust embargo imposed on their nation by the United States, and the current difficulties being endured globally as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Minister Fonseca told the students that he always tells students who travel abroad, that they are ambassadors of Belize.

“Each and every one of you is an ambassador of Belize when you’re out there,” said Minister Fonseca.

“What you do out there, what you do in Cuba, reflects on you, it reflects on your family, and it reflects on the people of Belize. It’s a beautiful opportunity. It’s an honor to get this scholarship. Many, many people try, and you are the chosen ones this year. So, take full advantage of this opportunity. Make

the most of it. Make yourself proud, make your families proud, and make Belize proud,” he said.

Minister Fonseca also urged the awardees to be resolute in the pursuit of their goals despite challenges. He also encouraged them to respect and embrace the Cuban culture, people and values, and appreciate their

experiences during their time there. The scholarship is awarded in full by the Government of the Republic of Cuba. This year will mark 27 years of diplomatic relations between Belize and Cuba. Over the course of those years, 200+ Belizean students have had the opportunity to study in Cuba.



Belize chairs 48th meeting of Community Council of Ministers (CARICOM)

The meeting held on Friday was chaired by Hon. Eamon Courtenay. Ambassador Amalia Mai was also present.



Hon. Eamon Courtenay and Ambassador Amalia Mai

by Khaila Gentle

BELMOPAN, Fri. Jan. 14, 2022

The forty-eighth meeting of the Community Council of Ministers was held on Friday, January 14, under the chairmanship of Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade, and Immigration, Hon. Eamon Courtenay. At the meeting, which was held virtually, several key issues were discussed, including the Plan of Action for CSME implementation and the continued reform of the CARICOM Secretariat; the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on global production, freight rates, consumers, and businesses; and the deteriorating political, security, and humanitarian situation in Haiti.

Also present at the meeting was Chief Executive Officer of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and

Foreign Trade, Amalia Mai, who updated the Council on preparations being made for the Thirty-Third Inter-Sessional Meeting of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community, to be held from February 28 to March 1 in San Pedro Town. She also spoke on preparations for the IV CARICOM-SICA Summit, to be held on March 2.

The Community Council of Ministers is made up of ministers responsible for CARICOM affairs in all the member states. It is the second-highest organ of CARICOM, just below the Conference of Heads of Government. The Community Council’s main responsibility is the development of CARICOM’s strategic planning and the coordination of its economic integration, functional cooperation, and external relations.

Some cruise ships cancel stops to Belize



BELIZE CITY, Mon. Jan. 17, 2022

According to the chairman of the Belize Tourism Board (BTB), Evan Tillett, at least 12 cruise ships have canceled stops in Belize so far amid the new Omicron wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. He also told local media that some overnight cancellations have also been recorded, but the numbers are nowhere close to the number of canceled bookings that were seen at the start of the pandemic. He said that they are also seeing positive signs in the industry, since a number of persons are re-booking.

The Omicron variant is proving to be just as infectious as scientists had estimated it would be, with new outbreaks of the COVID-19 virus being seen worldwide. Fortunately, the symptoms resulting from infections brought on by this new variant are, in a majority of cases, comparatively mild, and infected persons are cleared of the illness in a much shorter period of time.

At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, when a no-sail order was put in place, the cruise tourism industry came to a standstill for almost a year, and a few months after the resumption of cruise ship visits to

various tourist destinations, including Belize, the industry is now, in light of the Omicron-driven surge in cases, taking precautionary measures to avoid the type of shutdown that occurred in the initial stages of the pandemic.

Some cruise ships have thus opted to cancel their scheduled stops in Belize.

Last Saturday, the “conditional sailing order” put in place by the US Centers for Disease Control expired, and the agency transitioned to a new voluntary COVID-19 risk mitigation program for cruise ships. The new regulation includes mandatory vaccination for passengers and crew members, testing before boarding the vessel, and mandatory indoor mask-wearing by persons onboard ships except while they are eating or drinking.

The CDC has warned travelers to avoid going on cruises due to the Omicron variant. According to the agency, 14,803 positive cases of COVID-19 were reported between December 30 and January 12 on cruise ships — 95 times more cases than the 155 infections reported between Dec. 1 and Dec. 14.

Health Minister speaks on curfew extension, Omicron wave and transition

BELIZE CITY, Mon. Jan. 17, 2022

During an interview on Friday, the newly appointed Minister of Health and Wellness, Hon. Kevin Bernard, informed the public that the curfew regulations currently in place will be extended for an additional month. He said that the Statutory Instrument (SI) which put the curfew and other current Covid-19 prevention measures in place will remain basically the same, except for a relaxation in restrictions on sporting activities, which can now be held publicly, although the number of persons attending such events should not exceed 50% of the venue's capacity. He shared, however, that he is to meet with the COVID-19 response team today to take a look at the whole situation and determine if any additional changes to the regulations would be needed.

"We are going to ensure that that section of the SI, all other regulations

will remain the same except that we are now going to allow for 50% in terms of sports. It's something that as the Minister of Sports at the time, I have lobbied over and over and we have been saying it over and over, get vaccinated, and so we have said that if you are in an enclosed location, for example the Civic Centre, you want to have a basketball event, it must be at 50% of the population can be there, and it must be placed the necessary 6-foot regulation, social distancing, proper markers must be put in place, so that it's controlled," Bernard stated during his interview.

Increased enforcement of COVID-19 measures are also needed within local businesses, which are currently being battered by the Omicron wave of the COVID-19 pandemic — with as many as 90% of all companies in Belize being affected by staff shortages due to Covid-19 infections, local

reports say. Minister Bernard said that he will meet with the Senior Public Health Inspector to assess the issue of enforcement in the public, since he has received reports from COVID enforcement officers who are trying to ensure that people follow guidelines.

"One of the challenges I, we, have is that some people are not taking them serious, and I think that we have to strengthen that. I think we have to look at working closely with the police to ensure that police is also assisting in the enforcement of the laws that exist and the regulations, so it's a matter of concern which I have raised, and I will be discussing that with the CEO and the team," Minister Bernard said during his interview.

He added, "We're at a stage where Omicron is creating rampage across the country; we don't know all who are walking out there with Covid-19 because of the Omicron and the level of symptoms that it offers, minimal to mild."

Minister Bernard takes on the tasks of heading the ministry at a pivotal time in the Covid-19 pandemic, as a new, highly transmissible variant rips through the population and at a time when the Ministry is lacking key technical personnel. He said that filling those posts will be his first priority. Minister Bernard disagrees with remarks made in some quarters that the Health Minister must be a doctor, and noted that sound administrative capacity to lead the ministry is key.

"I think that the Minister of Health and any Minister that leads this ministry should be someone that has the administrative capacity. You leave the technical work to technical people,



Kevin Bernard,
Minister of Health and Wellness

and that's why the CEO and the head of units, these are the doctors, these are the persons that know the profession. These are the people that will guide. While the criticism may be, 'oh, the minister is not a doctor,' I have had the experience managing a town for 3 years, I've had experience in many areas, but trust me, I am here committed to work for the best interest of this ministry," he said.

In regard to the transition occurring within the ministry as a change in leadership takes place, Minister Bernard said that there is no bad blood between the previous Health Minister, Hon. Chebat, and himself, adding that they have already met to exchange notes.

"So, I can only expect that will continue, and like both of us shared when we sat down together, that we are here to work with each other. He understands as well what were some of the challenges, and he is sharing some of his experiences with me, and where we can make better improvements on some of those things. So, there is no such animosity," Minister Bernard said.

42 new cases at CFZ. Will land borders reopen next month?

by *Khaila Gentle*

COROZAL, Fri. Jan. 14, 2022

Last week, the Ministry of Health and Wellness began performing bulk COVID-19 testing at the Corozal Free Zone, and on Friday, January 14, forty-two new cases of the virus were identified—a total of 14% of the 296 investors and employees who were swabbed. The detection of these additional cases took place after 173 persons were found to be COVID-19 positive on Wednesday and brought the total number of infections to 215.

According to CEO of the Corozal Free Zone, Neri Ramirez, all those who tested positive were asymptomatic and were sent home so that they could be quarantined for seven days. The majority of those tested on Wednesday were also asymptomatic. The total number of persons at the CFZ who have been tested so far now stands at 1,298, and this, says Ramirez, is the majority of the Corozal Free Zone's population. The CEO further noted that 159 persons received vaccine booster shots recently, bringing the percentage of individuals who have gotten their boosters to almost 100%. And when asked how the sudden rise in COVID-19 cases has been affecting business, he pointed out that only three stores out of a total of 200 have had to close, meaning that 98.5% of the Free Zone remains in operation.

The sudden rise in cases at the CFZ has occurred in tandem with a surge in cases across the country. At the beginning of the most recent wave of COVID-19 following the detection of the Omicron variant in the country, the Government of Belize postponed the reopening of the country's land



Neri Ramirez,
Corozal Free Zone CEO

borders from January to February. But in the face of the Omicron variant and the rapid ongoing spread of infections, it remains to be seen whether the date will be pushed back once again. In a virtual interview with the media, Minister of Health Hon. Kevin Bernard stated that Cabinet has yet to make a final decision on the matter.

"The team at the Ministry has already forwarded their recommendations in terms of what needs to be put in place—what needs to be there for the preparation of the borders. We have to make sure we address the issue of testing, we address the issue of what requirements will be allowed for those going over on a 24-hour period, for those going for over 24-hours, and all of these things are being looked at," said Bernard.

Hon. Bernard stated that the safety of citizens and the health of the nation will always be taken into consideration, but he is also of the belief that we should ensure that the economy continues to thrive. He also said that the Ministry plans to take "whatever is the best approach" when it comes to the reopening of the borders.

Taiwan-Belize Economic Cooperation Agreement (ECA) now in effect

by *Khaila Gentle*

BELIZE CITY, Sat. Jan. 15, 2022

A press release from the Embassy of the Republic of China (Taiwan) announced that the Economic Cooperation Agreement (ECA), signed by the governments of Taiwan and Belize back in September of 2020, came into effect on Saturday. The mutually beneficial agreement is expected to give a much-needed boost to bilateral trade and to benefit both countries.

According to the release, "The ECA provides preferential treatment for Belize's 199 items of goods, including key agricultural and fisheries products such as lobster, beef, pork, chicken, juices, and sugar. In addition, the ECA also grants preferential tariffs for Taiwan's 33 products to Belize, including flat-rolled steels, tools (such as pliers, wrenches, screwdrivers, etc.), brakes, and cycle parts."

The increased presence of high-quality "Made in Belize" products in the Taiwan market will help generate an increase in foreign reserves and create additional employment and business opportunities in Belize. The agreement is also intended to attract greater investment from Taiwan to Belize and vice versa, strengthen our diplomatic ties, and deepen economic exchange between Belize, Taiwan, and the greater Caribbean region.

"Currently, Taiwanese companies have invested in Belize mainly in financial and insurance, manufacturing, and retail and wholesale. The accumulative value of Taiwan's investment to Belize has reached 142.02 million Belizean dollars," stated the press release.

Through the ECA, Taiwan will also be providing financial and technical assistance to the country for the development of institutions involved in trade, including in the areas of plant and animal health.

