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Five years and still no answers

No charges yet in housing investigation

CHARGES have yet to be brought against at least six people suspected of corruption as part of the now five-year-long housing investigation because the case has been tied up in the Attorney General's office.

Despite numerous inquiries into the matter, no answers have been forthcoming from the officials as to the status of the case.

According to a source close to the matter, the AG's office has had possession of the file for more than a year but prosecutors have yet to act on police recommendations.

Police inquiries began into the Ministry of Housing - which was then under PLP Minister of Housing Neville Wisdom - after The Tribune published allegations by contractors that some government employees were engaged in corrupt practices at the expense of poor home buyers.

Shoddy workmanship, illicit pay-offs, and rampant

favouritism were among accusations lodged against certain contractors and officials.

By mid-2007, the investigation had stalled for the lack of evidence. In 2008, police said the case was still active and that more charges were to be expected.

Since *The Tribune* resumed its probe into the matter last year, several calls have been made for full disclosure concerning the investigation.

During an interview with *The Tribune* before he was fired from Cabinet, former Housing Minister Kenneth Russell confirmed the long-awaited probe had been completed, but never made public and at least six more people were expected to face charges as a result of the police investigation into allegations of corruption.

Former lead investigator Keith Bell claimed that the investigation was subject to political interference. His

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BOY, 5, SLIPS INTO COMA DURING TREATMENT



FAMILY MEMBERS show a picture of Dsoragi Pitter-Hanna, who is in a coma. Dsoragi's family claim that his condition grew worse due to negligence at Princess Margaret Hospital.

By **AVA TURNQUEST**
Tribune Staff Reporter
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DISTRESSED parents are demanding answers after their young son slipped into a coma during treatment at the Princess Margaret Hospital.

Convinced that his condition worsened as a result of negligence, family members expressed their torment as Dsoragi Pitter-Hanna spent his fifth birthday unconscious.

The ordeal is especially harrowing for parents Nathaniel and Sheryone Hanna, who have suffered the loss of two children at the Princess Margaret Hospital.

Mrs Hanna, 39, said: "The only thing they said is we have to keep talking to him so he can hear us, keep praying.

"To me, I feel like he can hear me. Sometimes I feel like he's coming back, other times it's like he's gone.

"My husband can't take it. He can't work properly."

Suffering from an asthma attack, which doctor's called viral croup, Dsoragi was admitted to PMH on December 26. Mrs Hanna said her son was kept for observation until January 2 when doctors performed an endoscopy, a procedure in which a camera is inserted into a cavity of the body.

"During that procedure, (doctors) said they didn't find anything, so they took him to the recovery room," Mrs Hanna said.

"That same day, he had another asthma attack and they had to take him back

into theatre and put in a tracheotomy to keep the airways open."

Only moments after Dsoragi had been transferred back to the Children's Ward, Mrs Hanna said nurses sounded the alarm that air was seeping out around the tube.

"When that happened, it caused his lungs to collapse," Mrs Hanna said.

"So they inserted two tubes into his lungs, meanwhile his heart rate was dropping and I think this is where negligence comes in because enough oxygen wasn't getting to his brain."

She added: "As a result, he suffered brain damage and this will be three weeks that he's been in a coma with no improvement."

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'KFC STAFF WILL NOT BE BULLIED'

By **KHRISNA VIRGIL**
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BAHAMAS Hotel, Catering and Allied Workers Union president Nicole Martin warned that Kentucky Fried Chicken employees will not be bullied by their employer.

Referring to the labour unrest of the 1950s, Ms Martin said the union is prepared to take action if necessary.

She said: "Back in 1958, some things had to happen. It appears as if we're back there today.

"If we from the hotel union have to step it up, we will step it up, because workers will not be taken for granted in this country again."

Ms Martin was responding to a statement released on Tuesday by KFC's parent company Restaurants Bahamas outlining the status of contract negotiations with the union.

The statement said: "KFC's current wage benefits package is more than two times higher than all of the other fast food brands. As a result, KFC has proposed to the union that wages be rolled back to a level that is more in line with its competitors, as well as a reduction in specific benefits."

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UNION SAYS NO INCENTIVE FOR TEACHERS

By **CELESTE NIXON**
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BAHAMIAN teachers don't want to work in the Family Islands because there is no incentive to do so, a union boss has claimed.

