

Belize's leading newspaper

# GOB defends its position on FPIC



**Hon. Dolores Balderamos Garcia – Minister of Indigenous People's Affairs and Greg Ch'oc – Commissioner of Indigenous People's Affairs**

BELIZE CITY, Mon. Jan. 31, 2022  
This morning, the Minister of Indigenous People's Affairs, Hon. Dolores Balderamos Garcia, and the

Commissioner of Indigenous People's Affairs, Greg Ch'oc, held a

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## BTB Launches Matching Grant Program



**Hon. Anthony Mahler, Minister of Tourism & Diaspora Relation**

*by Khaila Gentle*

BELIZE CITY, Mon. Jan. 31, 2022  
The Belize Tourism Board has launched its Matching Grant Program for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and has issued a call for Expressions of Interest (EOI) to any small or medium enterprise that wishes to apply for

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## UDP Caucus for Change endorses Shyne; Tracy unfazed



**Hon. Shyne Barrow, Mesopotamia area representative**

*by Khaila Gentle*

BELIZE CITY, Sat. Jan. 29, 2022  
Last week the United Democratic Party's Hon. Shyne Barrow, the area representative for the Mesopotamia constituency, and Hon. Tracy Panton, area representative for the Albert division, both declared that they would be vying for the position of

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## Police officer dies in Cayo RTA

(See story on page 4)

## Stevedores back on the job

*In good faith, stevedores resumed their duties at the Port of Belize Ltd. on Friday following a ruling by the Essential Services Arbitration Tribunal that addresses some of their concerns. The CWU is now asking the management of the receivership at PBL to follow through, to do what the Tribunal has asked them to do—engage with them on outstanding matters.*

*by Marco Lopez*

BELIZE CITY, Mon. Jan. 31, 2022

On Friday the stevedores at the Port of Belize Ltd. who are members of the Christian Workers Union (CWU) returned to work following the rulings handed down to the parties by the Essential Services Arbitration Tribunal (ESAT) on Thursday, January 27. The CWU still has outstanding matters to

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**Evan Mose Hyde along with stevedores in front of CWU offices**

## Maya leaders jostle after FPIC announcement



**Friday morning press conference held by MLA spokespersons**

BELIZE CITY, Sun. Jan 30, 2022

Late Friday evening the Government of Belize released a statement in which it responded to the Maya Leaders Alliance's (MLA) and Toledo Alcaldes Association's

(TAA) rejection of a draft of the Free, Prior, Informed, Consent (FPIC) protocol that has since been submitted to the Caribbean Court of

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# Mobile Land Clinic still proving useful, says Deputy PM

by *Khaila Gentle*

LADYVILLE, Belize District, Fri. Jan. 28, 2022

Minister of Natural Resources and Deputy Prime Minister, Hon. Cordel

## GoB to update defamation law



**Hon. Magali Marin-Young,  
Attorney General**

BELIZE CITY, Mon. Jan. 31, 2022

This Friday, the Government of Belize plans to introduce an updated defamation law and to repeal the outdated libel and defamation legislation that is currently in place. Attorney General Hon. Magali Marin-Young has told local media that the purpose is to modernize the law to widen the net of culpability to various social media platforms publishing content. AG Young also indicated that some procedural changes would be made to alter how defamation cases are heard by the courts. She said that the proposed legislation allows a claimant to bring a single defamation case to cover issues of both libel and slander.

The law, as mentioned, is an attempt to modernize the legal landscape so that the courts can address potentially defamatory remarks made on a range of online platforms. So, in addition to known media outlets, and their various pages, as well as even individuals who post content on social media platforms, various other entities which publish online content could be subject to defamation lawsuits.

In 2019 Moses Sulph was sued for libel by Mark King for a post he published on Facebook. At the end of the trial, Justice Sonya Young handed down a 30-thousand-dollar judgment against Sulph. This case was precedent-setting and was followed by various defamation cases related to Facebook posts.

The Attorney General said that the new legislation will simplify the manner in which persons approach the court, widen the scope of remedies that could be used by the courts, and codify certain common law defenses.

Hyde has been making an effort to bring the services of the Lands Department to various parts of the country since early 2021—a strategy implemented by former Deputy PM Hugo Patt and continued by the current government—and this month the residents of Ladyville got the chance to benefit from the Mobile Land Clinic. The clinic, which was located at the Ladyville Community Center, is aimed at helping residents in resolving any land issues they have. According to Hon. Cordel Hyde, many of those issues have been longstanding.

“We’re in high demand. All our communities pretty much all over the country are clamoring for us, and so we can’t have enough mobile clinics really, because it is at these clinics that we get to solve a lot of longstanding issues for ordinary people. Some of these issues date back to 1998, to 2000, to 10 years ago, 12 years ago, 15 years ago,” said Minister Hyde.

He also expressed that it is often difficult for residents to reach the Lands Department in Belmopan and that many times when they do get there, the Department is too crowded to allow adequate time and attention to be given to each person’s issue.

Also present at the land clinic was Hon. Dolores Balderamos Garcia, area representative for Belize Rural Central; and Minister of Human Development, Families, and Indigenous People’s Affairs. Hon.



**Hon. Dolores Balderamos Garcia - Belize Rural Central area rep and  
Hon. Cordel Hyde - Minister of Natural Resources**

Balderamos Garcia expressed her gratitude to Minister Hyde and his team for bringing the department to the people of Ladyville.

“I am very grateful to Deputy Prime Minister Cordel Hyde and his team for bringing the services of government to the people, because it’s difficult for people to get to Belmopan all the time. What they have done here is bring every aspect of the Lands Department right here to the Ladyville Community Center so that if you have an issue with a lease, if you have an issue with maybe a dispute, or if you have applied and maybe all you need to do is pay your money, those are the kinds of services being offered

today,” she stated.

Both Hon. Balderamos Garcia and Hon. Hyde stated that the land clinic, which provided services within the community for two days, was highly successful.

“When we are on these mobiles, we see hundreds of people, and we do our absolute best to try and resolve all of their issues as quickly as possible. We’ve been pretty successful in that, I believe, and we will continue to do that,” said Hyde.

When asked where the mobile clinic’s next stop will be, Minister Hyde stated that they have two visits lined up for the Orange Walk District in February, but that these are yet to be confirmed.

## MOE gives laptops and scholarships to needy students



**Dian Maheia, CEO of the  
Ministry of Education**

by *Charles Gladden*

BELIZE CITY, Sun. Jan. 30, 2022

On Thursday, January 27, the Ministry of Education received ninety-nine laptops from the Social Investment Fund (SIF) to assist in the Basic Needs Trust Fund Ninth Program. The laptops will be distributed to needy students at five primary schools throughout the country. Currently, over 400 schools across the country are engaged in hybrid learning, and there are many students who do not own a tablet or laptop and are thus unable to access

online learning to continue the 2021/22 academic school year. These are the students who are being targeted as recipients of the donated laptops.

“What we’ve seen in the past twenty-two months is that forty percent of our primary schools have used some form of online learning. That’s four out of ten, and of the schools who use some form of online learning, eighty-four percent of them used WhatsApp as the primary means. So you know what that means is for the primary school students in this country who have been receiving some form of instruction using technology, it has been happening on a phone. These ninety-nine computers will go to schools across the country: Santa Marta Government School, Crooked Tree Government School, San Isidro Government School, St. Michael’s RC, and Louisiana Government.” said CEO of the Ministry of Education, Dian Maheia, during her remarks at the handing-over ceremony.

“This initiative falls under SIF’s mission to provide improved access to information and communications in education for schools across the country. The Social Investment Fund which is under the Ministry of Finance, Economic Development and

Investment is the implementing agency for the Government of Belize in addressing the basic needs of Belizeans from north to south. These laptops were purchased from funds from the Basic Needs Trust Fund Ninth Program,” noted Deputy Chairman of SIF, Valentino Shal.

The handing-over ceremony took place at the Government House in Belize City. The combined value of the laptops is approximately \$329,000 BZD

Notably, the Education Ministry’s Education Upliftment Project also commenced last week. Through this project over 1,000 students in Southside Belize City will be granted full scholarships to continue their secondary education. The program will be providing scholarships to students who reside, and attend institutions, on that side of the Haulover Creek. This includes students of four government schools: Sadie Vernon High School, Excelsior High School, Maud Williams High School, and Gwen Lizarraga High School. The Education Ministry has indicated that the program will include not only coverage of tuition fees but also transportation assistance, a feeding program, and social support for the family.

# Remaining COPA passengers sent back to Panama

*Visas now required for visitors from Venezuela, Ecuador, and the Dominican Republic*

by *Khaila Gentle*

BELMOPAN, Mon. Jan. 31, 2022

On Monday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade, and Immigration issued its fourth press release regarding the 37 COPA Airlines passengers who were denied leave to enter Belize on January 18. In this latest release, the ministry revealed that all the passengers have now left Belize, with the final 10 Venezuelans being allowed to return to Panama (their point of origin) after testing negative for COVID-19. Previously, the group of 10 had been accommodated at the Best Western Belize Biltmore Plaza Hotel at the expense of COPA Airlines after they had tested positive for COVID-19.

The ten passengers left on Saturday, January 29—one day after the UNHCR National Office- Belize requested that seven of the ten persons be handed over to Help for Progress (without security) so that they could seek asylum in Belize. This request, according to the ministry, was refused, in light of what occurred after eight other COPA passengers had requested asylum and been handed to Help for Progress. Those persons promptly left Help for Progress and fled to Mexico.

“The Government notes that these individuals [the seven passengers]

never claimed asylum when they arrived in Belize. On their immigration declaration forms, they stated that they came to Belize for ‘tourism’ purposes. They had previously been interviewed by UNHCR and did not claim asylum. After eight asylum seekers were handed over to Help for Progress, at the request of the UNHCR, and allowed to escape to Mexico, these seven persons changed their position and wished to apply for asylum,” stated the ministry’s press release.

According to the release, the seven individuals had expressed to UNHCR representatives that they feared their lives would be in danger if they were sent back to Venezuela. And so while they were not granted permission to remain in Belize, they were allowed to return to Panama instead.

“The Government was satisfied that Belize’s National Security, the Region’s Security, Belize’s Immigration Laws, and Belize’s commitment to the Global Compact on Migration have been and would once again be compromised. Consequently, the seven (7) Venezuelans were returned on a TAG flight to the country of origin, Panama, as scheduled. The Government of Belize has not returned them to Venezuela, and these individuals are free to seek asylum in

Panama,” it stated.

In a Cabinet brief issued on Thursday, the government announced that it would impose a visa requirement on citizens from three Latin American countries: Venezuela, Ecuador, and the Dominican Republic. The Government of Belize has been hypersensitized to the regional migration crisis currently playing out in the Latin America and Caribbean region.

In its Cabinet brief, GoB states, “Cabinet was updated on the increasing numbers of migrants arriving in Belize through the Philip Goldson International Airport from Panama via COPA Airline flights and using Belize as a transit point to move northbound.”

In recent years we have seen massive caravans of persons en route to the US/Mexican border, with hopes of crossing over into the US and seeking asylum to escape horrendous

social and economic conditions in their home country. In order to curb the use of Belize as a transit point for illegal migration, the government has approved the imposition of visa requirements on travelers from those three countries.

When interviewed last week, Deputy Prime Minister Cordel Hyde stated, “We looked at it recently. We have to be very vigilant, but we observed that recently there have been some persons coming in certain flights that don’t come here to be tourists, they are coming here without legitimate connection to the country, without legitimate reservations and are not necessarily staying here or at least not staying here and then leaving as they said they would. They are leaving by different means, so we have to be vigilant, and we’ve identified some problem areas, and so that is what the visa restrictions are about.”



*The 37 passengers onboard the COPA flight*

## 8 COPA passengers’ Mexico journey was possibly the original plan

by *Khaila Gentle*


BELIZE CITY, Thurs. Jan. 27, 2022

On Tuesday we reported that eight of the 37 COPA Airlines passengers initially prohibited from entering Belize after arriving at the Philip Goldson International Airport (PGIA) were allowed to remain in the country after UNHCR representatives determined that they were trying to seek asylum in the country. We also reported that, not long after, those eight passengers fled the country.

A statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs after the so-called escape indicated that the asylum-

seekers had left the Help for Progress shelter in Belmopan and had gone to Mexico. And according to a more recent statement, this occurrence might not be as unusual as one might be led to believe. An update from Cabinet has revealed that there have been increased numbers of migrants arriving at the Philip Goldson International Airport from Panama via COPA Airline flights and using Belize as a transit point to move north. As a result of this and the incident involving the eight refugees, Cabinet has approved the implementation of visa requirements for nationals of Venezuela, Ecuador, and the Dominican Republic.

## Elderly man attacked out west




# REPORT

## WHAT YOU KNOW

### VICTIM:

## Unknown Elderly





Sometime around the weekend of 22 Jan. 2022, an elderly citizen was beaten with a baseball bat to the point of unconsciousness by a currently unknown attacker on Kiskadee St., City of Belmopan. The elderly citizen is currently hospitalized.

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along with all acts of violence against the elderly.

“There is no justifiable reason for any member of our society to attack an older person violently and heartlessly. This incident is not the first in which we have seen physical harm being perpetrated on older persons, specifically older men,” said the press release.

The Council also condemned the passivity of those who stood by and not only watched but filmed the attack.

“We call on the

Police Department to continue their investigative process to ensure that justice is served. We call on all members of the Belmopan Community who may have any information regarding this incident to provide information to the Police Department. We can only protect our most vulnerable when we serve as the voices for those who are unable to speak for themselves,” it also stated.

The National Council on Ageing also used the press release to remind the public of its collective responsibility to protect and preserve the wellbeing of society, and urged citizens to report incidents such as this one to the police, to intervene when appropriate, and to hold others accountable for their actions.

The police have asked that anyone with any information regarding the incident report it by calling the CrimeStoppers hotline at 922 or by using the P3 app at [www.P3tips.com](http://www.P3tips.com).

by *Khaila Gentle*

BELMOPAN, Sun. Jan. 30, 2022

A number of Belizeans have seen video footage of an elderly man being attacked in Belmopan last weekend, and police are currently searching for the perpetrators of the heinous act. In the video, which quickly made its way onto the internet, the unnamed victim is seen being assaulted by a man with a bat. He is hit in the body and head until, eventually, he falls unconscious. According to police, the attack took place on Kiskadee Street, and while the elderly man survived, he ended up having to be hospitalized. Commissioner of Police, Chester Williams has publicly expressed his disgust at what took place, including the fact that there were persons who decided to film the entire ordeal rather than rendering aid.

This past weekend, the National Council on Ageing issued a press release condemning the incident

# Grave robbers raid Tanga's tomb



BELIZE CITY, Mon. Jan. 31, 2022  
 Over this weekend, the shocking news of the pillaging of the grave of Joseph Winston “Tanga” James surfaced on social media. The well-known gang figure, who was fatally shot in the neck while driving a Nissan Pathfinder somewhere between Bishop and King Streets on East Canal, was buried on Saturday evening along with an assortment of valuables, money, and jewelry. On Sunday morning, however, funeral director Andrew Munnings confirmed in a social media post that the money and the jewelry were missing, save for one \$100 bill.  
 Police reported that they received

a call early Sunday morning, around 2:00, and when they went to the cemetery, they saw some persons fleeing from the graveyard, but were unable to apprehend any of them. They did not do any further checks.  
 No formal complaint was made about the robbery.  
 Unconfirmed reports are that tomb raiders stole at least \$10,000.00 and a number of pieces of jewelry from inside the grave. On Sunday morning, Munnings, with the authorization and oversight of the Public Health Department, exhumed the body. James’ family then said a prayer over his body, after which he was re-entombed.

# Police officer dies in Cayo RTA

(From page 1)

by Khaila Gentle

ROARING CREEK, Cayo District, Mon. Jan. 31, 2022

A police officer lost his life in Cayo this past Friday when the motorcycle he had been driving crashed into a cement pillar. According to reports, police were informed of an accident near the Roaring Creek roundabout and when they arrived at the scene, they found the motionless body of 36-year-old police corporal Solomon Ical. Beside Ical’s body was a blue motorcycle.



Solomon Ical

Initial police investigations have revealed that Ical was heading to his home in Valley of Peace village when the accident occurred. Director of Communications for the Police Department, Fitzroy Yearwood, informed the media that officers were

able to extract both blood and urine samples from the deceased and that a toxicology report, which will indicate whether Ical was under the influence of alcohol at the time of the accident, is still pending.

# LATAM Summit 2022 concludes



Belize at LATAM Summit 2022

by Khaila Gentle

CANCUN, Mexico, Mon. Jan. 31, 2022

The Latin American Summit (LATAM Summit) 2022, which was held at Dreams Natura Resort and Spa in Cancun, Quintana Roo, where entrepreneurs and companies from across the region gathered to network with each other, came to a close on Saturday, January 29. Hon. Jose Abelardo Mai, Minister of Agriculture, Food Security, and Enterprise, headed a delegation from Belize which attended the summit. He was accompanied by Hon. Anthony Mahler, Minister of Tourism and Diaspora Relations; Servulo Baeza, CEO, Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Enterprise; Nicole Solano, CEO, Ministry of Tourism and Diaspora Relations; Narda Garcia, CEO, Office of the Prime Minister and Finance and Investment; and H.E. Oscar Arnold, Belize’s Ambassador to Mexico, as well as other officials across several ministries, said a government press release.

The summit took place from January 26 to 29, and on the final day, Hon. Mai shared an update.

“As leader of the Belize delegation, I thank the participants for their active role and well-focused interventions during the discussions. The Ministry of Agriculture’s discussion with the Secretary of Trade of Quintana Roo and

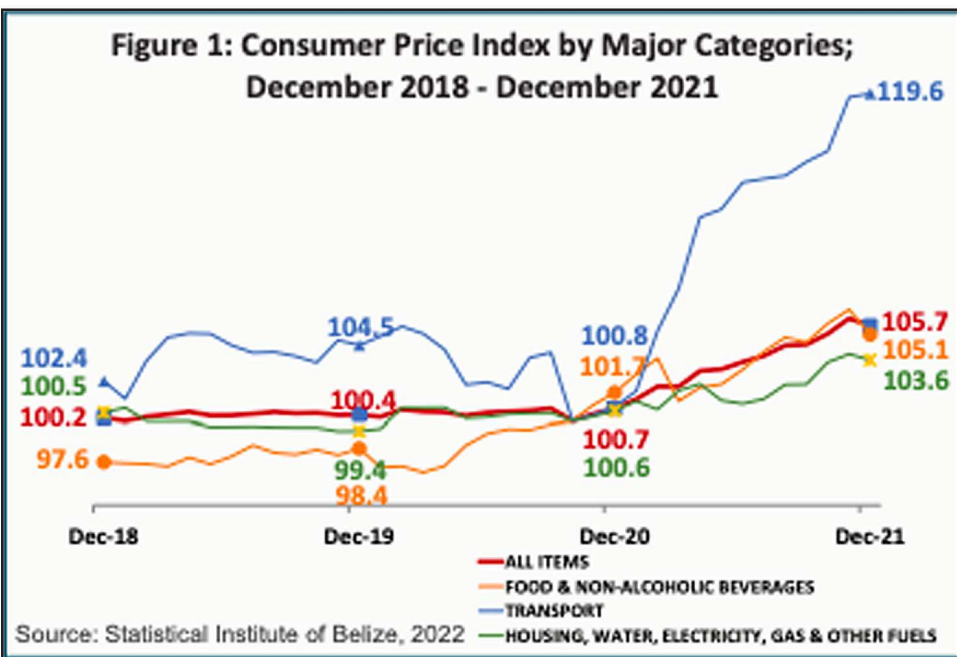
the Federal Delegate for the Secretary of Economic Development focused on reduction/elimination of tariffs for Belizean agriculture products traded with Mexico,” said Minister Mai.

He expressed that the main agriculture products discussed were cattle and shrimp, as the reduction or elimination of tariffs for both prove critical, since cattle exports to Mexico have been increasing and the shrimp industry has been seeing a revival. The Federal Delegate, he said, was optimistic and would be reaching out to the Ministry with a response to its request within the next few weeks.

The LATAM Summit, described as the “biggest business round in the Mexican Caribbean” featured more than 100 entrepreneurs from the United States, Colombia, Panama, Belize, Mexico, and other countries in Latin America. And according to the GoB press release, it serves to expand and diversify linkages and investment opportunities among the different participating countries, especially in the areas of real estate, construction, and promotion of regional opportunities.

According to the Government of Belize’s press release, “The Latin American Summit is organized by the Quintana Roo branch of COPARMEX, the Confederación Patronal de la República Mexicana or Employers’ Confederation of the Mexican Republic.”

# DPM speaks on inflation



BELIZE CITY, Mon. Jan. 31, 2022  
 The Statistical Institute of Belize has reported a considerable increase in the prices of goods compared to what they were in 2020. In November 2021, the highest overall inflation rate was recorded since August 2008: 5.7%. Deputy Prime Minister, Hon. Cordel Hyde told local reporters that the rise in prices is worrisome, but he explained that it is largely out of the government’s control and that the inflation currently being seen is occurring on a global level and is caused by various international forces.  
 “It’s worrisome, because a lot of this is beyond our control. A lot of this is driven by external global forces that we have absolutely no control over, you know, and so we’ve been looking critically at that, because it is worrisome. We get the complaints everyday; our constituents are shouting at us to let us know that

the cost of goods are becoming almost obscene. It’s really, really difficult.” Hon. Hyde said.

While he pointed to external forces as the main drivers of increased prices in Belize, he also acknowledged that price gouging at the retail level has also been taking place.

“We call on people in the business community to also be responsible and to not raise the prices any more than it needs to be raised, you know, cause in some instances it seems that it’s just price-gouging going on, and if the businesses are not going to be conscientious, are not going to be socially conscious, then I can tell you that government has been looking critically at how do we increase our enforcement, how do we crack down on businesses that have gone rogue so as to protect the consumer as best we can.” Hyde said.



# Different worlds

Sun. Jan. 30, 2022

The reported grave robbery mentioned in a recent news update, which indicated that thousands of dollars were reportedly entombed with the body of a well-known gang figure, is a wake-up call to many, who have been stunned by the fact that such an act (the burial of huge amounts of cash with a dearly departed) could be conceived, and secondly, that persons in the country would go to even greater lengths to steal the buried cash.

In analyzing this situation, it must be considered that those involved on both sides of this sordid affair are apparently living in a different world, though occupying the same space and time as the rest of ordinary, hard-working Belizeans.

Sometime ago in Belize, perhaps beginning in the mid to latter-1970s with the huge growth of the illegal marijuana export industry, and gaining greater momentum from the mid to latter-1980s and onwards with the explosion of the illegal cocaine transshipment and distribution business inside Belize, there began to develop amongst some citizens of this little colony and then nation, a new culture, a new set of values and thinking among certain sectors of the population. Whereas the old Belize culture placed great emphasis and value on things like honesty, family loyalty, respect for elders, the dignity of work, and the pride of principles, which were couched in sayings like, "a friend in need, is a friend indeed," and "good name betta than pocket money;" there was slowly developing among certain sections of the population a

different outlook, a different set of values, a new way of thinking and living; and it is evident that the quest for material things, however they were gotten, had overtaken the focus on personal dignity, principles and values that would not allow a person to think of causing harm to others in the quest for financial or material gain. The new mantra that good parents have to battle to try and protect their children from following, is ensconced in sayings like, "it takes a friend to f\_\_ a friend," "the end justifies the means," "get rich quick, or die trying," "it's all about the cheese," and "all a dehn di teef anyhow," referring to government and officials generally, thus justifying whatever one might need to do if he/she also wants to "get deh."

True, studies have been done dissecting the underlying factors in gang violence and crime among young people that have plagued our communities, and there seems to be no quick-fix solution that can stem the murder rate of a hundred plus over the past three decades in little Belize. It may be refreshing and

encouraging to consider that, indeed, there was a time in this colony of some 130 to 140 thousand citizens, and before the advent of the illegal drug industry in our streets, when a murder was something big in the news that left the community buzzing with grief and concern for weeks.