Coast Guard officer and policeman stabbed in separate incidents

by Charles Gladden

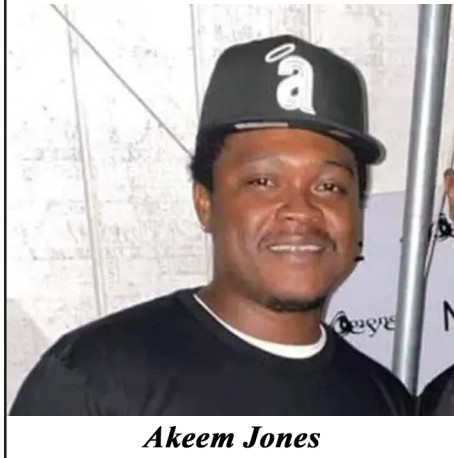
BELIZE CITY, Sun. Jan. 16, 2022

On Friday night, a police officer, Akeem Jones, 27, was stabbed while trying to part a fight in Belize City. Sometime after eleven o'clock, Jones and his companions were ending a night of socializing at a local establishment, when they saw two men assaulting someone at the corner of Water Lane and West Street. According to Jones, he recognized the person being beaten and stepped out of his vehicle to separate the participants in the fight. At that point, the man who was being assaulted took the opportunity to flee from the scene; however his two assailants then turned their attention to Jones and attacked him. Jones was able to free himself from the grip of the two men, and got into his vehicle, and drove away. He then realized, however, that he had been stabbed on his left hand and behind his right ear.

"We are investigating this matter. He was stabbed indeed. The nature



Kyle Humes



Akeem Jones

surrounding the stabbing incident is being investigated because the establishment has surveillance video and we will do further reviews," noted Communications Director for the Belize Police Department, ASP Fitzroy Yearwood.

Since then, police have detained Steven Flowers, 28, of Majestic Alley.

The second law enforcement officer to be assaulted over the weekend is Kyle Humes, 25, an officer of the Belize Coast Guard who was ambushed and stabbed outside of his home in Belize City. According to police, a little after 1:00 on Sunday morning, Humes had arrived at his home on Hart Street and, when exiting his vehicle, he was attacked by two men dressed in dark clothing, both of whom were armed with knives.

Humes received injuries to his upper right arm and face, and he also received two stab wounds to his left palm.

"From what the investigators put in this report, they are yet to do a detailed interview, because when Mr. Humes arrived at the hospital, the importance was for him to receive treatment for those injuries, and I know they were to follow up with him in obtaining a statement. Hopefully, when we get that statement, this attack was direct and personal, so we would get a better understanding of what may have caused these assailants to attack him in a brutal way," stated ASP Yearwood as he addressed local media about the matter.

Both Jones and Humes were transported to the Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital, where they have been listed in a stable condition.

Family Court, Court of Appeal to be relocated

The Family Court will be relocated to the Charles Bartlett Hyde Building, while the Court of Appeal will be moved temporarily to the former NBB building

by Khaila Gentle

BELIZE CITY, Mon. Jan. 17, 2022

At the Judiciary of Belize's opening ceremony for the 2022 Legal Year, Attorney General Hon. Madam Magali Marin Young spoke on the work that has been done during her first year in office as well as plans for the upcoming year, including the relocation of the Family Court and the Court of Appeal. In her address, the Attorney General announced that the Family Court is soon to be relocated to the Charles Bartlett Hyde Building on Mahogany Street Extension. She noted that the court's current location is unsuitable, since there is no parking space on the premises and there is limited space inside the building, which is a fire hazard. There will be more space for the operation at the new location, and the new layout will make it possible for several mediation facilities to be created, she said.

She also noted that, within the past year, she has been able to thoroughly assess the extent of neglect, and the number of challenges that exist, both within her ministry and throughout the Judiciary.



Court of Appeal

"When I assumed office, both the Acting Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and the Acting President of the Court of Appeal reported that their respective courtrooms and chambers had leaking roofs, that judges' chambers were moldy, and some infested with woodlice," she stated.

As a result, the Court of Appeal and several offices of the Supreme Court will be relocated to the former National Bank of Belize building on Regent Street so that the current building can be properly repaired.

In addition to commenting on the infrastructural issues that the Judiciary has been facing for quite some time now, the Attorney General also spoke on other issues, including plans for legislative reform, the renovation of several Magistrate's Court buildings, and the appointment of four new magistrates.

Customs officer, 43, dies in RTA

(From page 1)

by Khaila Gentle

BELIZE CITY, Mon. Jan. 17, 2022

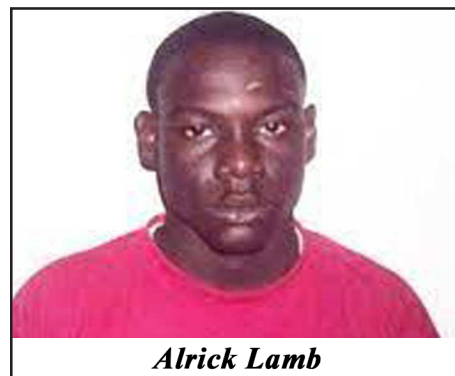
A Belize City man lost his life in a traffic accident that occurred on the George Price Highway on Saturday, January 15. According to police reports, somewhere between Miles 17 and 18 on the highway, 43-year-old Rudolph Sylvester Williams, who was heading from Independence village in Stann Creek to Belize City, lost control of his white Nissan Armada, which veered off the highway and overturned.

Williams was flung out of the vehicle, and was severely injured as a result. Upon arriving at the scene at around 10:30 that night, police found Williams lying motionless, and all indications were that he was already dead.

Reports are that the vehicle was found extensively damaged. Investigators have indicated that Williams was not wearing a seatbelt at the time of the accident. The police are currently still investigating.

Williams was a career customs officer and the officer in charge of the Big Creek station.

Belize City man shot while riding bicycle



Alrick Lamb

by Charles Gladden

BELIZE CITY, Mon. Jan. 17, 2022

A Belize City man was shot sometime after 1:00 on Saturday morning. According to reports, Alrick Lamb, 26, was riding his bicycle on Antelope Street Extension, and as he neared the Collet Education and Resource Center, and was turning into a lane, someone in a vehicle drove beside him and fired several shots at him. Lamb was hit in the thigh and ankle. He is currently listed in a stable condition at the Karl Heusner

Memorial Hospital.

This shooting follows the fatal shooting of a local welder, Dorian Tzac, 25, in the same area just days before, but the Communications Director of the Belize Police Department, ASP Fitzroy Yearwood, does not believe that there is necessarily a connection between the two incidents.

"The person in question, Mr. Lamb, is no stranger to the law, and we wouldn't want to say it is an act of retaliation, because he has his own problems in that area," Yearwood said.

"We must say that with the police presence over there it is alarming to see that people are still trying to elude the law and commit their agenda at their own will. We want to let it known to them that we will not stop our patrols in that area and we will go hard and fast after them. It's up to them if they want to be caught up with the law or keep the peace," Yearwood went on to state.

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Bad timing, CEOs?

Mon. Jan. 17, 2022

The recent Cabinet reshuffle, with the principal focus on the beleaguered Ministry of Health and Wellness, which experienced great unease and upheavals at the CEO level during the tenure of Minister Michel Chebat, may lead to improvement in the situation in that ministry under newly assigned Health Minister Kevin Bernard; but the situation begs the question, if this whole CEO matter needs to be seriously examined to determine if it has delivered the desired improvements in performance and services to the public over the previous post of Permanent Secretary. With the benefit of hindsight and careful analysis, government may now determine where the weaknesses lie in its CEO arrangement, and what can be done to correct those shortcomings, or if, indeed, as has been suggested before, it is worthwhile reverting to the previous system of Permanent Secretaries.

First of all, it should be acknowledged that the absence of major public outbursts in other government ministries is not an indication that they have all been functioning at the optimal level of efficiency. The situation in the MOHW may have escalated due to personality issues concerning Minister Chebat, but, unlike other ministries, the MOHW was enduring tremendous stress and demands for services due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Only when a tool or machinery is tested under stressful conditions, will the inherent weaknesses be revealed. The easy deduction is that it was just a case of a minister mishandling his CEO, so that there was friction, and thus CEOs were going in and out of the position. But a real "forensic"

analysis will confirm if there are indeed some structural deficiencies in the current CEO structure inside the public service that leads to such friction and upheavals. For that matter, other ministries may be quietly stumbling with shortcomings due to the CEO arrangement, but this goes unnoticed because there has been no great spotlight and stress that can parallel what the MOHW faces due to Covid.

There have recently been complaints from the current Commissioner of Police about the existence of "rogue cops" within the ranks of his Police Department, and it is his endeavor to try and weed them out. But it has also recently been revealed that, during the past UDP administration, it was the norm, in fact even an apparent requirement, for an aspiring recruit to receive a recommendation letter from the then police minister. The highly competitive recruit squad process was thus tainted by political cronyism, and we may now be reaping the chaff from this flawed exercise. And it makes us wonder, in light of the current national crime and corruption problem, if similar practices had become the norm in our

governance process, where political favoritism is prioritized over merit and ability to perform. With the recent reports of the Commission of Inquiry into the "fire sale" of government vehicles in the last months of the UDP administration, as well as the still to be disclosed final report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Immigration Department during the same UDP tenure, it would seem that corruption has probably spread throughout our government system.

In some decades past, Belizean visitors to Chetumal used to tell stories of the practice of "murdida" they encountered while dealing with some Mexican officials in different agencies, i.e. traffic, immigration, police. Not all officials are corrupt, of course, but those who are can give a bad name to their whole department; and of late, Belizeans have experienced similar situations on our own soil from corrupt Belize officials.

From all indications, it was the first-time UDP government of 1984 that saw the need to enlist Executive Officers in the ministries of government then under the stewardship of the established Permanent Secretary system. The reasoning may have seemed justified at the time. After all, from self-government in 1964, Belize was ruled by a PUP government, and naturally, all the heads of department and permanent secretaries were appointed under a PUP administration. Being positions with "tenure," those top individuals in the public service may have been viewed, or because of their behavior were considered, by the new UDP government leaders to be uncooperative or not showing allegiance to their new political bosses. There might have been some truth to that allegation, for long service and acquaintance had to have had an effect on the public service members; but, likewise, the landslide victory for the UDP also had to have been a result of many former PUP voters casting their ballots for the UDP, and some of them likely were public officers. Nevertheless, after decades of PUP rule, it would have to be considered natural that a period of accommodation and adjustment would be needed for the new leaders to enjoy the full confidence and enthusiasm of the various heads of department and permanent secretaries they encountered on assuming their ministerial posts. Were there some real "bad apples" among the permanent secretaries they inherited from the PUP, why the UDP felt they had to install Executive Officers alongside them to ensure their agenda was being followed? Or were the UDP too hasty in their decision to employ Executive Officers? Timing is an important factor in most major decisions, and twenty-twenty hindsight would indicate that a little more patience might have served them and the country better.

Belize inherited a Westminster style of government from our former colonial rulers, and in this system, where the public service is concerned, it shouldn't matter which political party forms the government. According to en.wikipedia.org, "Permanent secretaries are the non-political civil service chief executives of government departments, who generally hold their position for a number of years (thus 'permanent') at a ministry as distinct from the changing political secretaries of state to whom they report and provide advice." What they call "political secretaries of state" is what we refer to as our "ministers of government." So, a properly functioning civil service should perform its tasks professionally regardless of which party forms the government. And the Public Service Commission is there to ensure that they do their job professionally.

Well, then, after changing places with the UDP a few times, with executive officers alongside the permanent secretaries, the PUP finally decided, when they enjoyed an overwhelming majority in the House in 1998, to go all the way and abolish the permanent secretary post altogether, while replacing the executive officer with a full CEO (chief executive officer) post. And, regretfully, we now know what the unbridled political control of the public service machinery has cost the nation over the past two

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Our country's name is Belize. please!

Dear Editor,

Harnessing a country's collective identity can contribute to domestic and international prestige. This can instill patriotism and nationalistic sentiments. Belize, with its original inhabitants and immigrant population, needs to forge common ground to ensure its survival in the new global environment.