Responding to Education Minister Desmond Bannister's comments in the House of Assembly on Monday about the shortage of teachers in many islands, Bahamas Union of Teachers (BUT) president Belinda Wilson said government policies, poor pay and a lack of employment opportunities for spouses deter teachers from volunteering to serve outside New Providence.

She said: "It is not attractive for teachers to volunteer to go to the Family Islands as the incentives are little and sometimes nonexistent.

"There is a difficulty with finances - some teachers may

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LOCAL NEWS

RIDE FOR HOPE GETS INTO GEAR

RIDE FOR Hope is gearing up for this year's bike-athon with a free bike skills and handling course this Saturday, January 28.

The class, to be held at 4pm at St Paul's field, West Bay Street will be conducted by Hot Tubes Cycling, the most successful junior road racing team in American history and one of the top cycling teams in the world.

Instructions will include equipment checks, positioning on the bike, safe shifting, riding in groups, riding single file, cornering, and downhill.

"Thanks to the generosity of Hot Tubes," said Susan Larson, RFH co-chair, "we're able to offer to the general public the same bike skills taught at a professional level to international competitors. It's a wonderful opportunity for us all, even for the young or casual rider."

Diane Holowesko Dunkley from RFH said: "The safety of our riders is of paramount importance to Ride For Hope, and the painstaking detail that goes into planning the event is to ensure their safety as much as possible."

"In addition to this, bike handling skills are vital for everyone, as we'll all be safer riders if we know the proper techniques involved in everything from gear shifting, going downhill, rounding corners, and passing other riders."

"But safety starts first with having the correct gear and being properly fitted on your bike, which is why it's important for people who wish to attend this course to bring their bikes with them."

One Ride For Hope participant who rode 100 miles in last year's event was quite excited and relieved to hear about the course.

"I don't even know how to change a bike tire," he said, "so I'll definitely be there."

And I need all the advice I can get for those hills."

According to Stephen Holowesko, RFH co-chair, Hot Tubes team director Toby Stanton will conduct the course along with five of his riders.

"Not only is Hot Tubes one of the top cycling teams in the world," said Mr Holowesko, "but they have a wonderful philosophy in developing all aspects of the cyclist."

According to Mr Stanton, "Being a great teammate, being a great leader in the world on and off the bike, these are the hallmarks of Hot Tubes riders."

Although no registration is need for the bike skills course, RFH administrator Alicia Wallace said registration is already open for the annual bike-athon.

Registration sessions will be held at:

- the Royal Bank of Canada on Carmichael Road on January 27, 11am - 4.30pm
- Lowe's Pharmacy on Soldier Road on January 30, noon - 4pm
- Logos Bookstore, Harbour Bay on February 8, 2pm-6pm.

Registration can also be completed online at: http://www.rideforhopebahamas.com/ride_register.php.

Ms Wallace she encouraged participants to sign up early, as the registration structure has changed.

"The early registration fee of \$50 is valid until February 14; the regular registration fee of \$75 is from February 15 to March 14, and a late registration fee of \$100 begins March 15 to close," she said.

Ride For Hope's annual bike-athon, which raises money for cancer care, research and education in the Bahamas, will be held on Saturday, April 14 in Governor's Harbour, Eleuthera.

DNA unveils final three candidates

By DENISE MAYCOCK
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FREEPORT – The DNA announced its last three candidates yesterday at a press conference in Grand Bahama.

Tolonus Sands will run in Marco City. Fairlene Bridgewater-Thomas, the sister of former PLP MP and Senator Pleasant Bridgewater and the sister-in-law of former FNM cabinet Minister, High Rock MP Kenneth Russell, is running in East Grand Bahama.

Speculation has since insisted that Mr Russell will be key in helping Ms Thomas gain public support.

However, last night, Mr Russell dismissed the claims saying he is not campaigning for anyone at this time.

Howard Grant Jr, the son of FNM Eight Mile Rorck MP Vernae Grant, is also running in Central Grand Bahama. They join Osman Johnson, the candidate for Pineridge, and Roger Rolle, the candidate for West Grand Bahama.

With a full slate of candidates now named to contest all 38 constituency seats, the leader of the DNA said the party has achieved an historic milestone in Bahamian politics.