What may complicate any analysis of this murder phenomenon that has engulfed our society, is that historical records will show that also coinciding with the times when the illegal drug industry took off and became a major factor in the Belize economy, was the introduction of large-scale Central American immigration into Belize, facilitated by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and welcomed by the Belize government, likely for both party political advantages, as well as for satisfaction of the private sector in regards to their traditional complaint that Belize needed more people (customers) for businesses to thrive. True, immigration all over the world plays a part in injecting new energy and skills into the resident population; but the process is fraught with possibilities for social problems if not properly managed and controlled. And the risks are most evident where the demographic balance of coexisting ethnic groupings can be suddenly or drastically affected with large-scale, accelerated immigration, as has happened in Belize.

There has been the argument and suspicion expressed in various media in Belize that these accelerated and major demographic changes in Belize were by design and not by accident; that the purpose and the intention was to reduce the influence and political impact of the previously majority ethnic group, the so-called Kriols, who have traditionally been the most vocal in opposition to American proposals for some sort of political affiliation with our western neighbor, Guatemala. There were uprisings and street demonstrations against the 1966-68 Webster's Proposals; and later with the March, 1981 Heads of Agreement. And the negative local response to the Guatemalan claim has always been fueled by the historical narrative, that black-skinned people as well as the indigenous Maya have suffered discrimination in that neighboring country.

Hurricane Hattie played a big role in the exodus of Belizean citizens to U.S. cities, but only because the U.S. embassy gave free visas to accommodate our refugees from the hurricane; it served our individual purposes and it served theirs also. And the exodus continued in the following decades "through the back," because Belizeans were in search of jobs, as the lumber industry was in sharp decline.

And while many Kriol Belizeans were going "hand over fist" to the U.S., and crack cocaine was ravaging the population left behind, mostly Mestizo immigrants from the raging civil wars in Central America were pouring into Belize, in UNHCR-sponsored settlement programs, so that "overnight" there were many new villages across the country. Many of these people worked in farming, but others came to urban areas to seek employment, and their cheap labor inevitably displaced some of the Kriol resident population in the towns and cities.

The details of the crime and violence studies are certainly revealing and demand meaningful intervention, but the big picture also suggests that more "reparation" assistance from the U.N. should be forthcoming to offset the apparent side effects of their immigration program. Any casual walk through the streets of Belize City will reveal the reality that by far it is Kriol Belizeans that make up the wandering homeless, the mentally ill and the destitute scavenging for survival, and they are also the vast majority in prison, when that was certainly not a problem in Belize before 1980.

The numbers tell a story. According to a Wikipedia page which

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# Cabinet approves Blue Bond and Project Finance for Permanence Unit

A new unit was formed in the Prime Minister's office to ensure that GoB meets all commitments outlined in the Blue Bond Loan Agreement.

by Charles Gladden

BELIZE CITY, Mon. Jan. 31, 2022

Cabinet has informed the public that it has approved the establishment of the Blue Bond and Project Finance for Permanence Unit within the Office of the Prime Minister. The unit will be ensuring that the government meets all its commitments outlined in the Blue Bond Loan Agreement (BLA) and Conservation Funding Agreement (CFA).

In a House of Representatives meeting in October 2021, Prime Minister of Belize, Hon. John Briceno, officially introduced the Blue Bond Loan Bill to initiate the historic purchase, redemption, and cancellation of the so-called Superbond, at a 45% discount for the country—yielding savings of almost \$1 billion BZD. (Over \$700 million BZ).

And in September of last year, GoB started a process of requesting bondholders to consent to a buyback that would be financed through an innovative deal with TNC, and 87.4% of bondholders tendered offers.

At that time, the agreement was in its final stages, and a loan of \$365,000,000 was granted to the Government of Belize from the Belize Blue Investment Company LLC.

This has now led to the design of

an innovative new financing model: Project for Finance Permanence (PFP), to further assist Belize in meeting and sustaining its Nationally Determined Contributions and conservation goals.

“The new unit will coordinate across all relevant government ministries and agencies and will be the point of contact for the Government of Belize on all enquiries related to the Blue Bond and PFP programs. Additionally, the unit is responsible for documenting and maintaining workplans; ensuring project teams have sufficient human resources to achieve government's commitments; and coordinating with external partners to ensure full implementation of said workplans.” The release from GOB states.

The new unit will be coordinated across all relevant government ministries and agencies and will be the point of contact for the Government of Belize on all inquiries related to the Blue Bond and PFP programs.

Also, throughout the project's existence, there will be monitoring of program progress and program status information will be communicated to all relevant internal and external stakeholders.

The unit will be headed by Narda Garcia, Chief Executive Officer in the Office of the Prime Minister, and led by Ms. Beverly Wade, Director of the unit.

# Black History Month 2022

This year's theme for Black History Month, “Black Health and Wellness”, takes a look at how American healthcare has often underserved the African-American community.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has recently shown, a widespread disparity of access to quality healthcare negatively impacts outcomes for blacks and other minorities.

For African-Americans, the root of the problem goes deep, and back centuries.

Beginning with slavery a lack of economic opportunity, often put medical care out of reach for many African-Americans.

Even in good economic times, during the Jim Crow era “Whites Only” hospitals were commonplace throughout the South. Black medical facilities were often understaffed, underfunded, or non-existent. This stark reality gave credence to the saying: “When white folks catch a cold, black folks get pneumonia.”

Black folk remedies helped pick up the slack involving rituals and incantations, harking back to its African roots. Many plant-based medicines were also part of the cure. These included garlic for high blood pressure, and aloe vera for skin injuries which have since been validated in scientific studies.

It was only into the 20th century



when Black America was given a better shot at institutional health care. That's when the US government threatened to withhold Medicare payments to “Whites Only” medical institutions and — almost overnight — hospitals were desegregated. The year was 1964 with the passage of the Civil Rights Act.

More than 40 years later, following years of negotiations with the health insurance industry, the Affordable Care Act was eventually passed by the Obama administration that gave better access to medical care for Americans of all colors.

Today, (almost unbelievably for a rich industrialized nation), the US continues to lag behind the rest of the world in providing affordable medical care for a majority of its citizens. As a result, African-Americans, other minorities and especially the poor remain among the country's most vulnerable populations.

First published by chiff.com

## COVID-19 vax website launch

BELIZE CITY, Mon. Jan. 31, 2022

Today, the Ministry of Health and Wellness announced that they have officially launched a COVID-19 vaccination website. The site can be found at <https://www.myvaccine.bz/> and, according to the MOHW, vaccinated citizens will be able to

access COVID-19 information from the site. The website also provides information on the location of vaccination sites, and the community and district in which inoculation will take place, as well as the time at which vaccination services will be provided.

Continued from Page 5

highlights the 1946 census of Belize, at that time, in a population of 59,000, the blacks (Kriol & Garifuna combined) represented 45.2%; the Maya (Q'eqchi, Mopan & Yucatec combined) were 16.9%, and the Mestizo/Spanish/Latino were 31.0% of the population. By the 2010 census, in a population of 325,000, the blacks were down to 26.8% (an 18.4% drop), the Maya down to 9.9% (a 7% drop), while the Mestizo-Latino were now 49.7% (an 18.7% rise) of our population. What will the 2022 census reveal?

Amazingly, there are no signs of ethnic strife in Belize. What we have in Belize has been described by experts (Dr. Herbert Gale) as a high level of “social violence”, where the civil-war level murder rate encompasses all ethnicities, but mostly blacks. “At the core,” said Gale, “is a stew of social problems” accompanying “extreme poverty in the midst of wealth.”

And while large numbers of those persons are just surviving in a world of poverty and deprivation, and some have fallen by the wayside to become a burden to society, a few have escaped, mostly through the illegal drug trade, into the world of the rich or super rich, where money and “the good life” are all that matters. So extreme and decadent has become the intoxication of wealth in the new drug-based culture, that we are now talking about decorating the deceased in a casket with bundles of cash, as if that could somehow ensure entry through the “pearly gates”.

The challenge for Belizean elders and our political leaders is how to make the real world a much better place for our young generation to thrive, so that they don't get ensnared by the false glitter of the underworld dealers, which leads to vanity and death. The political will is absolutely essential, and according to Gale it will take “bravery” and it will also take “people who have a heart.”

**AMANDALA is cream!**

# Perpetuity contract, garbage tax, and court failure

by Colin Hyde

The best lawyers in the country have reportedly looked at the garbage contract between the Belize City Council (BCC) and Belize Waste Control Ltd. (BWCL) with an eye to finding a loophole to allow the BCC to renegotiate or cancel it, and the story is that it is fixed in stone, a marriage that cannot be annulled. The contract has a renewal clause that either of the parties can trigger, which means that the BCC can wish it away all it wants, but there'll be no separation if the BWCL says "we want to continue being your partner."

The original contract was signed during the 1998-2008 PUP governments, a time when our leaders were privatizing everything the public owned that had appeal to private entities. During that period a company also received a contract from the BCC for maintenance, I don't know what all that entailed, and I believe there was also another company that got a contract. Putting aside what I'm not sure of, I know that BCCs since 2006, from when Ms. Zenaida Moya became mayor,

have had trouble keeping up with the payments for private sanitation services. If the BCC was an individual, their name would certainly have gone abroad. Hmm, they still could be tagged, malpago, without compassion, but because the smear would fall on an entire city, we couldn't do that.

A UDP mayor, Darrell Bradley, told the *Amandala* in 2014 that 45 cents out of every dollar the BCC collected went to pay for sanitation services. Eamon Courtenay was the attorney for BWCL. I'll allow you a deep breath, but no calculator to figure out where a lock-tight contract that sticks like gorilla glue originated. The trail here is so obvious that a city dog could follow it. Cold contracts drawn up by L. Ashcroft's battery of highly paid lawyers have made him get the better of us in every court case. I could be wrong, but if the betting house was open, I would go with British barristers and their Belizean associates.

In 2009 Mayor Zenaida mobilized people power to get out of the contract's grip. The *Amandala* said she and her party planned a

referendum to "sample the opinion of city residents", and it is for sure if the city's residents had a say they would tell the BWCL to wheel and come again, but that was scrapped after the BCC got the sense about that contract in a local court.

It's entirely possible that Belize City is not paying sufficient taxes to cover its sanitation expenses. Yap, it's entirely possible that if the BCC had the money it's paying the BWCL it couldn't deliver better waste collection services than the private company. No, we don't know that it is a terrible contract in terms of "value for money", these things have to be gone over with the fine toothed comb, but BCCs both red and blue having tried to put it away makes it clear that minds that have seen it/ worked with it, noh deh wid it.

The proof of the pudding is always in the eating, but we really have to see this thing before deciding that it is sour. A part of the BCC's distaste could be that the unelected BWCL is managing half of the city's finances. For the edification of the masses, this thing should be aired out. Let all of us see what's so onerous in the contract; let us all see what kind of contract NOT to sign. At this time only the lawyers are getting lessons. Come on, BCC, show us so we all can see, and learn from your mistake.

Belize City has expanded since the contract was signed 20 or so years ago, and the BCC and BWCL have had to renegotiate the numbers to cover the greater workload. In normal times the BCC quite likely would have collected enough to meet their bills, but as we all know, thousands of citizens have fallen on lean times. The taxes are not reaching the BCC's coffers as they used to, and as a consequence the BCC is having trouble meeting the weekly payments for sanitation.

Four or five months ago, the BCC fell behind all of 20 weeks, over \$1 million, and to get their attention the BWCL suspended its operations. With garbage piling up in the city, Central Government, to get BWCL back on the job, bailed out the BCC, a quite embarrassing situation for any municipal body. But the BCC shouldn't feel too bad. Thanks to the pandemic we are all living in the age of embarrassment. Anybody who is holding their head above water all on their own has to have a rich uncle.

The BCC seems to not want to be embarrassed again. The contract with the BWCL is fixed in stone, they have to find the payments, and they want to ask city residents to pick up the tab, by paying a garbage tax. I think I heard the BCC mayor say that people who can't afford to pay would get an exemption. It may be that the majority of people in Belize City would need

an exemption, because poverty is greater than it has ever been, the pandemic having squeezed many businesses and homes.