Writing on "Social Conflicts and Collective Identities", authors, Patrick G. Coy and Lynne M. Woehrlé, state: "How important it is for groups in a social conflict to maintain a strong collective identity throughout the conflict process". This is especially important in territorial disputes and international conflicts. By allowing the translating of the name "Belize," the country has been supporting a dual identity, one legal and the other illegal, when it should be supporting one single identity.

Passing legislation to reaffirm the name "Belize" or the passing of a proclamation prohibiting the translation of the country's name would strengthen the name and the country's identity. This way, only the name Belize would be used in official and diplomatic circles at home and abroad, including at the OAS, leading to a final resolution of the name conflict.

A quick check at the Belize Archives & Records Service will show that the name of Belize was established by the "Belize

Ordinance, 19733 . This was done by way of a proclamation by Acting Governor R.N. Posnett, dated 31st of May, 1973. The Ordinance states that, "On and after the first day of June, 1973 the name of the territory which immediately before the said first day of June constitutes the colony of British Honduras shall be BELIZE" – not Belice!

The Constitution of Belize dealt with the definition of Belize under one single name, Belize, and Chapter I, 1. (1) "The State and the Constitution" clearly established Belize as a democratic and sovereign State within the Central American and Caribbean region.

Chapter I, 1. (2) further states that "Belize comprises the land and sea areas defined in Schedule I of this Constitution, which immediately before Independence Day constituted the colony of Belize."

Neither of the two documents mentioned above provides for the translation of the name Belize to any other name. And, even though some countries allow for their name translation, Belize should insist on a stop to this practice, especially in light of the unfounded territorial claim by Guatemala.

The use of the country's proper name would strengthen the nation's identity by eliminating the dual identity which has been attributed to the unfounded claim itself.

Ewart Robateau, MSCM

Bad timing, CEOs?

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decades.

So now, as governments come and go, the CEO's get changed. And not only do the army of workers in the public service departments now have to adjust to a new CEO whenever there is a change of government, but more than that, the new CEO has to also find a fit and understanding of the personnel and machinery of that ministry. Furthermore, while it was a requirement for all permanent secretaries to have a long track record of training, performance and experience in the public service, not all CEO's, despite their private sector credentials, were up to the task, and the evidence may lie in the number of political/financial scandals involving ministers of government during the recent

era of CEOs.

Is it the case that we Belizeans, because of our politicians' ego and expediency, have seen our governance system go "back way"? And are our government leaders now too embarrassed to say, 'I was wrong'?

Was it all a bad mistake to bring in this "come and go" CEO post to replace the long-serving permanent secretary, which provided a check and balance against ministerial indiscretion?

Perhaps, we can save face and keep the CEO name, but revert back to the permanent secretary- type requirements and permanency of the post. After all, when you had said that "VAT is a killer," you just had to change its name to "GST."

Respect to the Father of the Nation! Long live Belize! Power to the people!



WE'RE HIRING FIELD TECHNICIANS

The Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI) invites suitably qualified candidates to apply for the position of Field Technicians in the following countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, and St Lucia.

The Field Technicians will support the implementation of the 'Alliances for Coconut Industry Development, Expansion and Enhanced Support for The Caribbean' project funded by the European Union (EU) through the 11th European Development Fund (EDF), in accordance with the Caribbean Regional Indicative Programme (CRIP) managed by the CARIFORUM Secretariat. The International Trade Centre (ITC) and CARDI are the implementing agencies.

QUALIFICATION and WORK EXPERIENCE

A Bachelor's degree in Agricultural Science with a minimum of 3 years experience in supervising and conducting agricultural field research.

JOB DESCRIPTION

Under the general supervision of the CARDI Country Representative the successful candidate will be responsible for:

- Overseeing the implementation of national positive selection exercises by national state agencies in country.
- Providing direct field support for the project including: the establishment of coconut nurseries, establishment of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) plots and germplasm maintenance.
- Identifying lead farmers and establishing and monitoring climate-smart Lead Farms as demonstration sites.
- Conducting assessments and maintaining detailed records of project data/information and preparing monthly reports.
- Organising and participating in field demonstration and exhibitions, to disseminate agricultural information.

APPLICATION

Interested persons are invited to submit, via email, a cover letter and Curriculum Vitae to hresources@cardi.org by 28th, January 2022.

Subject Line: Field Technician (name of country)

Visit www.cardi.org for details.



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Interested applicants must:

- Have at least 3 years working experience and knowledge in the field
- Possess skills in preparation of legal documents, correspondence and corporate requirements
- Excellent command of both written and spoken English
- Be detail, organizational and time-oriented
- Be proficient in the use of QuickBooks, Microsoft Excel, Microsoft Word etc.
- Be able to work efficiently as a part of a team as well as independently
- Have a confident, consistent, decisive personality

Attractive salary being offered.

All applications will be kept confidential.

Applications must be sent to email: info@belizelawyer.com no later than **February 1st, 2022.**

Ha, I missed Father of Nation's birthday

by Colin Hyde

A long, long time ago I gave up trying to remember the birthdays of two women who are very close to me. One of the birthdays is in the month of September and how every year I fix my mind on November I don't know. The other is in the month of February, and I keep getting that mixed up with the birthdays of two cousins I grew up with who have birthdays that same month. I tried. I failed. I gave up.

Aha, George Cadle P, I plumb forgot that we were about to celebrate his birthday, even though I saw it on a calendar. It happened so because in my head I had him as being born on January 19th, so it's today, Tuesday the 18th, that I set aside to give him his props.

This daam PUP is sitting pretty with all these new holidays falling on the weekend. In normal times that would have been causing a lot of hate. There should be an asterisk beside every one of these holidays that fall on a Saturday or Sunday, and when you scroll down to find out what that's about it should say, *employers special*. Hmm, when things get back to normal, students

shouldn't dare complain about all the—*employers specials*. What's happened here since April 2020 is unprecedented. When school reopens they should be made to go Sunday to Sunday.

I haven't got in yet my take about the back-benching of Commonwealth Day. I think Kareem said the day will still get its respect, just that the government and private businesses won't pay for it. I guess I'll be satisfied with half a loaf if this PUP doesn't foul up on the 24th of May. I'm not ready yet to apply for my UDP party card.

What's this, what's this from Dickie Bradley that our area representatives no longer swear allegiance to the Queen and her heirs? Well then, will the local anti-British please drop that as one of the excuses for the failures of our leaders?

My gudnis, that Don Hector really ku tell it. He was gushing this week on his facebook page about other exploits of the great hero, how he was a champion swimmer, champion bulldozer operator, champion cane cutter (?), champion musician, and we all know, this one's for sure, the man was a champion poet.

Now, Don Hector, beating urban

boys, you and San Perdomo, in a swimming race, I don't think that boosts Price's swimming credentials any. Price has his big points for wading through high water on streets and swimming in spots to save himself in Hattie. Wait, maybe hihn kud a mi swim fast fu true. If he could swim half as fast as he could walk he could have been a fish.

Aha, Price hated bush, he wanted to see it cleared away, and we know that from his epic poem, so I bet he was happy for the invention of the mighty bulldozer. Pity that in the urban world the only chance you get to mount a bulldozer and tayr down bush is when there's the need to open a street. Ahem, if you want to know about great bulldozer operators, go read Louis Lindo's book, *Tales of the Belizean Woods*. In my experience with dozer operators, the best of them are a daring, dangerous breed.

Somebody properly scolded one of my heroes for saying Price said he wished he could chop cane all day. I think all those village women whose pots he liked to look into, if they had known that he was a major league cane cutter they would have held off the cooking so they could send him to the milpa to go cut the rice, shell some beans, and dig up some cassava and the daily sweet pitayta.

Ah, symbolism is great, but we shouldn't overdo it. Price was no physical wood-cutting hero like Abraham Lincoln. Price was a city boy who had a little sea experience at St. George's Cay and country experience from farm visits in his childhood. If we want to talk about what he was great at, we can start with keeping the books for that anti-British tycoon, Bob Turton, and fearlessly telling him what the Pope thought about his dirty pig capitalist ways.

Leroy A. Grant, in his book *The Life of Robert Sidney Turton*, tells us the future Father of the Nation got a stern lecture about the infallible one's complete lack of understanding about business.

Hey, we NIP celebrate George Price too. No man is perfect. You have to have humility to grow. He was humble enough to accept PSWG's correction, and that helped him do great things for Belize. He did. And so we join in and are very sincere when we say, Happy George Price Birthday!

Sankara died from natural causes, after being shot seven times

The African media, *AFP* reported this week on the ongoing trial about the 1987 murder of Thomas Sankara, the great Burkina Faso president

whom his enemies shot seven times. After the foul murder, they disappeared his body and reported to the world that he died from natural causes. The brother did tremendous work to uplift his nation, but he was taken down by forces that insist on puppet regimes that support the big businesses of the world, which are owned by the people who invaded the Americas beginning in 1492. The report at the trial said the bullets that killed Sankara were fired from high-powered rifles.

AFP said Sankara was "a fiery Marxist-Leninist (who) railed against imperialism and colonialism, often angering Western leaders but gaining followers across Africa and beyond", and that he "remains a revered figure for many and his brutal death cast a pall over the country for decades."

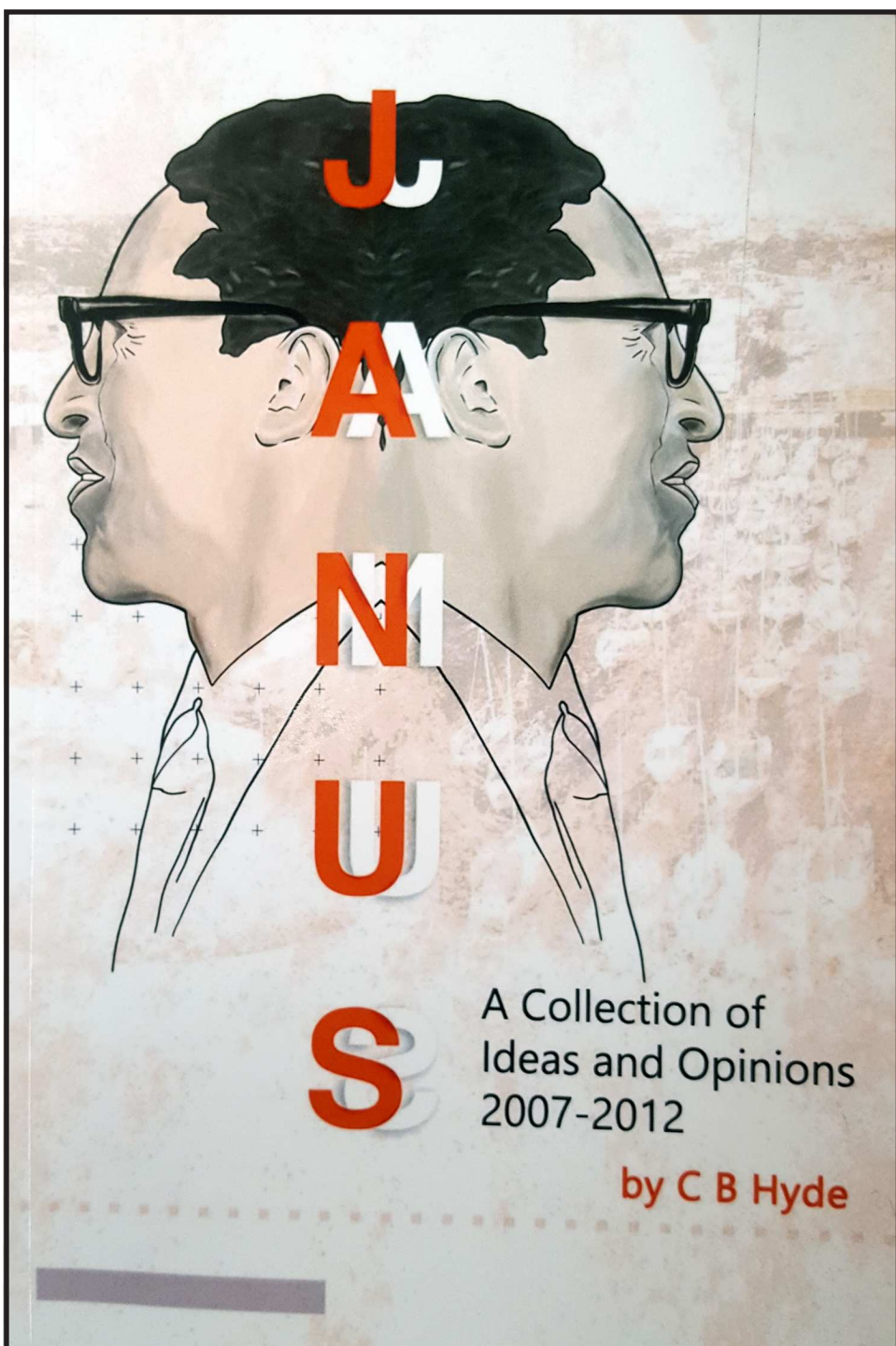
One of Sankara's brilliant initiatives was to send talented youth from deprived situations to study in universities in Cuba. A lot of Belizeans are sworn against the Marxist-Leninist philosophy of running a country, but while I'm no expert on the left, I am one hundred percent sold that a country that is locked in poverty must tweak the free economy system to address the inequalities in the society. In time, when there are opportunities for all, a people will demand some easing up of the restrictions. Any country that tolerates poverty is on the wrong path.

Sankara is a giant hero and his initiatives were completely worthy. His "friend", Blaise Compaore, who succeeded him, and is being tried in absentia, along with others, said he had nothing to do with the overthrow. But if he was innocent he should not have taken Burkina Faso back down the dead end road that opened the country for exploitation that didn't yield prosperity for his people.

I'd say

If they asked me if Brother Godwin Hulse was a dirty rotten crook like so many UDP ministers were, I'd say, it's less likely than so. What's with Andrew Marshalleck and this wicked PUP game to try and lump in Godwin with people who got a terrible beating at the polls? There are plenty enough UDPeez to flog like a dirty mat. Godwin rode in to rescue our passports after UDP philistines had run the system like a private milk cow. Godwin is a hero. Everyone knows that more likely than not he is as pure as the driven snow.

You really want to know what's more likely than not? Well, I'll tell you. It's more likely than not that Rene won't set foot back in Belize until the Reds control the House again, or until his battery of lawyers have found a loophole for him to slip through or a lawsuit they can bring to negotiate a favorable deal with.





¡Mal momento, directores ejecutivos?

Lun. 17 de enero de 2022

La reciente reorganización del Gabinete, con el foco principal en el asediado Ministerio de Salud y Bienestar, que experimentó gran malestar y agitación a nivel de director ejecutivo durante el mandato del Ministro Michel Chebat, puede conducir a una mejora en la situación en ese ministerio bajo el recién asignado Ministro de Salud Kevin Bernard; pero la situación plantea la pregunta, si todo este asunto de directores ejecutivos debe ser examinado seriamente para determinar si ha brindado las mejoras deseadas en el desempeño y los servicios al público sobre el puesto anterior de Secretario Permanente. Con el beneficio de la retrospectiva y un análisis cuidadoso, el gobierno ahora puede determinar dónde se encuentran las debilidades en su arreglo de directores ejecutivos y qué se puede hacer para corregir esas deficiencias, o si, de hecho, como se sugirió anteriormente, vale la pena volver al sistema anterior de Secretarios Permanentes.

En primer lugar, debe reconocerse que la ausencia de grandes estallidos públicos en otros ministerios gubernamentales no es una indicación de que todos hayan estado funcionando al nivel óptimo de eficiencia. La situación en el MOHW (por sus siglas en inglés) puede haber empeorado debido a problemas de personalidad relacionados con el Ministro Chebat, pero, a diferencia de otros ministerios, el MOHW estaba soportando un tremendo estrés y demandas de servicios debido a la pandemia de Covid-19. Solo cuando una herramienta o maquinaria se prueba en condiciones estresantes, se revelarán las debilidades inherentes. La deducción fácil es que solo fue un caso de un ministro manejando mal a su directora ejecutiva, de modo que hubo fricción y, por lo tanto, los directores ejecutivos entraban y salían del puesto. Pero un verdadero análisis "forense" confirmará si realmente existen algunas deficiencias estructurales en la estructura actual de directores ejecutivos dentro del servicio público que conducen a tales fricciones y trastornos. De hecho, otros ministerios pueden estar tropezando silenciosamente con deficiencias debido al arreglo de directores ejecutivos, pero esto pasa desapercibido porque no ha habido un gran foco de atención y estrés que pueda ser paralelo a lo que enfrenta el MOHW debido a Covid.

Recientemente ha habido quejas del actual Comisionado de Policía sobre la existencia de "policías deshonestos" dentro de las filas de su Departamento de Policía, y su esfuerzo es tratar de eliminarlos. Pero también se ha revelado recientemente que, durante la pasada administración UDP, era la norma, de hecho incluso un requisito aparente, que un aspirante a recluta recibiera una carta de recomendación del entonces ministro de policía. El altamente competitivo proceso de reclutar un escuadrón se vio contaminado por el amiguismo político, y es posible que ahora estemos cosechando la paja de este ejercicio defectuoso. Y nos hace preguntarnos, a la luz del actual problema nacional de delincuencia y corrupción, si prácticas similares se han convertido en la norma en nuestro proceso de gobernabilidad, donde se prioriza el favoritismo político sobre el mérito y la capacidad de desempeño. Con los informes recientes de la Comisión de Investigación sobre la liquidación de vehículos gubernamentales en los últimos meses de la administración UDP, así como el informe final aún por divulgar de la Comisión de Investigación sobre el Departamento de Inmigración durante el mismo mandato UDP, parecería que la corrupción probablemente se ha extendido por todo nuestro sistema de gobierno.

En algunas décadas pasadas, los visitantes beliceños a Chetumal solían contar historias de la práctica de la "mordida" que encontraban al tratar con algunos funcionarios mexicanos en diferentes agencias, es decir, tránsito, inmigración, policía. No todos los funcionarios son corruptos, por supuesto, pero los que lo son pueden dar mala fama a todo su departamento; y últimamente, los beliceños han experimentado situaciones similares en nuestro propio suelo por parte de funcionarios corruptos de Belize.

Según todos los indicios, fue el primer gobierno UDP de 1984 el que vio la necesidad de reclutar directores ejecutivos en los ministerios de gobierno que entonces estaban bajo la dirección del sistema establecido de secretarios permanentes. El razonamiento puede haber parecido justificado en ese momento. Después de todo, desde el autogobierno en 1964, Belize fue gobernado por un gobierno PUP y, naturalmente, todos los jefes de departamento y secretarios permanentes fueron designados bajo una administración PUP. Al ser puestos con "permanencia",

es posible que esos altos individuos en el servicio público hayan sido vistos, o debido a su comportamiento, eran considerados por los nuevos líderes del gobierno UDP como no cooperativos o no mostrando lealtad a sus nuevos jefes políticos. Podría haber algo de verdad en esa alegación, ya que el servicio prolongado y familiaridad tenían que haber tenido un efecto en los miembros del servicio público; pero, del mismo modo, la victoria aplastante del UDP también tuvo que haber sido el resultado de que muchos ex votantes del PUP votaron por el UDP, y algunos de ellos probablemente eran funcionarios públicos. Sin embargo, después de décadas de gobierno PUP, habría que considerar natural que se necesitaría un período de acomodo y ajuste para que los nuevos líderes gozaran de la plena confianza y entusiasmo de los distintos jefes de departamento y secretarios permanentes con los que se encontraron al asumir sus puestos ministeriales. ¿Había algunas verdaderas "manzanas podridas" entre los secretarios permanentes que heredaron del PUP, por que el UDP sintió que tenía que instalar funcionarios ejecutivos junto a ellos para garantizar que se cumpliera con su agenda? ¿O fue el UDP demasiado apresurado en su decisión de emplear directores ejecutivos? El tiempo es un factor significativo en la mayoría de las decisiones importantes, y una visión retrospectiva 20/20 indicaría que un poco más de paciencia podría haber sido mejor para ellos y para el país.

Belize heredó un estilo de gobierno Westminster de nuestros antiguos gobernantes coloniales, y en este sistema, en lo que respecta al servicio público, no debería importar qué partido político forma el gobierno. Según en.wikipedia.org, "Los secretarios permanentes son los jefes ejecutivos no políticos del servicio civil de los departamentos gubernamentales, que generalmente ocupan su cargo durante varios años (por lo tanto, 'permanentes') en un ministerio a diferencia de los cambiantes secretarios políticos de estado a quien reportan y asesoran". Lo que ellos llaman "secretarios políticos de estado" es lo que nosotros llamamos nuestros "ministros de gobierno". Por lo tanto, un servicio civil que funcione correctamente debe realizar sus tareas de manera profesional, independientemente del partido que forme el gobierno. Y la Comisión de Servicio Público está allí para garantizar que hagan su trabajo profesionalmente.

Bueno, entonces, después de cambiar de lugar con el UDP varias veces, con funcionarios ejecutivos junto a los secretarios permanentes, el PUP finalmente decidió, cuando disfrutó de una abrumadora mayoría en la Cámara en 1998, ir hasta el final y abolir el puesto de secretario permanente en conjunto, mientras se reemplazó al funcionario ejecutivo con un puesto completo de director ejecutivo (CEO por sus siglas en inglés). Y, lamentablemente, ahora sabemos lo que el desenfadado control político de la maquinaria de servicio público le ha costado a la nación durante las últimas dos décadas.

Así que ahora, a medida que los gobiernos van y vienen, los directores ejecutivos cambian. Y no solo el ejército de trabajadores en los departamentos de servicio público ahora tiene que adaptarse a un nuevo director ejecutivo cada vez que hay un cambio de gobierno, sino que más que eso, el nuevo director ejecutivo también tiene que encontrar un ajuste y entendimiento del personal y la maquinaria de ese ministerio. Además, si bien era un requisito para todos los secretarios permanentes tener un largo historial de capacitación, desempeño y experiencia en el servicio público, no todos los directores ejecutivos, a pesar de sus credenciales en el sector privado, estaban a la altura de la tarea, y la evidencia puede residir en la cantidad de escándalos políticos/financieros que involucran a ministros de gobierno durante la era reciente de los directores ejecutivos.

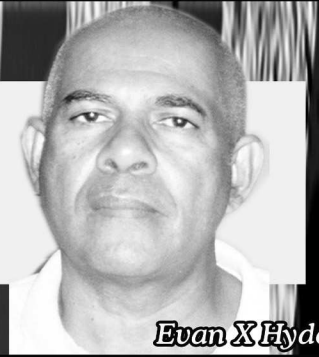
¿Es el caso de que nosotros, los beliceños, debido al ego y la conveniencia de nuestros políticos, hemos visto a nuestro sistema de gobierno retroceder? ¿Y nuestros líderes gubernamentales ahora están demasiado avergonzados para decir: "Me equivoqué"?

¿Fue todo un grave error traer este puesto de "viene y se va" director ejecutivo para reemplazar al secretario permanente de larga data, que proporcionaba un control y equilibrio contra la indiscreción ministerial?

Tal vez podamos salvar las apariencias y mantener el nombre de director ejecutivo, pero volver a los requisitos de tipo secretario permanente y la permanencia del puesto. Después de todo, cuando habían dicho que "el IVA es un asesino", solo tuvieron que cambiar su nombre a "IGV".