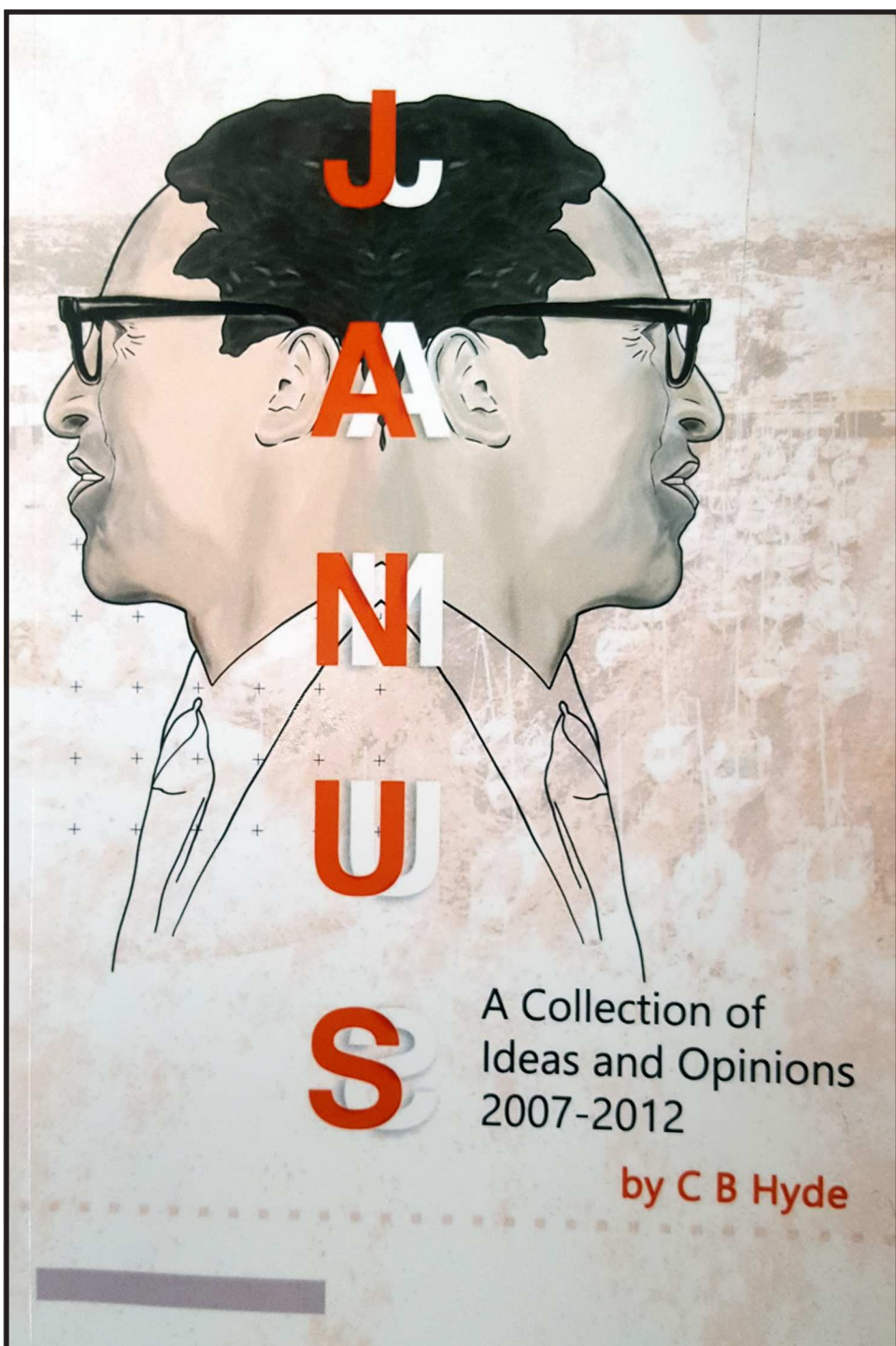
The substance here is that no ifs, ands or buts, garbage has to be picked up, and you have to pay whoever picks it up. But it's going to cost to get that cash. There will be a political price to pay if a garbage fee is introduced, and the PM has said city leaders in the National Assembly will have to weigh in. That popularity thing is very important to politicians, wait, being liked is everything for them.

In these pandemic times the BCC might have to lean heavily on companies that have done well and those households that are holding on okay, to get the taxes to pick up that garbage. The BCC might have to look to them to step up, pick up the slack for their brothers and sisters who are not able to do much at this time. The pandemic has shown everyone who had their head in the sand that we are our brothers' keepers, what affects one affects all, especially on matters related to health. Poor sanitation anywhere affects everyone everywhere.

The rich, and the well-off group which includes those public employees who did not fall into poverty when salaries were cut, might not have to carry the load alone for long. Hopefully all of the government's employees will be getting back their pay within the year, and they will be so happy they, the ones who live in the old capital, won't be reluctant to pay a garbage fee.

My, it would be good if the BWCL eased the city for the next two years, to give people the space to recover from the pandemic. But if it's hardball all the way, then the cash-strapped BCC, if it can't find another source of revenues, will be up to its nose in debt to the BWCL again very soon. It's a real dilemma for Belize City. I read that some BCC councilors are against the garbage fee. It would be interesting to see their proposal.

That garbage problem in Belize City goes beyond colors. Both PUP and UDP BCCs have wrestled with the contract. The Gordian knot was unraveled by cutting it, but there was no contract like the one BWCL has to guard it. I don't know the details of this contract, so I can't say yay to the BCC's cry of foul, but what I do know is that a bloody revolution changes things. There's a way to preempt bloody revolutions. We should be able to depend on our courts to remedy everything that is harmful to the people. My, BWCL has a contract in perpetuity, and the BCC says it can't afford it, without a garbage tax.





# Mundos diferentes

Domingo 30 de enero de 2022

El reportado robo de una tumba mencionado en una reciente actualización de noticias, que indica que miles de dólares fueron supuestamente enterrados con el cuerpo de una muy conocida figura pandillera, es una llamada de atención para muchos, quienes se han quedado atónitos por el hecho de que tal cosa (el entierro de enormes cantidades de dinero en efectivo con un difunto) podría concebirse, y en segundo lugar, que hay personas en el país que harían todo lo posible para robar el dinero enterrado.

Al analizar esta situación, se debe considerar que los involucrados en ambos lados de este sórdido asunto aparentemente viven en un mundo diferente, aunque ocupan el mismo espacio y tiempo que el resto de los beliceños comunes y trabajadores.

Hace algún tiempo en Belize, tal vez comenzando a mediados o finales de la década de 1970 con el enorme crecimiento de la industria de exportación ilegal de marihuana, y adquiriendo un mayor impulso desde mediados hasta finales de la década de 1980 y en adelante con la explosión del negocio ilegal de transbordo y distribución de cocaína en el interior de Belize, comenzó a desarrollarse entre algunos ciudadanos de esta pequeña colonia y luego nación, una nueva cultura, un nuevo conjunto de valores y pensamiento entre ciertos sectores de la población. Mientras que la antigua cultura de Belize ponía gran énfasis y valor en cosas como la honestidad, la lealtad familiar, el respeto por los mayores, la dignidad del trabajo y el orgullo de los principios, que se expresaban en dichos como, "un amigo en necesidad, es un amigo de verdad", y "un buen nombre es mejor que dinero en el bolsillo"; se estaba desarrollando lentamente entre ciertos sectores de la población una perspectiva diferente, un conjunto diferente de valores, una nueva forma de pensar y de vivir; y es evidente que la búsqueda de cosas materiales, cualquiera sea la forma en que se consiguieran, había superado el enfoque de la dignidad personal, principios y valores que no permitían pensar en causar daño a los demás en la búsqueda de ganancias económicas o materiales. El nuevo mantra contra el que los buenos padres tienen que luchar para tratar de proteger a sus hijos de que no lo sigan, está contenido en dichos como, "se necesita un amigo para j—er a un amigo", "el fin justifica los medios", "hazte rico rápido o muere intentándolo", "lo importante es el billete" y "todos esos son unos ladrones de todos modos", refiriéndose al gobierno y a los funcionarios en general, justificando así cualquier cosa que uno deba hacer si él/ella también quiere "llegar allí".

Es cierto que se han realizado estudios para diseccionar los factores subyacentes en la violencia de las pandillas y el crimen entre los jóvenes que han afectado a nuestras comunidades, y no parece haber una solución rápida que pueda detener la tasa de asesinatos de más de cien en las últimas tres décadas en el pequeño Belize. Puede ser refrescante y alentador considerar que, efectivamente, hubo un tiempo en esta colonia de unos 130 a 140 mil ciudadanos, y antes del advenimiento de la industria de las drogas ilegales en nuestras calles, cuando un asesinato era algo grande en las noticias que dejó a la comunidad llena de dolor y preocupación durante semanas.

Lo que puede complicar cualquier análisis de este fenómeno de asesinatos que ha envuelto a nuestra sociedad, es que los registros históricos mostrarán que también coincidiendo con los tiempos en que la industria de las drogas ilegales despegó y se convirtió en un factor importante en la economía de Belize, fue la introducción de inmigración centroamericana a Belize a grandes escalas, facilitada por el Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Refugiados (ACNUR) y bien recibida por el gobierno de Belize, probablemente por las ventajas políticas para ambos partidos, así como por la satisfacción del sector privado con respecto a su queja tradicional de que Belize necesitaba más personas (clientes) para que las empresas prosperen. Es cierto que la inmigración en todo el mundo contribuye a inyectar nuevas energías y habilidades a la población residente; pero el proceso está lleno de posibilidades de problemas sociales si no se gestiona y controla adecuadamente. Y los riesgos son más evidentes cuando el equilibrio demográfico de los grupos étnicos coexistentes puede verse afectado repentinamente o drásticamente por una inmigración acelerada a gran escala, como ha ocurrido en Belize.

Ha habido el argumento y la sospecha expresada en varios medios en Belize de que estos cambios demográficos importantes

y acelerados en Belize fueron por diseño y no por accidente; que el propósito y la intención era reducir la influencia y el impacto político del grupo étnico anteriormente mayoritario, los llamados criollos, que tradicionalmente han sido los más vocales en oposición a las propuestas estadounidenses de algún tipo de afiliación política con nuestro vecino occidental, Guatemala. Hubo levantamientos y manifestaciones callejeras contra las Propuestas Webster de 1966-68; y más tarde contra el Preámbulo de Acuerdo de marzo de 1981. Y la respuesta local negativa al reclamo guatemalteco siempre ha sido alimentada por la narrativa histórica, que tanto las personas de piel negra como los indígenas mayas han sufrido discriminación en ese país vecino.

El huracán Hattie jugó un papel importante en el éxodo de ciudadanos beliceños a las ciudades de los EE. UU., pero solo porque la embajada de los EE. UU. otorgó visas gratuitas para acomodar a nuestros refugiados del huracán; sirvió a nuestros propósitos individuales y sirvió también a los de ellos. Y el éxodo continuó ilegalmente en las décadas siguientes, porque los beliceños estaban en busca de trabajo, ya que la industria maderera estaba en fuerte declive.

Y mientras muchos beliceños criollos se dirigían a los EE. UU. y el crack causaba estragos en la población que quedaba, en su mayoría inmigrantes mestizos de las guerras civiles en Centroamérica llegaban a Belize, bajo programas de asentamiento patrocinados por ACNUR, de tal modo que "de la noche a la mañana" hubo muchas aldeas nuevas en todo el país. Muchas de estas personas trabajaban en la agricultura, pero otras llegaron a las zonas urbanas en busca de empleo, y su mano de obra barata inevitablemente desplazó a parte de la población residente criolla en los pueblos y ciudades.

Los detalles de los estudios sobre el crimen y la violencia son ciertamente reveladores y exigen una intervención significativa, pero el panorama general también sugiere que se debería recibir más asistencia de "reparación" de la ONU para compensar los efectos secundarios aparentes de su programa de inmigración. Cualquier paseo casual por las calles de la Ciudad de Belize revelará la realidad de que, con mucho, son los beliceños criollos los que componen las personas sin hogar, los enfermos mentales y los indigentes que buscan sobrevivir, y también son la gran mayoría en prisión, cuando eso ciertamente no era un problema en Belize antes de 1980.