¡Respeto al Padre de la Patria! ¡Viva Belize! ¡Poder al pueblo!

From the Publisher



Evan X Hyde

On Sunday morning when I checked my e-mail, I saw that Elma Whittaker Augustine had mailed me the day before to say that her husband, Cliff, had passed the day before in Chicago.

We knew that with Cliff it was only a matter of time, because he had been ailing for years with serious kidney disease. In fact, just a few months ago he insisted that Elma bring him home one last time to visit his home village, Hopkins (Stann Creek District), which she did, although the trip was complicated by all the medical apparatus and medications involved with Cliff's condition.

I met him at a home they had built in the Lake Garden area on that visit, and the love between him and Elma was, as always, awesome and inspiring. I thought, as always, what are these two doing being such friends of mine when my personality is so different from theirs, so cantankerous?

You could never meet a couple as sweet as Cliff and Elma. Their love had blossomed under very difficult circumstances way back around 1972, 1973. Cliff was an ordained Roman Catholic priest: he had to be released from his priestly vows to marry Elma. Elma was a student at Pallotti High School, her parents' eldest child, and she was Creole. Cliff was Garifuna.

I'd met Elma in 1970 when I

lived on Waight Street in the Yarborough area. When I rode my bike from home in the mornings to the downtown city, I had to pass two families who treated me with a lot of love: these were the Earl Smith and the Whittaker families.

Elma was an executive officer of the rump UBAD organization between 1973 and 1974. I use the term "rump" to describe the fact of our organization having been split

into two, and she remained with the section under my leadership. She also sold advertisements for our little AMANDALA newspaper, which was a letter press product at the time. Elma was a soldier. Smiling and pleasant and gentle, but a soldier.

She got her Ph.D. in Chicago, and now Elma is a big-time scholar. I am so proud of her, and feel such grief for her at Cliff's passing. They

were a perfect couple. Serious thing.

Elma sent me a wedding photo. I was Cliff's best man, and Hanifa Reneau was Elma's maid-of-honor.

Ras Pin, my deepest condolences to you and your siblings on the death of your beloved father.

Relatives and friends of Cliff and Elma, this is how it is. As we live, so shall we die.

Rest in perfect peace, Cliff. My brother from another mother.



FROM THE PUBLISHER en Español

El domingo por la mañana, cuando revisé mi correo electrónico, vi que Elma Whittaker Augustine me había enviado un correo el día anterior para decirme que su esposo, Cliff, había fallecido el día anterior en Chicago.

Sabíamos que con Cliff era solo cuestión de tiempo, porque había estado enfermo durante años con una grave enfermedad renal. De hecho, hace apenas unos meses insistió en que Elma lo llevara a casa por última vez para visitar su pueblo natal, Hopkins (Distrito de Stann Creek), lo cual hizo, aunque el viaje se complicó por todo el aparato médico y medicamentos involucrados con la enfermedad de Cliff.

Me reuní con él en esa visita en

una casa que habían construido en el área de Lake Garden, y el amor entre él y Elma fue, como siempre, maravilloso e inspirador. Pensé, como siempre, ¿qué hacen estos dos siendo tan amigos míos cuando mi personalidad es tan diferente a la de ellos, tan cascarrabias?

Nunca podrían conocer a una pareja tan dulce como Cliff y Elma. Su amor había florecido en circunstancias muy difíciles allá por 1972, 1973. Cliff era un sacerdote católico romano ordenado: tuvo que ser liberado de sus votos sacerdotales para casarse con Elma. Elma era estudiante de la escuela secundaria Pallotti, hija mayor de sus padres, y era criolla. Cliff era garifuna.

Conocí a Elma en 1970 cuando vivía en la Calle Waight en el área de Yarborough. Cuando iba en bicicleta desde mi casa por las mañanas hasta el centro de la ciudad, tenía que pasar junto a dos familias que me trataban con mucho amor: estas eran las familias Earl Smith y Whittaker.

Elma fue directora ejecutiva de la organización del remanente UBAD entre 1973 y 1974. Uso el término "del remanente" para describir el hecho de que nuestra organización se dividió en dos, y ella se quedó con la sección bajo mi liderazgo. También vendió anuncios para nuestro pequeño periódico AMANDALA, que era un producto tipográfico en ese momento. Elma

era como soldado. Sonriente y agradable y gentil, pero una soldado.

Obtuvo su Ph.D. en Chicago, y ahora Elma es una gran erudita. Estoy muy orgulloso de ella y siento mucho dolor por ella por la muerte de Cliff. Eran una pareja perfecta. Cosa seria.

Elma me envió una foto de la boda. Yo era el padrino de Cliff y Hanifa Reneau era la dama de honor de Elma.

Ras Pin, mi más sentido pésame para ti y tus hermanos por la muerte de tu querido padre.

Familiares y amigos de Cliff y Elma, así son las cosas. Como vivimos, así moriremos.

Descansa en perfecta paz, Cliff. Mi hermano de otra madre.

Single-use plastic ban approaching

BELIZE CITY, Thurs. Jan. 13, 2022

In a Cabinet release issued today, the Government of Belize approved amendments to section 33 (1) b, c, and d of the Plastic Regulation, enacting new effective dates for the phase-out of single-use plastic in Belize. In January 2020, the Government of Belize first announced that importing prohibited plastic was no longer permitted. In today's release the current government indicated that the date that has been set for the manufacturing of such products to cease is January 31, while the sales of such products must end by 28 February, and possession of such products will become an offense by March 31.

This legislation seeks to address the issue of widespread waste and the environmental impact caused by the use of environmentally unfriendly, single-use plastic across the country. Since January 2020, a soft phasing out has taken place, but now, with the announcement of the approval of these amendments, it is expected that the full phasing out of the single-use plastic will be fast-tracked.

Section 33 (1) (a) to (d) of the legislation contain the amendments that have led to the establishment of the specific dates mentioned. It must be noted that while the planned prohibition of the products was finalized following the passing of the

legislation, no effective dates for the end of manufacturing, sales, and possession were yet in place until now.

In recent years, single-use plastics have become a major global issue, said to contribute significantly to the damage of protected marine systems, including the loss of biodiversity, and harm to marine life. This is compounded by the negative impact that the use of such products has had on public health and the land pollution that has resulted due to the discarding of such plastic in garbage dumps and slums. In Belize, according to a study in 2017 by the Department of the Environment over a three-year period, Belize annually imported over 200 million pieces of single-use plastic bags and 52 million pieces of styrofoam & plastic food containers, and locally produced and manufactured an estimated 35 million single-use plastic bags and 5 million pieces of styrofoam.

Single-use plastics, commonly referred to as disposable plastics, are plastics intended for one-time use before being thrown away or recycled. In many cases, single-use plastics are used as packaging materials. Recently, we have seen the rolling out of more biodegradable, and in some instances reusable, disposal containers across the country.



The list of single-use plastic products to be prohibited as per Schedule II of the Environmental Protection (Pollution from Plastics) Regulations, 2020, is as follows: single-use styrofoam and plastic "clamshells"; single-use styrofoam

and plastic plates, bowls, cups, and lids; single-use plastic forks, knives, spoons, forks, and cutlery; single-use plastic carrier bags commonly referred to as shopping bags and/or T-shirt bags; and single-use plastic drinking straws.

UNDP donates COVID-19 testing kits and 2 GeneXpert machines to MOHW



by *Khaila Gentle*

BELMOPAN, Fri. Jan. 14, 2022

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP), under the framework of the Global Fund project titled "Building Resilience through Innovation and National Accountability for the HIV and TB Response in Belize" and in partnership with the National AIDS Commission, donated two GeneXpert machines and 631 COVID-19 testing kits to the Ministry of Health and Wellness on Friday.

At the handing-over ceremony held in Belmopan, Ms. Diane Wade, Officer in Charge for the UNDP Country Office in Belize, presented the testing kits and the two machines to Minister of Health, Hon. Kevin Bernard.

According to a press release issued by the UNDP, the donation, valued at US \$138,181, was secured using finances from The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. The Fund has also provided an additional US \$526,486 in

financing for COVID-19 relief in Belize.

"As we continue to work amidst a fourth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and its variants in Belize and with a growing concern over the most recent and highly infective Omicron variant, our teams remain highly vigilant at this non-ending epidemic. The most important tasks of enhanced surveillance, early testing, and diagnosis are crucial elements of the national response," said Minister Bernard at the ceremony. He also expressed deep gratitude to the UNDP for its donation and partnership.

The two Cepheid Gene Xpert machines—which can be used to test for COVID-19 as well as tuberculosis—will be used at the Corozal Community Hospital and the Punta Gorda Hospital. This donation brings the total number of machines in the country to five. The other three are being used at the Central Medical Laboratory, Western Regional Hospital, and Southern Regional Hospital.

VACANCY

KREM Television is seeking applications from suitable candidates for the post of REPORTER to be stationed in Belize City.

Requirements:

- Minimum of an Associate Degree in English; a Bachelor's Degree would be a plus
- Excellent command of the English language
- Interested in the news
- Strong interpersonal communication skills
- Disciplined, inquisitive, go-getter and enjoys research
- Willing to work long hours
- Willing to learn
- Works well under pressure and can multitask
- Is a team player

Send your resume with two letters of recommendation to:

Human Resource Manager
KREM Television
3304 Partridge Street
Belize City
Or e-mail to: innadynamics@gmail.com

Deadline for applications is Monday, February 1, 2022.

Solidarity Fighting Pandemic in Belize, Cuba and Puerto Rico Pt. 1

by Cynthia Adina Kirkwood

The Caribbean features variety in people, natural beauty and its approach to battling COVID-19. Belize, Cuba and Puerto Rico have different strategies based on their history, politics and cultural values.

The two nations and one United States territory promote handwashing and sanitizing, physical distancing and masking as three of the pillars of preventing the spread of the virus. The fourth pillar is the vaccine. However, they stress that the vaccine will not be successful without the other three and that the vaccine, though essential, is not a silver bullet.

Detected one month ago, the Omicron variant, even more transmissible than its predecessor, Delta, has increased case numbers explosively in these countries as elsewhere. With the pandemic two years on, some countries are re-examining their programs,

Effective campaigns feature solid organization, good communication, statistical information and shared goals. They tend to issue from countries that are community- not individually-oriented. Also, wealth is not a factor for success.

Puerto Rico

Puerto Rico has an underfunded healthcare system, high levels of poverty and an infrastructure still devastated by a hurricane in 2017, reported *France 24* (November 10, 2021) as well as a series of earthquakes in January 2020, according to *The New York Times* (March 1, 2020).

Yet, Puerto Rico is one of the top three United States jurisdictions, alongside Vermont and Guam, with the highest rates of COVID-19 vaccinations, according to *NBC News* (December 23, 2021).

In a population of 3.2 million, 3,393 people have died of COVID-19, according to *Our World in Data* (January 10).

A total of 77.5 percent, or 2.48 million of the population, has been fully vaccinated and 6.05 million doses were administered as of January 5, according to *Our World in Data*. Less than 40 percent of the population has received a booster, reported *Vox* (January 9,

2022). However, not everyone is eligible as yet if six months have not elapsed since their last shot of Pfizer or Moderna, or three months with the Johnson & Johnson (Janssen) vaccine.

Experts credit a sense of solidarity and a public health response untainted by political polarization. Scientist Monica Feliu-Mojer told *National Public Radio (NPR)* (November 29, 2021):

“Solidarity is at the core of what it means to be Puerto Rican. Culturally, we are family- and community-oriented. Truly, we take care of each other. So, that solidarity, that caring for the other person, empathy, is manifested to people pretty much universally masking.”

Sensing the gravity of the pandemic, an immediate response to the pandemic was a never before seen coalition of community groups, non-profit organizations of scientists, and the government, said Feliu-Mojer of Ciencia Puerto Rico (Science Puerto Rico), a non-profit group of scientists, professionals, students and citizens committed to advancing science in Puerto Rico.

Organization was key to Puerto Rico’s success.

“As vaccines began to move toward authorization at the end of 2020, the Puerto Rico Department of Health (PRDH) asked the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for technical assistance to plan a vaccination campaign. Five people from the CDC office in San Juan were given the immense task of getting vaccines into people’s arms to help stop the pandemic,” according to the CDC.

The CDC Puerto Rico team was led by a lead epidemiologist. It included an IT (Information Technology) specialist; a second epidemiologist; a recruitment specialist; a logistics specialist, and an emergency management specialist. According to the CDC:

“The Puerto Rico-based team normally studies dengue, a mosquito-borne disease common in the region. Since the beginning of the pandemic, CDC has supported local response efforts with data analysis, epidemiology, laboratory science, and other services. With this experience, the dengue team was able to quickly turn its focus to getting COVID-19 shots

in arms.

“The team developed online resources to speed up the process of getting vaccine providers enrolled, helping increase the number of providers from 20 to more than 550.”

Oscar Padro, the IT specialist, said: “PRDH was receiving many calls and emails from providers about how to register, slowing the process considerably. We developed new digital tools that improved the workflow, including an online provider registration form.”

Working with the Puerto Rican National Guard, the logistics specialist, helped develop a vaccine distribution system that shipped vaccines to central hubs, where Guard troops then distributed them to providers. This system provided the most complete island-wide data on total distributed vaccines.

Meanwhile, Eunice Soto, the recruitment specialist, identified and enrolled vaccine providers to ensure island-wide coverage.

“Puerto Rico has a solid healthcare infrastructure with experienced vaccine providers,” said Soto. “Hospitals, federally qualified health centers, and primary care centers were quickly brought up to speed to become the first line of vaccinators. Recruiting non-traditional vaccine providers in rural areas, where fewer vaccine providers were available, was essential to ensure availability across the island.”

In addition, the team trained more than 1,000 healthcare providers and vaccination staff on how COVID-19 vaccines work and their possible side effects. After the CDC team left, PRDH’s Immunization Program’s experienced trainers have continued to train nearly 20,000 providers.

Communication was essential in the effort.

Epidemiologist Liliana Sanchez-Gonzalez was tasked with ensuring that providers “had all the training and education resources they needed. First, we developed a COVID-19 vaccination website with online training and education materials. The Spanish website quickly became one of the top online resources for information on COVID-19 vaccines.”

How is misinformation (unintentional false information) and disinformation (intentional false information) combatted?

“One of the projects of my organization working with other nonprofits was a rumor-tracking project working with community leaders who were our eyes and ears in the community,” said Feliu-Mojer of Ciencia Puerto Rico. “Puerto Rico WhatsApp is very popular and used as a community tool. Often, community leaders got misinformation and disinformation on WhatsApp, and they would report it back to us.

“There were a lot of rumors, and they were in a few categories: the safety and effectiveness of the vaccines; how fast the vaccines came to market, and government mistrust, which is general in Puerto Rico.

“So, we created materials that

responded to these rumors and shared them on social media and, most importantly, with community leaders.”

In a fast-moving environment, when new programs are being rolled out and the virus itself is changing, clear and timely communication is essential. The CDC team kept weekly office hours. Gabriela Paz-Bailey, lead epidemiologist, kept communication flowing among the CDC, PRDH leadership and the Immunization Program.

Over time, vaccination rollouts tend to reach plateaus. Projects to encourage people to get vaccinated are helpful. In the summer of 2021, Voces Coalicion de Inmunizacion y Promocion de la Salud en Puerto Rico, Direct Relief and Facebook Data for Good conducted an online study that showed that the use of local celebrities may be effective in vaccine promotion among the young, according to *Direct Relief* (October 1, 2021).

The effectiveness of four separate ads, each featuring a different celebrity, was tested among two target audiences: those 18-34 and those 35 and older. The three-week study began in mid-August. It reached more than 486,000 people in Puerto Rico, and it garnered nearly 38,000 visits to Voces’ vaccination clinic calendar.

The celebrities in these ads were musical artist VF7, members of the Vaqueros de Bayamon Puerto Rican professional basketball team Benito Santiago and Victor Carattini, former professional baseball player Carlos Delgado, and Puerto Rican actress/comedian Angela Mayer. With the onslaught of Omicron and a 4,600 percent increase in cases, Puerto Rico expanded its already existing restrictions, reported *The New York Times* (January 2, 2020).

Governor Pedro R. Pierluisi ordered lower capacity limits in restaurants. To attend large public events, people have to be vaccinated and present a negative COVID-19 test. Passengers arriving on domestic flights must show a negative test taken within 48 hours before arrival. Similar rules already were in place for international flights.

Mass public events, including the celebration of the 500th anniversary of San Juan, were canceled. “Dick Clark’s New Year’s Rockin’ Eve”, which ABC planned to broadcast live from Puerto Rico in front of big crowds, was downgraded to a virtual event. The Miss World pageant final was canceled.

The Scientific Coalition, a group of scientists and health professionals that had been advising the governor, recommended stricter measures such as limits on liquor sales and shorter hours for bars, reported *The Times*. The next day, the governor followed the recommendations. He also mandated boosters for restaurant employees and public safety workers.

Full article can be viewed at : <http://www.cynthiaadinakirkwood.com/post/solidarity-fighting-pandemic-in-belize-cuba-and-puerto-rico>

To be continued...

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

The U.S. Embassy Belmopan is seeking eligible and qualified applicants for the following position:

Position Name: Maintenance Mechanic (Generator Mechanic)
Vacancy number: Belmopan-2022-02
Closing date: January 28, 2022

Interested applicants must submit their application via the Electronic Recruitment Application (ERA) system, a web-based system. To view and apply for this vacancy, visit the ERA site at: <https://erajobs.state.gov/dos-era/blz/vacancysearch/searchVacancies.hms>

Please visit the Embassy’s website for instructions on how to apply via the ERA system: <https://bz.usembassy.gov/embassy/jobs/>

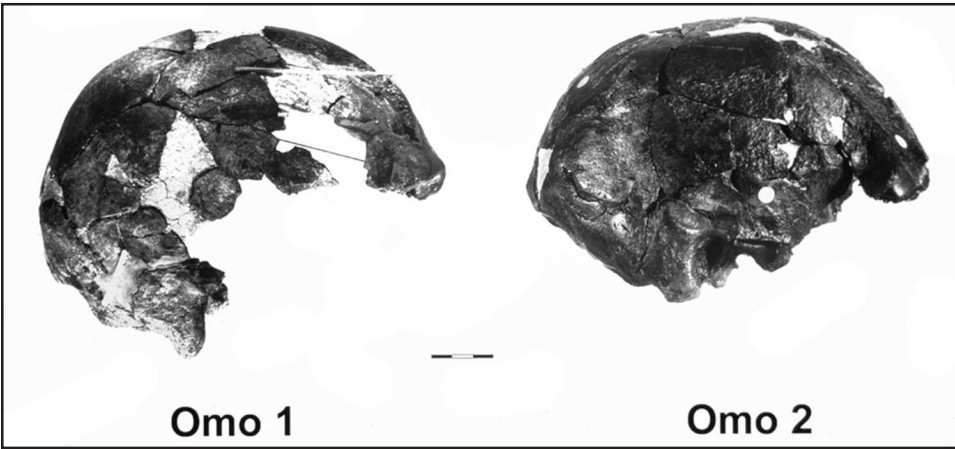
Note 1: Resumes **will not** be considered. Candidates must note all work experience when completing the ERA application. Insufficient or incomplete information will result in an ineligible application.

Note 2: Candidates **must** submit applicable required documentation by the closing date of this announcement. Failure to provide the required documentation will result in an ineligible application.



REGIONAL & INTERNATIONAL

Oldest remains of modern humans are much older than thought, researchers say



by Jordan Mendoza

Sun, Jan. 16, 2022 (usatoday.com)

Some of the oldest remains of modern humans in the world are much older than scientists thought.

The remains, known as Omo I, were found in southwest Ethiopia in the late 1960s. The bone and skull fragments researchers discovered were some of the oldest known remains of Homo sapiens.

Initial research suggested they were nearly 200,000 years old, but new research shows the remains are at least 230,000 years old. The peer-reviewed research was published in the journal Nature on Wednesday.

Over a four-year period, a team of international scientists attempted to date all of the major volcanic eruptions in the Ethiopian Rift in eastern Africa. Céline Vidal, a volcanologist from the University of Cambridge and lead author of the research, said the fossils were below a thick layer of volcanic ash, but the ash was “too fine-grained” to date with radiometric techniques. If the volcanic eruptions could be accurately dated, so would the remains.

The team took “fingerprints” from the site: rock samples from volcanic deposits broken down to sub-millimeter size.

“Each eruption has its own fingerprint – its own evolutionary story below the surface, which is determined by the pathway the magma followed,” Vidal said in a statement. “Once you’ve crushed the rock, you free the minerals within, and then you can date them, and identify the chemical signature of the volcanic glass that holds the minerals together.”

Analysis revealed the samples to be related to the eruption of the Shala volcano about 250 miles away, which is now the deepest lake and the largest crater in Ethiopia, according to Oregon State University researchers. The eruption

happened 230,000 years ago.

Though signs of earlier forms of humans have been found in Africa, such as the 3.66 million-year-old footprints of two types of early humans, Aurélien Mounier from the Musée de l’Homme in Paris and co-author of the paper, said Omo I has “unequivocal modern human characteristics,” such as a tall, spherical cranium and chin.

There is uncertainty as to when modern humans appeared on Earth. Fossils found in the Sahara Desert in 2017 were more than 300,000 years old, but Mounier told Reuters the fossils “do not possess some of the key morphological features that define our species,” so there are questions whether they are linked to modern humans or another species related to humans.

“The new date estimate, de facto, makes it the oldest unchallenged Homo sapiens in Africa,” Mounier said.

Vidal said she was “really excited” to find out the remains are much older than thought – from the late Middle Pleistocene time period, before Homo sapiens began to spread out of Africa.

Although the findings in Ethiopia give the fossils an estimated age, it is possible the remains are much older than 230,000 years.

“Our forensic approach provides a new minimum age for Homo sapiens in eastern Africa, but the challenge still remains to provide a cap, a maximum age, for their emergence, which is widely believed to have taken place in this region,” said Christine Lane, geochronologist at Cambridge and co-author. “It’s possible that new finds and new studies may extend the age of our species even further back in time.”

First Published by USA today.

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2022/01/16/oldest-modern-human-remains-ethiopia/6548811001/>

Tonga eruption: How its impact spread so widely and violently

by The Visual Journalism Team

BBC News

A massive volcanic eruption in Tonga, on Saturday, triggered a tsunami that spread across the Pacific in a matter of hours.

Waves hit Australia, New Zealand and Japan as well as the west coasts of North and South America.

An atmospheric shockwave was detected around the world and a huge ash cloud has covered Pacific islands for hundreds of miles.

Here’s what we know about how and why it spread so widely and violently.

Where is Tonga?

Tonga is made up of about 170 islands, many uninhabited, about 2,000 miles (3,300km) east of Australia.