Los números cuentan una historia. Según una página de Wikipedia que destaca el censo de Belize de 1946, en ese momento, en una población de 59.000, los negros (criollos y garífuna combinados) representaban el 45,2%; los mayas (q'eqchi, mopan y yucatecos combinados) eran el 16,9% y los mestizos/españoles/latinos eran el 31,0% de la población. Para el censo de 2010, en una población de 325.000, los negros se redujeron al 26,8 % (una caída del 18,4 %), los mayas al 9,9 % (una caída del 7 %), mientras que los mestizos-latinos ahora eran el 49,7 % (un aumento del 18,7 %) de nuestra población. ¿Qué revelará el censo de 2022?

Sorprendentemente, no hay signos de conflictos étnicos en Belize. Lo que tenemos en Belize ha sido descrito por expertos (Dr. Herbert Gale) como un alto nivel de "violencia social", donde la tasa de asesinatos a nivel de guerra civil abarca todas las etnias, pero en su mayoría a los negros. "En el fondo", dijo Gayle, "hay un guiso de problemas sociales" que acompañan a la "pobreza extrema en medio de la riqueza".

Y aunque un gran número de esas personas sobreviven en un mundo de pobreza y privaciones, y algunas se han quedado en el camino para convertirse en una carga para la sociedad, unas pocas han escapado, principalmente a través del tráfico ilegal de drogas, al mundo de los ricos o súper ricos, donde el dinero y "la buena vida" son todo lo que importa. Tan extrema y decadente se ha vuelto la embriaguez de la riqueza en la nueva cultura basada en las drogas, que ahora se habla de adornar al difunto en un ataúd con fajos de dinero en efectivo, como si eso pudiera asegurar de alguna manera la entrada por las "puertas del cielo".

El desafío para los ancianos beliceños y nuestros líderes políticos es cómo hacer que el mundo real sea un lugar mucho mejor para que nuestra generación joven prospere, para que no se dejen atrapar por el falso brillo de los traficantes del inframundo, que conduce a la vanidad y la muerte. La voluntad política es absolutamente esencial y, según Gale, se necesitará "valentía" y también "gente que tenga corazón".



# BTB Launches Matching Grant Program

Continued from Page 1

grant funding.

The project, for which, according to the BTB, 2.4 Million BZD has been earmarked, through the support of the Inter-American Development Bank, aims to implement growth opportunities within the tourism industry. The launch of the Matching Grant Program was held at the Belize Best Western Biltmore Plaza, with Hon. Anthony Mahler, Minister of Tourism and Diaspora Relations; Inter-American Development Bank representative, Ramiro Lopez Ghio; Director of Tourism at the Belize Tourism Board, Evan Tillett; and Chief Tourism Officer, Raymond Mossiah, all giving remarks.

Inter-American Development Bank representative, Ramiro Lopez Ghio, commented that tourism is the “engine of the Belizean economy.”

“Forty percent of [the country’s] GDP is provided by tourism. So it is a key sector for this economy—a sector that has suffered a lot because of the pandemic,” he said.

Ghio also stated that the program is one way in which the country can overcome the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic and achieve inclusive and sustainable growth.

When speaking about the program, BTB’s Director of Tourism, Evan Tillett, stated that the grants will aid in job creation and will contribute to the development of bio-protocols, skills, technology, and marketing intelligence and thus will increase the competitive edge of SMEs. Tillett encouraged all SME’s to pursue the opportunity.

And in his opening address, Minister of Tourism, Hon. Anthony Mahler expressed his wishes that the grant program reaches as many people as possible. The aim, he said, was to make the program especially accessible to the most vulnerable—which is why the program is focusing on Small and Medium Enterprises.

“Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) represent over 70% of our private sector employment and income in Belize, and in tourism, they are the backbone of our service industry. MSMEs also provide inclusive growth that leads to a more equitable distribution of wealth,” said Minister Mahler.

According to Mahler, even before the pandemic, MSMEs have faced many barriers when it comes to their development, including challenges in accessing funding from public and private sources.

A press release issued by the BTB stated that the project also aims to contribute to the growth of Belize’s economy and the expansion of its tourism industry through the provision of financial incentives for SMEs to overcome what the Board calls a “clearly defined set of market failures”.

SMEs wishing to express interest in receiving funding must submit completed Expression of Interest forms by Monday, February 21, 2022, at 4:00 p.m. Interested persons can visit the BTB website or Facebook page for guidelines and eligibility requirements.

Along with the Matching Grant Program, the BTB has also implemented two other projects—the

# Man shot to death in Seine Bight

Shooting in Seine Bight leaves one man dead, and another injured

by Charles Gladden

SEINE BIGHT VILLAGE, Stann Creek District, Mon. Jan. 31, 2022

A man was fatally shot while sitting in a bar on Sunday in Seine Bight village. The shooting took place around 12:35 a.m. at Gee Pee’s Bar, where Ernest Staine, 32, and Alrick Munnings, 30, were socializing with the owner of the bar in a shed, when an unknown gunman, dressed in a black hoodie and armed with a 9mm pistol, entered and fired several shots at them.

The gunman fired at Munnings first, then at Staine, at whom he aimed a number of bullets before firing several more shots at close range.

Munnings was taken to the Placencia Polyclinic for medical attention and was later transferred to the Southern Regional Hospital. Stain, however, died at the scene of the shooting shortly after being wounded.

As many as 13 expended shells were later recovered by police from the scene.

“To be honest with you, it’s a repeated problem, especially in these rural communities where our police officers are stretched thin, being that their patrols, people take advantage of it. They are still out during curfew hours, and as if there is no curfew. They make themselves easy targets, because this time you have minimal movement in the streets, and of course, if you have a problem with someone else, then there [are] not [many] hindrances that would cause your enemy to find you during curfew hours,” said the Police Department’s Director of Communications, ASP Fitzroy Yearwood in reference to the

many shooting incidents that have been occurring during curfew hours.

“We even ask the owners of these establishments, to close these places an hour before curfew to allow their employees to go home. We keep seeing where the owners of these establishments take advantage, especially if they live near to their place of business, and they remain on their premises, then they would say they’re at home, and it creates a lot of problems for the police and in this instance, we have a life lost,” ASP Yearwood further said.

Currently, police are searching for a person of interest in connection with the shooting incident.

“We haven’t gathered much so far. We do have a person of interest that we’re searching for, but that’s as much as I can say on this investigation. Because this person isn’t yet in police custody, and when it comes to [the] identity of persons wanted for murder, we try not too much information out there that could detriment the process if this person was found and charged,” ASP Yearwood went on to note.

It is yet to be determined whether Staine had been involved in any recent conflicts with anyone.



ASP Fitzroy Yearwood, Police Department’s Communications Director

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# REGIONAL & INTERNATIONAL

## How are Russian media outlets portraying the Ukraine crisis?

*Pro-Kremlin media assure audiences that Russia doesn't want a war, as independent news laments Putin's dangerous games*

RUSSIA. Mon. Jan. 31, 2022 (Al Jazeera)

In Western and Ukrainian media, the armed build-up at the border is a sign of Russian imperialist aggression, of Moscow trying to bully its smaller neighbour. In Russia, however, the situation is viewed rather differently.

NATO is a “cancer”, Sergey Karaganov, an influential, hawkish Russian political scientist said in a recent interview.

Comparing the standoff with the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, Karaganov said it is better for tensions to rise now than to “allow a repeat of June 22, 1941” further down the line, referring to the Nazi invasion.

In other words, Karaganov sees NATO expansion to Russia's borders as an existential threat better dealt with sooner than later.

Ukraine should be left alone to become a “proper buffer state”, and having reached that understanding, Russia and the West may become friends – so long as it is not ruled by the “LGBT cult” and “ultra-feminism”, he added.

However, he is not for an all-out invasion.

“Occupying a country that is economically, morally and

intellectually castrated, a country with a destroyed infrastructure and an embittered population, is the worst-case scenario,” he continued, echoing the position of pro-government media and experts – that Russia does not want war, and any hostilities will begin from the other side.

Western powers are fearful that Russia, having massed thousands of troops at the Ukraine border, is planning an attack. Russia has said its actions are aimed at protecting its interests, and blames NATO for undermining the region's security.

In December, Moscow delivered a series of ultimatums to key NATO member the United States, chief among them a promise that NATO would never allow Ukraine to become a member. The US and NATO have turned down that request.

“Donetsk has been surrounded! Horlivka has been cut off! Ukrainian and NATO cyber troops have already begun a new war in Donbas,” read a recent headline in the tabloid Komsomolskaya Pravda, while the state-run TASS news agency reported on claims from pro-Russian separatists that Ukrainian forces were conducting reconnaissance on their positions, preparing an attack.

Most Russians still get their news from television, but social media

apps like Telegram are increasingly popular.

Economist and political analyst Yevgeny Satanovsky wrote recently on his Telegram channel, “The background

noise about the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which is about to begin, is intended not so much to save it (Ukraine) from the evil Muscovite government, but to disguise its own preparation for aggression.

“Everything will start, of course, with the Crimea and Donbas.”

Satanovsky compared Ukraine to a cow that both the Germans and Americans are trying to milk.

Russia, on the other hand, would let it graze in peace, so long as it, too, is left alone.

Referring to the White House press secretary and United States president, Satanovsky went on, “What somewhat softens for Moscow the impression of [Jen] Psaki's tantrums, [Joe] Biden's rhetoric and the nonsense that the American State Department utters at all levels, is the current dilapidated state of the United States political elite, and the failures in their foreign and defence policy.

“After Afghanistan, the threats from the United States are hard to take



seriously.”

Other pro-Kremlin commentators also play down Russia's role in the crisis.

Talkshow host Vladimir Solovyov, one of the best-known faces on Russian television with his own radio and YouTube shows, told his audience that Russia is able to destroy Ukrainian forces “without even crossing the border”.

“We have enough firepower for the full annihilation of the Ukrainian military infrastructure without an incursion of forces into Ukrainian territory. But we aren't preparing to do this,” Solovyov said on his YouTube show, Solovyov LIVE, which has nearly one million subscribers.

Full article can be found at : <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/31/how-are-russian-media-outlets-portraying-the-ukraine-crisis>

First published by Al Jazeera.

## Mandera attack: Seven killed in Kenyan bus ambush

KENYA. Mon. Jan. 31, 2022 (BBC)

At least seven people have been killed in a roadside blast in northern Kenya.

Attackers ambushed a minibus, locally known as a matatu, after the blast and opened fire on its occupants near Mandera town, a police statement said.

Survivors were taken to hospital with various injuries, as the attackers fled the scene, the police said.

Mandera is one of the most dangerous areas in Kenya, due to the Islamist militant group al-Shabab, based across the border in Somalia.

Hospital authorities say they are treating 13 people, including a three-year-old infant.

A spokesman for the national police, Bruno Shioso, said a force was despatched to engage with the



Blast in Mandera

attackers who appear to have fled towards the Somali border.

No group has yet claimed responsibility, but al-Shabab has mounted numerous attacks on Kenya over the past decade.

This attack follows recent warnings made by the French and US diplomatic missions to Nairobi that the risk of militant attacks was rising, a threat the Kenyan authorities were keen to downplay.

First published by BBC news.

## Chileans protest against Venezuelan migrants

CHILE. Mon. Jan. 31, 2022 (BBC)

Thousands of people in northern Chile have staged a protest against migration from Venezuela.

Demonstrators marched through the city of Iquique waving Chilean flags and demanding the expulsion of what they called foreign criminals.

Some tore down tents that had housed migrants, while at least one person was beaten by the crowd.

There has been an increase in people arriving in Chile after fleeing Venezuela's economic collapse.

The protest, which attracted 4,000 people, was triggered by a video that showed two Chilean policemen being attacked at a checkpoint by suspected Venezuelan drug dealers.

Chile, one of the wealthiest countries in South America, has been a destination of choice for many Venezuelans, despite pandemic restrictions in recent years.

But there have been growing tensions over border control in the country, with migration and crime among voters' biggest concerns in last year's presidential elections.