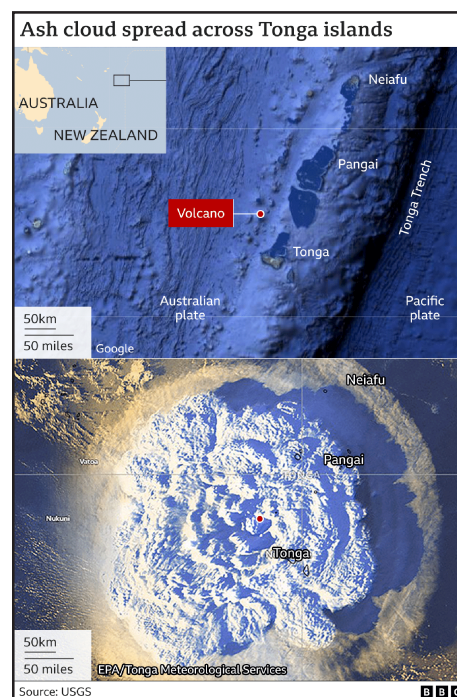
The volcano, Hunga-Tonga-Hunga-Ha’apai, sits 40 miles north of the capital.

On Saturday, the centre of the volcano sank, disappearing under the sea.

About two hours later, it erupted, with devastating force.

When the eruption had ended, almost all of the volcano and the land around it had disappeared.

The eruption set off a massive atmospheric shockwave travelling at about 300m (1,000ft) per second.



Pressure changes were detected on the other side of the world, in Europe, 15 hours later.

The explosion was heard across the Pacific, from Fiji to Alaska.

How quickly did the tsunami spread?

Waves from the tsunami spread rapidly across the Pacific.

They took less than five hours to reach New Zealand, about 10 to reach Alaska.

Experts say the tsunami may have been caused by the collapse of debris on the ocean floor and boosted by the pressure wave pushing down on the surface of the water.

The waves continued through Sunday and were still being recorded in Australia on Monday.

Tsunami waves can be much more destructive than normal waves, even when they are not particularly high.

A normal wave might take 15 seconds to wash up the shore and flow back out.

Some of the tsunami waves in Australia were under 1m but lasted almost 30 minutes.

They kept moving onshore for 15 minutes and took about 15 minutes to move back out.

Why was the eruption so violent?

The exact reasons why this eruption was so violent are still being assessed by experts.

Some believe the speed with which the molten magma was blasted out of the volcano may have played a big part.

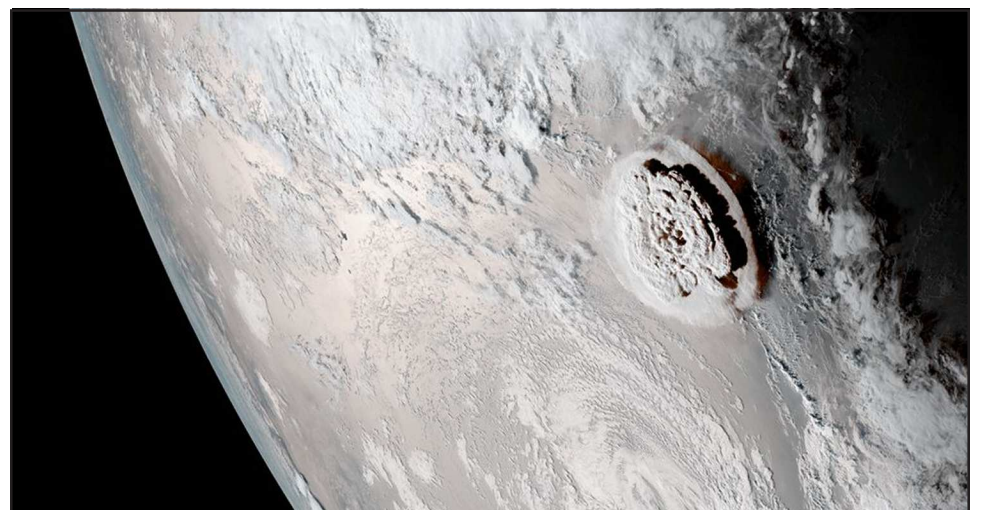
When magma filled with volcanic gas is forced through sea water at high speed, there is no time for a layer of steam to cool it.

And this “fuel-coolant interaction” causes a massive chemical explosion, researchers say.

Deeper water could have suppressed this - but the volcano’s surface was just 150-200m under the sea

Full article can be view at : <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-60027360>

First published by BBC news





50% return of fans allowed at sporting events, says NSC

BELIZE CITY, Mon. Jan. 17, 2022

In a press release dated Friday, January 14, the National Sports Council of Belize (NSC) revealed its updated “Guidelines for Fan Attendance at All Sporting Events,” whereby some fans will now be allowed to attend games.

After just over a year and a half ban on all sporting activity in its stadiums across Belize due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the NSC had lifted the ban on competitions at its facilities with a press release on October 19 of 2021 listing its “Guidelines for the Return to Competitive Contact Sport;” but among the Covid protocols listed was one guideline stipulating that “No fans” were to be allowed inside the stadiums for the competitions.

Since late November of last year, the Belize District 1st Division Amateur tournament has been featuring games on Saturdays at the MCC Grounds in Belize City; and the same has reportedly been occurring in other districts, all being restricted to the “no fan” rule. Meanwhile, the National Amateur Women League (NAWL), which kicked off its

tournament with games across the country on November 7, and the FFB Top League (PLB still in Limbo) which started on October 23 and played all games at the Isidoro Beaton Stadium, have both completed their tournaments before Christmas, all the games being played to empty stadiums.

So now, it was refreshing news for football fans last Friday, January 14, at least for those who got the news on time, when the NSC released its “Guideline for Fan Attendance at All Sporting Events” wherein it stipulated that “effective 15 January 2022,” “All approved sporting events will return to 50% fan attendance.” Further conditions include “proof of immunization against Covid to be allowed entrance” and “fans must be seated; absolutely no standees allowed.”

The new 50% allowance of fan attendance coincided with the kickoff this past weekend of the Football Federation of Belize (FFB) National Elite Youth Championships for U17 Men, U17 Women, U20 Men and U20 Women, which are being played in stadiums across the country.

Local welder shot dead by gunman who entered room

(From page 1)

Dorian Tzac, 25, a local welder, was fatally wounded by a gunman who entered his room. A 14-year-old who was also wounded is clinging to life



Dorian Tzac, deceased

by Charles Gladden

BELIZE CITY, Mon. Jan. 17, 2022

Dorian Tzac, 25, a Belize City welder who resided on Antelope Street in Belize City, was fatally wounded when a gunman entered the lower flat of the two-storey building in which he lived at around 8:20 p.m. and opened fire on Tzac and his companions. Tzac would later pass away as a result of the wounds he received, while a 14-year-old minor who was in his company during the

shooting and who was also wounded by the gunman is listed in a critical condition in the Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital. When police arrived at the scene of the incident, Tzac was transported to the Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital for treatment and succumbed to his injuries approximately five to ten minutes later.

“The initial investigation, [has] revealed so far that they were in a room at the lower flat of a house on Antelope [Street] Extension when a lone gunman entered the yard, opened that door to the room, opened fire on both of them, fatally injuring Mr. Tzac and causing injuries to the minor,” said the Belize Police Department’s communications director, ASP Fitzroy Yearwood, at a police press briefing.

It is unclear at this point what the motive was for the attack, and there is currently no indication whether or not Tzac was the gunman’s intended target.

“We are not ruling out anything, but I don’t know if I mentioned, Mr. Tzac was a welder, a gainfully employed person. So, for us to just say directly that it’s a gang-affiliated shooting, it wouldn’t be fair, because, [as] I said, he was not one of those that we would say was idling. He had a job and actually, he does his welding right from his home,” said ASP Yearwood.

Police have since arrested Malcolm Muschamp, 20, a Ladyville resident, in connection with the shooting. He been charged with murder, attempted murder, use of deadly means of harm, and dangerous harm and was arraigned in court today, Monday, January 17, 2022.

intended to promote education awareness and foster national pride and identity,” Benque House of Culture coordinator, Nalleli Yacab, noted.

Exhibition honoring the Father of the Nation opens



by Charles Gladden

BELIZE CITY, Mon. Jan. 17, 2022

Over the weekend, the nation of Belize celebrated George Price Day for the second time since it was established as a national holiday last year by the newly elected PUP government. In honor of what would have been the 103rd birthday of the Father of the Nation, Rt. Hon. George Cadle Price, a small ceremony was held at the House of Culture in Belize City to mark the grand opening of the Rt. Hon. George Cadle Price exhibition, “The Man vs Politicization”. The exhibit displays both the late Rt. Hon. George Cadle Price’s personal life and his political

achievements.

“I remember so many times that I met Mr. Price, and the issue of humility always stood out. This great man would take time to any and everybody, even myself,” said Prime Minister of Belize, Hon. John Briceño as he reminisced during his remarks on his encounters with Rt. Hon. Price.

“What he was doing, he was doing great things for this country, turning a colony where people never thought that we could’ve become a country. They were saying that we have nothing of the qualities to become a country, yet he was steadfast in his belief that Belize can become a modern country in the Caribbean and in Central America and could one day play a critical role in this region,” said Prime Minister Briceño.

“I am happy that the National Institute of Culture and History made an effort to share with the Belizean people a glimpse of Mr. Price’s early years: his childhood, his early years entering the priesthood, and as a young boy. I am very grateful to the people at the Museum of Belize. I think we understand and appreciate that we have a special duty and responsibility to this country to preserve the legacy of George Price and make sure that generations come after us will know about George Price,” said Minister of Education,

Culture, Science, and Technology, Hon. Francis Fonseca, during his remarks at the ceremony.

While this ceremony was taking place in Belize City, in Benque Viejo Del Carmen a Tribute Mass was held on Saturday evening to celebrate the life of Belize’s first Prime Minister, Rt. Hon. George Cadle Price.

Two other activities in honor of the late Prime Minister, the Right Honorable George Cadle Price, will be held this month.

“Throughout the month John Paul II Junior College and partners will host an interactive and virtual forum via Zoom. The Benque Viejo Town Council through Councilor Teresita Betancourt will also lead a pictorial exhibition. These initiatives are



Mandatory US\$18 travel insurance for tourists

Continued from Page 1

visitors are required to apply for Belize Travel Health Insurance — a mandatory insurance that helps protect travelers against incurred medical and non-medical expenses if they test positive for COVID-19 during their stay in Belize.”

The policy will cost US \$18 and provide coverage of up to US \$50,000 for medical expenses related to treating a COVID-19 infection over a period of 21 days. The insurance plan will also cover up to USD 2,000 of lodging expenses incurred during the period in which an infected person is quarantined and also cover any emergency assistance services provided for a sick traveler, such as air evacuation,



Evan Tillett – Director of Tourism, BTB

or any expenses related to pre-existing conditions.

Travelers are asked to purchase the insurance policy before coming to Belize but can also purchase such coverage at the Philip Goldson International Airport and at the land borders. All visitors entering the country will be required to purchase the insurance policy, except Belizean nationals, permanent residents, travelers visiting under the qualified retirement program, long-stay visitors, and flight crews.

The Director of Tourism at the BTB, Evan Tillett, told local reporters that the travel insurance will provide “peace of mind” for both visitors and local hotels. He said that during the pandemic, many countries have opted to implement travel mandates and have tailor-made those policies to suit their locations and their guests’ needs. One area of the policy protects hotels by allowing for recovery of funds in cases of cancellation—especially since the new Omicron variant spreading rapidly across the globe has caused uncertainty in travel plans and resulted in mass cancellations worldwide, albeit not as widespread as was the case at the start of the pandemic.

The Belize Hotel Association, however, in a letter to its members

released today, said that the association has opposed the idea of mandatory travel insurance since it was first proposed by the BTB back in October of 2021. They said that the BHA representative on the board of directors at the BTB voted against that proposed insurance, citing their objection to the fact that only one company, the Insurance Corporation of Belize (ICB), was responsible for providing the coverage.

In his remarks, Tillett stated that they are open to proposals from other insurance companies and confirmed that the BTB is working with the Insurance Company of Belize (ICB) at this time.

The BHA in essence is saying that there is not sufficient justification for the mandatory insurance, since

there is not enough evidence to indicate that any excessive burden has been placed on our health system by tourists or that visitors were not able to meet their medical expenses. While they agree that hotels should be compensated for an extended stay of guests who are infected with COVID-19, they feel that the reasoning offered by the government is not satisfactory.

This morning the United Democratic Party released a statement seeking clarification of the announced travel mandate. They expressed concern over the fact that coverage will be purchased from a single proposed provider and added that the US \$18 fee is “yet another tax on visitors coming to Belize.”

The party proposed that travelers with existing insurance coverage could provide proof of such coverage upon arrival in the country, opt-in to the travel insurance, or sign a liability waiver excluding them from the insurance. They also proposed that hotels can provide travel insurance as a part of a package.

The release from the UDP states, “With visitor arrivals at the PGIA for the first 11 months of 2021 down by approximately 60 percent of the 2019 overnight arrival figures, taxing visitors indiscriminately thereby increasing the cost of travel to Belize in a very competitive environment, may cause more harm than good in our national economic recovery efforts.”

They urged that the government avoid implementing mandatory policies that could deter travel to Belize and move toward measures incentivizing travel and geared toward increasing visitor numbers while maintaining safety measures for citizens and visitors.

PUC extends deadline for comments on electricity rate increase

Continued from Page 1

2021 Annual Review Proceeding. As was previously reported, the utility regulator has proposed a rate increase from 39.9 cents per kilowatt-hour to 41.58 cents per kilowatt-hour for the next six months of this year. BEL has said that they do not support an increase at this time, given the strenuous economic conditions brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, and, according to BEL chairman, Andrew Marshalleck, they prefer to recover the near 10 million dollars in the increased cost of power sometime after 2023.

The PUC, however, is asking more members of the public to reach out with comment submissions on this particular issue and has extended the deadline for comments to January 31. The original deadline date was January 15.

In the PUC release, the PUC chairman, Dean Molina, remarked, “The Commission is of the review that given the impact and importance of this decision, it is essential that we hear from as many people and organizations as we possibly can. In order to allow for additional time for individuals and organizations to submit comments, we have taken the decision to extend the deadline for

Public Consultation, thereby, allowing all stakeholders an opportunity to make their voices heard.”

The company’s chairman says that an increase at this time will simply create more arrears for the company and additional difficulty in the area of collections. Chairman Marshalleck said that giving consumers some time to rebound is something that the company is in the position to do, given the sizable profits that it has made for the past two years — 40 million dollars in 2020 and 35 million dollars in 2021, according to Marshalleck. He said that allowing this ease on the consumer underpinned their December rate review submission.

In an interview with Ernesto Gomez, Director of Tariff Compliance and Standards at the PUC, he said that an increase at a later time could also be to the detriment of the consumers economically, since it is possible that the cost of power might increase during the proposed 2023-2024 period.

For now, the PUC is continuing to seek comments from stakeholders on this proposed increase and will likely have made a final decision by February 5, 2022, five days after the extended deadline.

New CEO at MOHW; new Deputy Governor at Central Bank

Continued from Page 1

appointment of a new deputy governor at the Central Bank of Belize took place in December, the identity of the new deputy was not initially publicized via local media. It is now being reported widely, however, that Hollis Parham was appointed on December 1, 2021. He will thus occupy the Central Bank deputy governor post previously held by Mr. Kareem Michael, who is now the governor of the Central Bank.

In the coming weeks, Dr. Julio



**Hollis Parham,
Central Bank deputy governor**

Sabido will officially take on the title of CEO of the Ministry of Health and Wellness. This comes after much discord within the ranks of the ministry throughout the past year. Dr. Sabido takes up the mantle just thirteen days after Dr. Lesbia Guerra, who had been selected in December to be the CEO in the ministry after the departure of the previous CEO, Dr. Deysi Mendez, from the ministry two months ago, opted not to take the position. Dr. Sabido holds a Master’s degree in Public Health from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and another Master’s degree in Public Health Nutrition from the University of Technology, Jamaica. He obtained his medical degree from La Universidad Mariano Galvez in Guatemala.

According to Minister of Health, Hon. Kevin Bernard, the new CEO will not be single-handedly shouldering the management of the ministry. In an interview with *News5*, Bernard stated that his goal as Health Minister is to work hand in hand with

Please turn to Page 15

CITCO fine-tunes portfolios

Continued from Page 1



Mayor Bernard Wagner

office for almost 1 year and follows an assessment of the performance of the council over that time. The release states, "There, the realignment outlined below is not only a reflection of this but also a catalyst for delivering greater results for the remainder of the term."

As mentioned, the changes are a part of an effort to achieve the strategic objectives of the council and were made to all portfolios.

To start off, Mayor Bernard Wagner now will be in charge of staff development and training, public relations, and special events. This is in addition to his responsibilities to oversee finance, administration, budgeting, anti-corruption, the CARILED program, and human resources.

Deputy Mayor Pollard retained works, infrastructure, urban development, and labor relations, while councilor Javier Castellanos continues to work in market management and assumed the new portfolio of management information systems.

Albert Vaughan will continue to work in the area of traffic management and security, and has also assumed responsibility for the municipal court and enforcement portfolios.

E-governance and community engagement will now be the responsibility of councilor Micah Goodin.

New councilor Deannie Requeña will continue to work with after-school programs and now also assumes the portfolio dealing with

non-governmental organizations. Stephanie Hamilton will continue in tourism and diaspora relations, zoning and planning, and the building unit and now also takes over Foreign Affairs and Sister City relations.

Parks, playgrounds, and beautification are now the responsibility of councilor Natasha Pipersburgh; these are added to her responsibility in the areas of women and children, CEMO, Climate Change, and disaster & risk management.

Edmund Kwan continues to work in the area of local economic development, trade, and investment, along with small and new businesses. And pro cyclist Kaya Cattouse retained responsibility for youth, sports, and wellness and assumes the portfolios of sanitation and maintenance.

Finally, Michael Novelo will continue to be responsible for cemeteries and public health.

The release states that the realignment is an attempt to achieve symbiosis within the council's operations.

the signing of an Instrument of Appointment by Prime Minister Hon. John Briceño on December 1. According to a press release issued by the Central Bank, Parham, who has been working with the bank for over 30 years, has held several positions at the bank, including data processing supervisor, systems analyst, and assistant manager of the Banking & Currency Department.

"The Board of Directors, Management, and Staff of the Central Bank congratulate Mr. Parham and endeavour to continue working with him in furthering the Central Bank's mission: promoting the stability of the monetary and financial system in a manner that is conducive to economic growth," stated the press release.

Legal Year 2022 commences

Continued from Page 1

personnel and major changes in the structure of the high courts in the country.

During her presentation preceding the adjournment of the opening, the Attorney General, Hon. Magali Marin-Young, announced that the Government of Belize is currently drafting a Senior Courts Bill by means of which a total rearrangement of the Supreme Court will be carried out. One of these changes will be the renaming of the Supreme Court, which will become known as the High Court of Belize. During last year's opening, Hon. Marin-Young first announced the government's intention to restructure the court system; today she gave some insights into what changes will be made.

"Firstly, it is proposed that the Supreme Court is to be renamed Belize's High Court, since it is a misnomer to call it the Supreme Court when it is not our apex court. Under a newly restructured Court of Appeal, a new High Court, there is to be a Chief Justice whose judicial function is to be recast to administratively supervise the performance of all High Court and Court of Appeal judges and allowing for him or her to sit on either court from time to time in the important matter of his or her choosing," AG Young explained.

She went on to tell the acting Chief Justice, Hon. Madam Michelle Arana, that this is the only reason she has not been given proper tenure of office. At this time, the government is entering the consultation phase and hopes to have this new legislation to restructure the court passed in the short term.

"Under the proposed restructuring, there is to be one judicial leader, namely the Chief Justice who will head both the High Court and the Court of Appeal and will be assisted by two senior high court judges one in the civil division and the other in the criminal division. In the civil division, there is to be a Public and Administrative Law Division, a Family and Trust Law Division, and a Commercial Law Division. The Chief Justice will continue to chair the Judicial and Legal Services Commission and as chair will ensure that matters are dealt with efficiently." AG Young shared.

Besides the restructuring of the bench, the government is also promising an infrastructural upgrade for the court. Attorney General Marin-Young announced that the government is also planning the construction of a judicial complex. This complex is to feature larger courtrooms that are retrofitted for virtual hearings, which have become the new norm.

In regard to funding for the judiciary, acting Chief Justice Arana stated that the funds allotted to the courts (after there was a cut in what was designated for the judicial system in last year's budget) was "woefully inadequate." She explained that the court's budget

was reduced from 9 million dollars to 7.9 million dollars.

"While the judiciary is fully cognizant of the need for cost-cutting measures, especially in this era of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative that this arm of government be funded in a manner that enables us and empowers us to carry out our duties in an effective manner. An overburdened, under-resourced, and underfunded judiciary is not conducive to the effective and the efficient administration of justice." CJ Arana said.

As far as judicial personnel is concerned, all three divisions of the Judiciary had to engage in the recruitment of legal personnel last year. To date, five new magistrates were added to the low court, while an additional 4 Supreme Court Justices and three new Justices of the Court of Appeal were appointed. Justice Lisa Shoman has been given tender of the Supreme Court, while former Justice Westmin James returned to Barbados to his position as a law professor at the UWI Cave Hill Campus.

In total, in the last year, 1,343 new civil cases were lodged in the Supreme Court, according to CJ Arana, with 603 of those cases being disposed of. In the criminal division, a total of 81 new criminal indictments were heard, with 70 cases in that division being disposed of. At this time, the remanded population at the Belize Central Prison stands at a total of 355 persons, with 187 remanded for murder.

The Bar Association, in their presentation, highlighted issues with the limited Court of Appeal hearings and a lack of comprehensive judgments coming from the bench. On the issues of limited hearings by the Court of Appeal, they shared that with the new virtual hearings, that should be done away with.

"The limited Court of Appeal sessions must be left in 2021," the president of the Bar Association, Illiana Smith, remarked. She added, "The Judiciary now has a tool to do better; the Bar would urge that the Court of Appeal have sittings all year."

In reference to the delivery of judgments from the bench, she said, "There is a growing concern by the Bar, about the quality of judgment delivery. It has unfortunately become quite common for parties to receive judgments with little to no reasons and merely a repetition of the arguments made by counsel and a statement as to which side of the argument was accepted. Parties to litigation and, most importantly, the unsuccessful party, should know why a judge arrived at a specific decision, as is consistent with the rules of natural justice."

Also announced were upgrades to court buildings across the country and relocation of various courts to more suitable building locations.

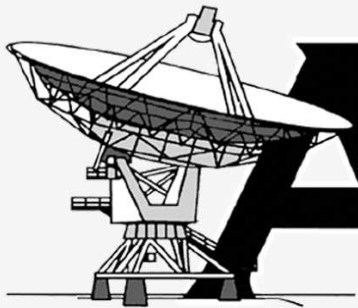
New CEO at MOHW; new Deputy Governor at Central Bank

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the CEO to improve and strengthen the MOHW.

"I needed somebody that already knows the in and out of this ministry, somebody who is technical as well that can provide some decisions, guidance so that we can work together, and indeed while Dr. Sabido is one of the persons that we have been communicating with and more likely will be finalized as the CEO. I can tell you that I am prepared to work with any and everybody," Bernard said during an interview last Friday.

In the case of the Central Bank of Belize, Hollis Parham became the bank's official Deputy Governor after



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