Leftist candidate Gabriel Boric won the election and became the country's youngest ever leader last month, defeating his far-right opponent José Antonio Kast.

“This can't go on,” read one banner from Sunday's protest, which was marred by incidents of violence.

Videos on social networks showed a man lying on the ground surrounded by police officers while protesters shouted at him.

Some protesters also destroyed belongings taken from migrant camps in the streets.

However, police said they had made no arrests because there had been “no serious disorder”.

First published by BBC news.

# PAHO launches Neglected Infectious Diseases campaign

by Charles Gladden

BELIZE CITY, Mon. Jan. 31, 2022

On Sunday, January 30, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), under the World Health Organization (WHO), launched a campaign to bring an end to Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs). Although the world's attention has been shifted towards ending the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries throughout the world are still battling diseases that have been neglected for many years.

The theme for this year's PAHO campaign is "achieving health equity to end the neglect of neglected tropical diseases and other poverty-related infections, known in the Region of the Americas as 'neglected infectious disease'".

NTDs are normally found in low-income areas where there is limited

access to clean drinking water, sanitation, education and health services.

These diseases have affected over 1 billion persons globally and are caused by a variety of pathogens, including viruses, bacteria, parasites, fungi, and toxins. It has been estimated that 40 million children in Latin America and the Caribbean live in areas where they are at risk of infection or re-infection.

PAHO has listed 13 diseases that are classified as NTD's: Ascariasis, Buruli Ulcer, Chagas disease, Dracunculiasis, hookworm infection, Human African Trypanosomiasis, Leishmaniasis, Leprosy, Lymphatic Filariasis (elephantiasis), Onchocerciasis, Schistosomiasis, Trachoma, and Trichuriasis.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has made this even worse. Millions of people [have] been thrust deeper into



**Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General**

poverty. We've lost livelihoods, nourishment, and already limited access to health services reduced even further," said WHO Director-General, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus in his message for World Neglected Tropical Diseases Day (WNTDD)

PAHO's objective is to eliminate all NTD's by 2030.

# Trust

There was a time, not long ago, when a person's word was his bond. When making promises and keeping them was just taken for granted, and that was that. This does not apply to politicians; they are too supple and mercenary in their pronouncements and promises. I believe that maybe because of a fast-changing world, technology has changed so dramatically, that we are bombarded with so many "facts," that sometimes we choose the truths that are most convenient for us. Never mind that it may all be false, made up, we tend to believe it if the narrative supports our deeply held convictions! So facts or truths are now malleable, the best or loudest message prevails, and we are left trying to decipher the hieroglyphics of those very confusing and tainted tablets!

Trust is becoming almost an alien word! We don't trust the police, our elections, the media, our doctors, lawyers, teachers, religious leaders, our elected officials, the courts. Everything is fodder for conspiracy theorists, and their mastery of the mediums through which misinformation is channeled. I mean, look at what is happening in the United States right now. Almost half of the population believe that the last election was not on the level, not withstanding the fact that there's no evidence to that end. Every investigation, every court, has ruled against these false claims, yet they prevail. Why? Because we've become very tribal and deluded, and believe what we want to believe, in most cases. Some know better, but they see advantages in the deceit.

Although sometimes we think that we are tough and can withstand the constant, withering barrages of deception that surround us, the false narratives that are abounding in our daily lives, we mostly can't. We are fragile beings, who need validation; we have a need to fit in, so we choose sides! In the end, we become our own worst enemy! We become purveyors of false realities, and lose every shred of truth and trust that we had formerly worn as a badge of decency.

I tremble to think of what lies ahead for us, living in this fast-changing world. So fragile because of global warming, another subject full of disinformation, and because of poverty and the plague and conflict! I don't see, or can't imagine a resolution to this problem, the devaluation of truth and trust. I believe that it will get much worse, until some miracle, which I don't believe in, changes they way we think, the way we absorb information! There are no filters anymore; it all just streams out relentlessly, and we pick and choose what to believe.

It's happening already, but soon we will begin to only listen to, hang out with, and even only marry, people that think the way we do. This will only get worse as time goes on, and can only end in tragedy, if it ever ends!

"The best lack all conviction; while the worst all full of passionate intensity!" W.B. Yeats. *The Second Coming*.

Glen

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# Health & NUTRITION

## Explainer: Scientists on alert over rising cases caused by Omicron cousin BA.2

CHICAGO, Jan 30 (Reuters) - The highly transmissible Omicron variant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus - the most common form of which is known as BA.1 - now accounts for nearly all of the coronavirus infections globally, although dramatic surges in COVID cases have already peaked in some countries.

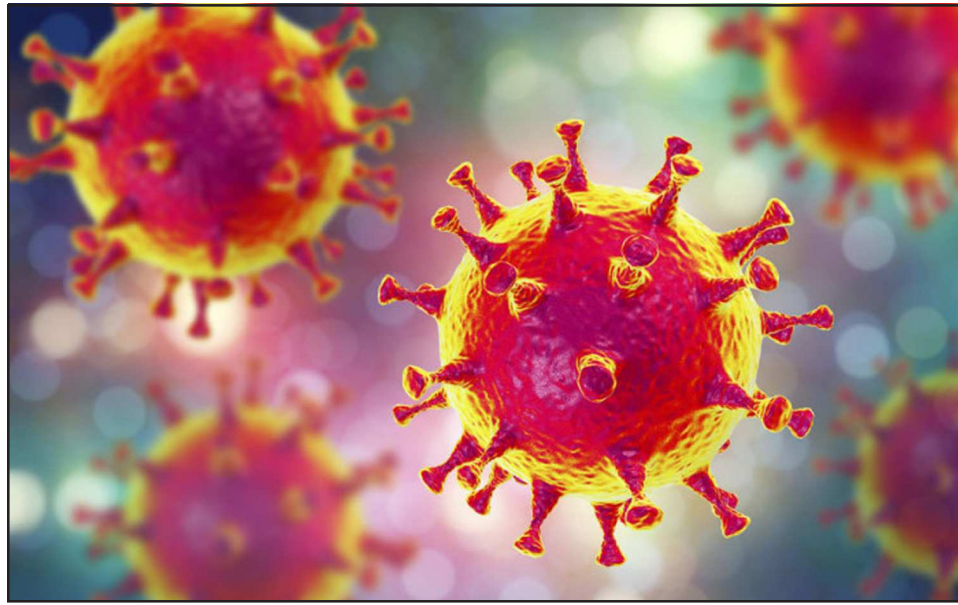
Scientists are now tracking a rise in cases caused by a close cousin known as BA.2, which is starting to outcompete BA.1 in parts of Europe and Asia. The following is what we know so far about the new subvariant:

### “STEALTH” SUBVARIANT

Globally, BA.1 accounted for 98.8% of sequenced cases submitted to the public virus tracking database GISAID as of Jan. 25. But several countries are reporting recent increases in the subvariant known as BA.2, according to the World Health Organization.

In addition to BA.1 and BA.2, the WHO lists two other subvariants under the Omicron umbrella: BA.1.1.529 and BA.3. All are closely related genetically, but each features mutations that could alter how they behave.

Trevor Bedford, a computational virologist at Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center who has been tracking the evolution of SARS-



CoV-2, wrote on Twitter on Friday that BA.2 represents roughly 82% of cases in Denmark, 9% in the UK and 8% in the United States, based on his analysis of sequencing data from the GISAID database and case counts from the Our World in Data project at the University of Oxford.

The BA.1 version of Omicron has been somewhat easier to track than prior variants. That is because BA.1 is missing one of three target genes used in a common PCR test. Cases showing this pattern were assumed by default to be caused by BA.1.

BA.2, sometimes known as a “stealth” subvariant, does not have the same missing target gene. Instead, scientists are monitoring it the same

way they have prior variants, including Delta, by tracking the number of virus genomes submitted to public databases such as GISAID.

As with other variants, an infection with BA.2 can be detected by coronavirus home tests kits, though they cannot indicate which variant is responsible, experts said.

### MORE TRANSMISSIBLE?

Some early reports indicate that BA.2 may be even more infectious than the already extremely contagious BA.1, but there is no evidence so far that it is more likely to evade vaccine protection.

Danish health officials estimate that BA.2 may be 1.5 times more transmissible than BA.1, based on

preliminary data, though it likely does not cause more severe disease.

In England, a preliminary analysis of contact tracing from Dec. 27, 2021, through Jan. 11, 2022, by the UK Health Security Agency (HSA) suggests that household transmission is higher among contacts of people infected with BA.2 (13.4%) compared with other Omicron cases (10.3%).

The HSA found no evidence of a difference in vaccine effectiveness, according to the Jan. 28 report.

A critical question is whether people who were infected in the BA.1 wave will be protected from BA.2, said Dr. Egon Ozer, an infectious disease expert at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago.

That has been a concern in Denmark, where some places that saw high case counts of BA.1 infections were reporting rising cases of BA.2, Ozer said.

If prior BA.1 infection does not protect against BA.2, “this could be sort of a two-humped camel kind of wave,” Ozer said. “It’s too early to know if that will happen.”

The good news, he said, is that vaccines and boosters still “keep people out of the hospital and keep people from dying.”

*First published by Reuters.*

## COVID Fatigue: How to Cope with Pandemic Burnout

The COVID-19 pandemic is still taking and disrupting lives. Although vaccines and treatments promise that someday life will return to some kind of normalcy, a growing number of people are experiencing pandemic burnout.

The desire to follow protective guidelines is waning, and a sense of exhaustion is on the rise. What can be done about COVID-19 fatigue?

This article explains what pandemic fatigue is like and where it comes from. It also outlines some steps you can take to reboot if you’ve grown weary of life in the grip of a

pandemic.

What exactly is COVID fatigue?

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines pandemic fatigue as being “demotivated” and exhausted with the demands of life during the COVID crisis. The WHO warns that this fatigue could ultimately lead to a longer, more devastating pandemic.

Here’s a key fact: Pandemic fatigue is *completely natural*.

At the beginning of the pandemic, your short-term survival skills kick in. Fear keeps you motivated. But over time, fear subsides and frustration grows. Exhaustion — and complacency — set in.

How to know if you have COVID fatigue

What burnout looks like can vary from one person to the next, but here are some common symptoms.

### Feeling

**cynical and emotionally exhausted.** Two of the most common burnout symptoms are feeling emotionally drained and cynical about the world around you. Researchers Trusted Source have observed these symptoms in people who have worked in demanding environments during the pandemic.

· **Being less effective on the job.** Burnout happens when you’ve run out of personal resources. Self-doubt creeps in and, over time, you may not be able to pay as much attention to work tasks. Researchers Trusted Source have noticed that some people with pandemic-related burnout begin feeling like a failure at work.

· **Having a deep sense of anxiety about the future.** Your anxiety may be related to your own future or the future of your community and the wider world. Researchers Trusted Source think this anxiety comes from the fact that you can’t predict when the pandemic will end. When things are unpredictable, people often feel they have no control over their lives.

· **Being less willing to comply with health guidelines.** As the pandemic drags on, more people are tiring of restrictions such as mask-wearing and social distancing. Growing tired of inconvenient public safety measures may be natural, but experts say it could prolong the pandemic even further.

Strategies for dealing with COVID burnout

The first thing to know about pandemic fatigue is this: Under prolonged extraordinary stress, it’s completely normal to burn out.

Let’s take a closer look at what research has revealed about how to cope with this type of burnout.

### Keep your routines

During times of crisis, public health experts Trusted Source explain that sticking to your daily routines helps maintain good mental health. But how do you hang onto your routines when you’re suddenly working from home or you’re out of work altogether?



# Maya leaders jostle after FPIC announcement

Continued from Page 1

Justice (CCJ). The Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs stated in the release that they were pleased with Cabinet's approval of the draft FPIC and insisted that "any claim of a lack of consultation on the part of Government is not so."

On Thursday we spoke to Cristina Coc following the announcement by GoB that it had submitted the protocol to the CCJ, and she informed us that the move made by the government amounted to a unilateral decision, one not supported by the Maya people which the umbrella organization represents. The MLA includes the Toledo Alcaldes Association (TAA), the Toledo Maya Cultural Council (TMCC), the District Association of Village Councils (DAVCO), the Kekchi Council of Belize (KCB), the Toledo Maya Women's Council (TMWC), the Julian Cho Society (JCS) and the Sarstoon Temash Institute for Indigenous Management

(SATIIM).

These organizations represent the interests of Maya communities residing in almost 38 villages in Southern Belize, and champion the preservation of their traditional system of governance and customary land ownership. The government is now arguing, however, that these leaders do not constitute the collective governance institution of the Maya people, and is asserting that instead such a system of governance exists at the village level and is not in the hands of the MLA leadership.

"MLA leadership continues to claim that the TAA is the 'collective governance institution of the Maya people.' However, we do not believe that there is such a collective governance system' of the Maya people. Customary governance is based at the village level, and as such, the authority to make decisions resides solely in meetings convened by village members, and not a collective or association. Furthermore, the FPIC

recognizes this principle of Maya customary law: that village members at a village meeting, and not only the leaders, are the supreme decision-making authority," the release from GOB states.

This declaration by the government was made against the backdrop of an internal rift brewing among the leaders of the Maya community. On Friday evening, the KCB, TMCC, and SATIIM released a statement in which they reiterated the government's position.

"For seven years, the JCS has called the TAA the 'collective governance institution' of the Maya people.' Shockingly, they perpetuated this misleading concept of 'Alcaldes' as supreme leaders in Maya villages. Yet the TAA is not a Maya customary organization. And the MLA is simply a membership association. The collective governance of the Maya people rests in each individual community. We, members of the Maya Leaders Alliance (MLA), call on the Julian Cho Society and the Toledo Alcalde Association to refrain from issuing any position without full consultation - and consent - of its membership ...," their release said.

The alcalde system is indeed, as these entities asserted, operated at the village level, with representatives being chosen from each village to lead. The Toledo Alcaldes Association includes those leaders of those individual villages represented under their traditional system.

The joint release from the three other organizations states, however, "Customary governance is based at the village level, and as such, the authority to make decisions resides solely in meetings convened by village members, and not a collective or association."

MLA spokesperson, Cristina Coc, maintains, however, that GOB is attempting to railroad the TAA, who were the appellants of the CCJ 2015 order who took the case to the CCJ, by removing them as a key signatory to the FPIC and putting decision-making authority in the hands of

unrepresented individuals at the village level. Coc said that at one point the Commissioner of Indigenous People's Affairs, Gregory Ch'oc, was insisting that the various Maya organizations supposedly sympathetic to the government were supposed to sign on to the FPIC protocol.

"The government has now removed, at the end of the protocol, they removed the clause where both parties were supposed to sign to bring into effect this consent protocol against the advice of the court, against the guidance of the court, and the reason we can think why they have removed that is because the court made it extremely clear that it is the T.A.A. and the M.L.A. that is to sign; they are the appellants. The other side, the Commissioner of Indigenous People's Affairs, was insisting that the people to sign would be these many organizations, Maya organizations that are sympathetic to the government, who are creations of the government. This is the government's attempt to create their own process and completely ignore the systems that already exist." Coc said.

The government has stated that they had a limited timeframe within which to submit the FPIC protocol to the CCJ in light of a deadline set for today January 31. The MLA has pointed out, however, that the government changed the terms in the commencement clause from the signing of the protocol to instead its submission at the CCJ.

As a result of the change to that commencement clause, the document is now indicating

that the protocol takes effect upon its being filed at the C.C.J. "The C.C.J., I don't think is going to accept this, because it goes against their very guidance. And so, in terms of process, we are going back. We have already communicated our dissent to the court and the Government of Belize and, of course, we expect the court, we are calling on the court, to intervene." Coc said.

The Government Press Office has announced that a press conference will be held on the matter.

## COVID Fatigue: How to Cope with Pandemic Burnout

Continued from Page 12

In times of upheaval, narrow your focus to those routines that are necessary for maintaining your livelihood and basic health needs like eating well and getting good sleep. These often have the biggest influence on how stressed you feel.

Researchers call other habits, such as exercising and socializing, "secondary routines." They're also important to your mental health. You may need to adapt or replace these habits to fit into your new daily schedule.

Strengthen ties with your most important relationships

Finding and fostering new relationships takes lots of time and energy. If you're feeling fatigued and overwhelmed, it may benefit you more to lean into established relationships. These relationships can give you a sense of connection and community without using up too much of your emotional resources, researchers Trusted Source say.

It's important to point out, however, that not all established relationships are healthy ones. If any of your primary relationships are troubled or toxic, the demands of the pandemic may have put extra pressure on you.

Every person's situation is unique, and you're the expert on your relationships. If you're ready to remove yourself from a destructive or abusive relationship, there are resources that can help you do this, whether there's a pandemic going on or not.

Be aware of addictive behavior risk  
Mental health experts note that when there's economic uncertainty, food insecurity, and isolation, people feel more stressed. Extra stress can lead to

more anxiety and depression. In those circumstances, people who've had disordered eating or substance use issues may notice more symptoms.

In one small study Trusted Source, 38 percent of people being treated for an eating disorder said they had an increase in symptoms during the early part of the pandemic.

The researchers of this study recommend that you:

- plan relaxing and enjoyable activities
- practice deep breathing
- meditate
- keep a diary of positive experiences during the day

Build your resilience  
Resilience is the ability to bounce back from hard circumstances. Professional athletes are great at it because they are used to recovering from exhaustion, injury, and extreme demands on their minds and bodies.

Resilience may be a personality trait, but it can also be built up intentionally. Researchers Trusted Source studying COVID burnout offer these strategies for strengthening resilience:

- **Believe in yourself.** Remind yourself of all you've successfully overcome in the past. Self-belief Trusted Source is an important resilience skill.
- **Pay attention to the present moment.** Developing a mindfulness habit can increase resilience.
- **Exercise.** It doesn't just improve your body's resilience; there's evidence Trusted Source that it builds brain resilience, too.

Full article can be found at : <https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/covid-fatigue#coping-strategies>  
First published by Healthline.com

## Man found dead in Holy Emmanuel extension

by Charles Gladden

BELIZE CITY, Mon. Jan. 31, 2022

The body of 39-year-old Jose David Funes Lopez was found in the Holy Emmanuel Extension area early on Friday morning. When police arrived at the scene where Lopez's corpse was discovered in the St. Martin De Porres area of Belize City on Friday, January 28 around 6:00 a.m., they found Lopez's lifeless body lying face-up on a wooden pallet with gunshot injuries to his face, neck, chest and leg. Lopez was an AC technician in Belize City who reportedly had no fixed address.

A police investigation revealed that between the hours of 10:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. on Thursday night, residents in the area heard several gunshots, but ignored those shots until the following morning, when Lopez's body was found and authorities were notified.

The area has been canvassed by the police, who have found one expended shell.

Communications Director of the Belize Police Department, ASP Fitzroy Yearwood stated that no one has been detained or charged for this latest murder.

The motive for the murder is still uncertain.

# GOB defends its position on FPIC

Continued from **Page 1**

press conference to respond to the claims made by the spokesperson for the Maya Leaders Alliance (MLA) and the Toledo Alcaldes Association (TAA), Cristina Coc. On Friday, Coc told AMANDALA that the government failed to carry out meaningful consultation on the most recent Free, Prior, Informed Consent protocol prior to the submission of that protocol to the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ). Today, the Ministry sought to clarify the claims and, according to them, dispel some of the untruths.

Firstly, both Minister Balderamos Garcia and Commissioner Ch'oc insisted that despite the claim of the MLA spokesperson, wide and inclusive consultation was carried out, starting as early as March 2021. They claimed that the view presented by MLA/TAA reps is not the collective view of the organizations under the MLA and the villagers across the 41 Maya villages in southern Belize.

"Please let me dispel any notion at this point that there has been a lack of consultations," Minister Garcia stated. During this morning's press conference, they brought a number of documents that, according to them, provide evidence of the extensive consultation done by the Government to ascertain the view of the Maya communities. The Minister said that she visited at least 14 of the 41 villages during that period of purported consultation.

The matter of contention pertains to the government's submission of the FPIC to the CCJ, reportedly without the consent of the Toledo Alcaldes Association (TAA) and a faction of the MLA. The government was given a deadline of January 31, 2022, to submit the FPIC protocol to the CCJ. Along with this new FPIC protocol, the Ministry has also submitted a revised version of an agenda to map the implementation process. Minister Garcia said that they revised a draft FPIC protocol rejected by the parties in September 2021 and, after consultations with various communities, arrived at this new FPIC protocol. But the TAA spokesperson, Coc, asserted that the association, which includes the alcaldes of the Toledo district, was ambushed.

Coc said that the government is attempting to usurp the authority of the traditional Maya government system, the alcalde system, and by submitting a document not signed by the TAA is in contravention of the CCJ consent order.

The government, however, is contending that the TAA is not the governance system for the Maya people and that all authority lies in the hands of the villagers and not their leaders. Minister Balderamos Garcia said that in the last compliance hearing the court ordered that the government submit the roadmap and FPIC protocol by today, January

31—an order which they intend to comply with rather than kicking the can down the road, said Minister Garcia.

"Now, if the organization has a difficulty with what has been submitted, they are absolutely free to apply to the court," Minister Garcia said.

She added, "This government, I want to assure you, is serious about the implementation of the consent order in a respectful way but absolutely in an inclusive way. We do not wish to deal with only certain leaders, we wish to deal with all the various communities."

Greg Ch'oc, a long-time Mayan activist and now Commissioner of Indigenous People's Affairs, has come under fire amid claims that he has been working against the Toledo Alcaldes Association. He has denied the assertion and has echoed Minister Balderamos Garcia's claims that their process of consultations was inclusive. He said that there was no requirement for those organizations to sign on to the FPIC before submission to the court.

"They are two organizations that have said we are the only two that you need to talk to, but the claim 366 provide who are the members of the MLA, so if there was a need for

signatory we would have been legally bound to get all those organizations to sign," said Ch'oc.

He added, "What is important is the content, the substance of this document, is what is important, not who signs. It has become an issue of if I can't get my signature there it's not good enough, rather than does this document protect the right of the community."

When asked about the assertions that this recent FPIC falls short in regard to the language used by constantly utilizing the term "consultations" instead of "consent" and especially in portions of the document that relate to the extraction of minerals and oil from Maya lands, the Ministry said that those resources belong to the country as a whole and not the Maya community.

"The constitutional authority of the Government of Belize over all land in Belize is not affected and you can go and read that right in the consent order itself. The government is not giving away when it comes to oil drilling etc. anything in the ground is owned by the people of Belize and administrated by the government," Minister Garcia said.

In regard to the wording in the protocol, Ch'oc said, "We have not called it consent protocol because the

community may probably get the impression that they have to consent no matter what, but that is not what international law provides for; there is an option for dissent," Choc said.

Choc said that in cases where consent is withheld at the village level, then no project can proceed; this is in cases other than the exceptions outlined in the Constitution.

"An individual organization or leaders, if they call themselves leaders, we will not be dictated to, that is really the crux of what I believe we are getting at here, and we have to maintain a strong and firm position, friendly and respectful but firm, that we are not going to be abdicating our responsibility," Minister Garcia said.

"We now know now that it's obvious that there is internal conflict. Do we abdicate the duty of the states to protect the rights of the Maya people, the duty is to protect, and that's why I go back to this document. Does this document protect the free, prior, and informed rights of the Maya people, and based on international expert opinion it does. This has been filed with the Caribbean Court of Justice. If the court should say it does not, then we go back to the drawing board." Choc said.

## Stevedores back on the job

Continued from **Page 1**

address with the receivership management at Port of Belize, but the loading and unloading of ships began in good faith on Friday. The stevedores are hoping that the Port of Belize Ltd. will act with similar good faith and comply with the ruling of the tribunal rather than ignoring the tribunal's order after the stevedores have desisted from the sole strategy they have been able to use to get PBL and GoB to respond to their concerns: industrial action. CWU president Evan "Mose" Hyde told local media that the union was unsure of PBL's position prior to a meeting scheduled for Thursday afternoon, but in a CWU press release released on Friday morning, the union states, "The CWU hereby respectfully appeals to the Receivership Management at PBL to comply with the ruling and engage with us on the outstanding matters that could be potential stumbling blocks in our relationship."

The stand taken by the stevedores caused some disruptions in the shipping industry in Belize that was additional to the disruptions caused by the global shipping crisis being experienced worldwide. Various groups from the business community publicly expressed their objections to the delay in unloading of containers as a result of the stevedores' strike and went to great lengths to outline what they thought would be the effects of the stevedores' actions. However, the vice president of the Customs

Brokers Association of Belize, Delroy Fairweather, has publicly stated that the results of the 8-day strike will be minimal, and any substantial increases in prices seen at the stores CANNOT be attributed to the industrial action at the Port. He told 7News, "The couple days delays that we had ... so we had maybe a couple days where we had to work out the logistics, and I could tell you that yes, containers are being trucked at present back to Belize City. So, to say that the country would have ran out of supplies, it could have been maybe something even more dramatic than this 8 days or so. What this actually did was created some delays which I would refer to it as very minimal delays, because now one week later the vessels which came into port that was scheduled to be here this week, so there is not really much it would say that it would have created a situation where the shelves would have been peeled. There are costs to move the containers from what we have worked out. If you would multiply or divide it into the total cost of what's inside those containers, it really and truly shouldn't be anything that significant ... it wouldn't make any significant difference in terms of raising the price or anything. If we are moving into the price gouging aspect, if people start seeing maybe a notation in the cost and they are attributing it because goods were coming through Big Creek, I would say no, it would be more on the freight end, because of

course we still are dealing with the price of containers at 300%-400% the freight cost at this moment. So the prices should be within the same range, it shouldn't be any difference of such."

In light of the previously mentioned public statements made by some high-profile entities that seemed to portray an exaggerated effect of the week-long standoff and appeared to primarily attribute the standstill to the stevedores, rather than the private enterprise that was unwilling to address the concerns of its employees, however, a press release from CWU states, "We call on all the voices who have been so vocal in questioning the legitimacy of our claims and the stand that we have taken, to now join us in appealing to PBL."

In an interview with Hyde he stated, "Our position that we have been contending is not outrageous, are not unsound, are not unreasonable ..."

The rulings of the Essential Services Arbitration Tribunal confirmed that the requests tabled by the CWU on behalf of the stevedores were valid, following its deliberation on the rebuttals submitted by both parties. In a release issued late Thursday evening they outlined:

1. The Port of Belize Limited is directed to forthwith confirm the primary stevedores as Registered

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## UDP Caucus for Change endorses Shyne; Tracy unfazed

Continued from Page 1

leader of the UDP, and within a few days the UDP Caucus for Change—a group within the party with representation from nineteen constituencies and said to be led by former Belmopan area representative John Saldivar—publicly indicated that it is endorsing Hon. Shyne Barrow for leadership of the party. According to the Caucus for Change, the decision was made after members of the caucus met in an open session with the two candidates and after subsequent deliberation.

“It is the firm belief of the Caucus that Hon. Shyne is best suited to lead the Party at this time given his vision, decisive leadership, resourcefulness, and global exploits that continue to promote Belize,” stated a release issued by the group.

In response to the endorsement, which included a call for everyone to unite behind the Mesopotamia area representative, Barrow expressed gratitude, stating that he felt “extremely humbled”. He also stated that he plans to work arduously to “stand up for the Belizean People, hold the Government accountable and lead the UDP to victory in the next General Elections.”

The UDP Caucus for Change, however, isn’t the first and only organ of the party that has openly declared support for a candidate. When the now former UDP leader Hon. Patrick Faber first announced his resignation following domestic violence accusations, the United Democratic Party National Organization for Women (UDP NOW) declared support for Hon. Tracy Panton while condemning all forms of gender-based violence. In response to the organization’s declaration, however, the UDP publicly indicated that the statement by UDP NOW did not reflect the official views of the party.

“Every organ of the U.D.P. serves the entire U.D.P., and the U.D.P. considers it inappropriate for an arm of the party to demonstrate a particular preference for any individual to hold any official position in the U.D.P.,” said the release issued by the UDP.

Despite the majority of the Opposition representatives purportedly declaring support for Hon. Barrow as the new leader, Hon. Tracy Panton has maintained her bid for the position. The Albert area representative, if selected, would be the first woman to ever lead one of the country’s major parties in the

more than 50 years that both parties have been in existence. But according to Barrow, she missed her chance to become leader when he endorsed her for the leadership post in June 2021, when Faber’s leadership was first challenged and a recall petition was submitted by the Caucus for Change for his removal following a separate incident of domestic abuse in which Faber was allegedly involved. (That incident was captured on a video that had been circulated online.)

“It’s not about for gender sake, it’s about who is going to lead us into this war to take back our country, and you know when it comes to leadership in the time of war, we need someone who is steady, who has the conviction, who is fearless and that has nothing to do with gender,” said Hon. Barrow in an interview with the media.

He then went on to state that Mia Mottley, the recently re-elected Prime Minister of Barbados, is not a great leader because she’s a woman but because she exhibits good leadership skills.

“We have had issues where a woman may not be recognized for her greatness because she is a woman, but we cannot excuse a woman’s shortcomings and let gender be the reason for that excuse and give her something that someone else is more worthy of because of gender. So I don’t believe in gender discrimination and gender affirmative action but for gender awareness and gender inclusivity and gender equality,” he added.

But where “gender awareness” and “gender equality” are concerned,

For now, the union and its members are hoping to finally end the decades of discord between the PBL and the stevedores, which has been seen by many as primarily the result of what Hyde referred to as a “privatization misadventure”.

“You have so many stakeholders who are completely invested in the stability in this particular place, and then, we are doing this in light of a miscalculated, ill-advised, deformed, adventure called the privatization of the port and it’s like we have been in a circle going round and round and round just encountering the same fundamental deformities and paying a price for it everytime. Nobody wants to be doing that. Right.” Hyde said.

He noted that both parties need to come to the table with a spirit of reconciliation.

“We hope that all sides involved will bring good faith to the table. The word we think of right now is are we going to have a conversation based on reconciliation, or is this a conversation about vindictiveness. Is this a conversation about ego, about hubris, who has wealth? Our fundamental mooring is that we want to have a conversation that looks at reconciliation, look at this 20-year, two-decade misadventure, where our members have paid a serious price,” said Hyde.



Hon. Tracy Panton, Albert area representative

many members of the public—as well as Taegar-Panton herself—have expressed doubt in Barrow’s viability as leader. That is because, in October of 2020, reports surfaced of domestic abuse allegations made against the Mesopotamia area rep. Similarly to what occurred in the case of former leader Patrick Faber, Barrow’s wife, Catherine Barrow, withdrew the report that she had made to police—though not before it managed to make its way onto social media. The leaked SITREP, dated Sunday, October 4, 2020, reported that Barrow “kicked her [his wife] in the back, causing her to hit the wall, which led her to hurt her big toe.” According to the SITREP, a doctor had classified Catherine Barrow’s injuries as harm. Barrow, however, eventually issued a statement saying that she had exaggerated her report due to “hurt and anger”.

While there was mass condemnation and public outcry regarding the incident, Hon. Shyne Barrow was not made to step down from his position. Barrow has insisted that his situation and Faber’s were not the same.

“I did not get accused of the same thing as Honorable Faber. He has been accused by three different women on more than five different occasions,” he stated in an interview.

“I have an isolated incident for which I have apologized to my wife for just being a part of that. I am not going to come to the media and blame her and try to throw her under the bus. I take responsibility for my actions,” he added.

In a Facebook post made early Monday morning, Hon. Tracy Panton expressed her belief that the people must hold their political leaders accountable.

“We cannot have different standards for those who aspire for the highest office in the land. Domestic violence is a critical issue of national importance. Two persons have been publicly accused of domestic violence. One has been forced to resign,” she stated.

She also pointed out that there is an urgent need for the UDP to reestablish its credibility as a major political party. The United Democratic Party must select a new leader by means of convention within 90 days after Patrick Faber has issued his official resignation.

## Stevedores back on the job

Continued from Page 14

Stevedores;

2. The Port of Belize Limited is directed to promote the 28 Secondary Substitutes to Primary Substitutes and invite them to participate in Port of Belize Limited’s insurance scheme as from the 27 January 2022. Further, the Port of Belize Limited is directed to pay their share of contributions to the retirement savings for the 28 stevedores from the 13 July 2021, being the date when the dispute was brought to the attention of the Minister; and

3. That the parties forthwith commence negotiations for payment under the Redundancy Package as agreed between the parties on the 6 March 2020.

A release from the government of Belize added that they would follow the oral ruling handed down with a written document within a few days—something the CWU has been waiting for, in order to receive some assurance that the ruling will be complied with, and will not just be an unfulfilled statement.

The union’s president said that an oral offer from the government—presumably related to compensation for the loss of their earnings due to the transfer of sugar-loading to the Big Creek Port—was tabled, but they will await a written document before putting any proposal to their membership for a vote.

“My position to our members is my position to the public: if I don’t have something in writing to say that

an offer has been made and the condition of the offer, for us it’s as if though the offer has not been made as yet, and in fact, we met with our members to say, ‘listen, because you are our members we will tell you what has been said to us’, but we are not going to vote on it,” Hyde said.

There is no indication so far that the official written ruling from the tribunal has been handed down yet, or if the government has sent a written offer of the proposed compensation to the stevedores for the hardships caused to them by the privatization of the Port and GoB’s involvement in facilitating the transfer of sugar-unloading to Big Creek, in violation of a memorandum signed years ago.

Also, in regard to what is seen as the most pressing matter on the table—the negotiation of the Sugar Redundancy Package, as mentioned the tribunal has ordered PBL to reengage with the CWU, as the company had committed to doing under the March 2020 agreement. Hyde said that members of the union would lose an estimated 30 million dollars in earnings because of the Big Creek transition.

“When we add up everybody that are presently working and what they would have earned in sugar before retirement, 30 million dollars, just in earnings. We’re not talking about the retirement benefits that would be based on those earnings that add up as well; we’re not talking about the years that they have spent doing sugar even before there was a PBL,” Hyde outlined.



# Sales Agents

## BELIZE CITY

- \* Puma Roundabout
- \* Puma, 2 Mls.
- \* Shell Service Station, C.A. Boulevard
- \* Community Drug Store
- \* William Supermarket, C.A. Boulevard
- \* Fuel Logistics/Bel-China
- \* Puma Freetown
- \* Cambranes
- \* J & K Supermarket
- \* Twin Supermarket, 5526 St. Thomas Street
- \* Tow Tow Grocery Store, Mahogany Street
- \* Julie Wong Store, Belama (by police station)
- \* JB's Store, Mahogany Street
- \* 88 Shopping Center, C.A. Boulevard
- \* Freetown Drug Store
- \* Publics, Philip Goldson Highway
- \* Buca Shell, Philip Goldson Highway
- \* James Brodie & Co., Albert St., and Philip Goldson Highway
- \* 1<sup>st</sup> Choice Pharmacy
- \* Save-U Supermarket

## PLACENCIA

- \* Placencia Office Supplies

## LADYVILLE

- \* Puma Service Station
- \* Shell Service Station
- \* Low's Supermarket

## ORANGEWALK

- \* One Stop Service Station
- \* People's Store

## BENQUE

- \* Eduard Cambranes
- 6 Diaz St., Benque

## CAYO

- \* Amini Habet
- C/o Shell Service Station
- San Ignacio
- \* Venus Store

## BELMOPAN

- Dakers Stationery & Books
- \* Hydes Mini Market
- \* First Choice Variety Gift Shop
- \* Shell Service Station
- \* Medicare Plus Pharmacy

## STANN CREEK

- \* Xaibel Service Station
- \* S & S One Stop
- C/o Uno Belize
- \* St. Vincent Convenience Store

## COROZAL

- \* Aguilar Car Care Products # 60 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Corozal Town
- \* Xiomara Alcala c/o Corozal Farmer's Supplies # 99 - 5th Avenue, Corozal Town
- \* Elena Castaneda WE Store Gabriel Hoare Market #A8 6th Avenue, Corozal Town

## INDEPENDENCE

- \* G N J Mart

## PUNTA GORDA

- \* King's Texaco
- \* NJV Pharmacy

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