"Never before in a modern Bahamas has a so-called third party presented Bahamian voters with a full slate of viable and highly qualified candidates to contest a general election," McCartney said.



THE LAST three candidates of the DNA are, from left, Howard Grant Jr (Central Grand Bahama), Tolonus Sands (Marco City), and Fairlene Bridgewater-Thomas (East Grand Bahama).

"Today I can say that this is momentous. This introduction of the three candidates I present today, the DNA would have defied another set of odds, and in doing so this one time called splinter group is now the alternative government; we have rewritten Bahamian history," McCartney said. "Grand Bahama, I know you have been waiting a long time for the DNA; your wait is over."

"Today with the addition of the three candidates the DNA will present the Bahamian people with 38 able-bodied and impassioned men and women who are prepared to contest the full 38 named constituencies up for grabs in the upcoming general election and we are prepared to win the government of the Bahamas."

Mr McCartney said that both the FNM and PLP have failed Grand Bahama. He said the DNA's strategy is to create jobs and rebuild people.

He noted that there have been layoffs on Grand Bahama at Hutchison's container port, Grand Lucaya Resort, and BORCO, as well as reduced work weeks at City Market.

Mr McCartney indicated that in the short term the DNA's strategy is to create a new government ministry for Grand Bahama with a cabinet minister at the helm to deal specifically with matters pertaining to Grand Bahama and the Grand Bahama Port Authority.

He also stated that they want to amend the Port Authority Act to make it current, and work with the GBPA to ensure that living and working in Grand Bahama would be significantly improved for Bahamians.

"I see where the PM is now saying that he is now talking to the GBPA. It is a little too late I think," Mr McCartney said.

He warned that Bahamians should not be fooled by that.

"Because there is an election – don't be fooled by that. The PM, now realising that the FNM is in deep problems, would say anything."

"We have less than 20 weeks before the next election; what happened to the last four and a half years?" Mr McCartney asked.

"People have lost their homes, people are living in cars, people don't have electricity, no food; they can't send their children to school and young adults cannot go back to college – this is no way to be living."

Mr McCartney also questioned why the government waited until near elections to promote 250 people this week within the Defence Force.

"I am not saying they don't deserve promotions, and making it retroactive. Why didn't you do that when the time was right as opposed to doing it now 20 weeks before an election date?" he asked.



REGISTERED voters flock to Kendal GL Isaacs Gymnasium to collect their voters' cards. Photos: Tim Clarke/Tribune Staff

ELECTION WEBSITE LAUNCHED

A NEW website seeking to provide timely election results has been launched.

Alexander Hanna, owner of BahamasElections.com, said his website also aims to provide the public with information on all candidates and constituencies in the lead-up to the vote.

"We have so many people who do not know who is running in their constituency, let alone which constituency they belong to," he said. "This is why it is our plan to publish maps of each constituency on to the site."

The website also features polls and a comments section for the public.

Followers can participate in the 'Make a Prediction' section, the results of which will be published after the election.

According to Mr Hanna, the site will be live during the

election, and people can watch its progress in real time.

"Thirty-three per cent of traffic to the site is from persons who search Bahamas elections and these people are not only from the Bahamas, we've seen IP addresses from around the world," he said.

Mr Hanna believes the site will be lively even after the elections, as the public will be able to continue participating in the polls and commentary.

CANDIDATE IS 'SURPRISED' BY LEVELS OF SUPPORT

By LAMECH JOHNSON
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THE girlfriend of a man accused of his brother's stabbing death last Valentine's Day testified in a Supreme Court murder trial that she was not happy about the victim having to live with the accused prior to the incident.

Janice Marc told a 12-member jury yesterday that the early morning of February 14, 2011 was the last time she had seen deceased Luigi Lockhart alive, as he had been staying at his brother's residence for nearly a month.

Luigi Lockhart, the 15th homicide victim of 2011, was reportedly stabbed in the chest during an argument over a dog at his home. The accused, 25-year-old Cyril Lockhart is accused of the killing.

In yesterday's trial, Ms Marc told the court that Luigi had come to live in their one bed-room apartment on Blenheim Road near "the ending part of January 2011."

"I was not happy with that because of the background of Luigi and his aggressive behaviour."

The mother of the 5-year-old daughter of the accused further explained that her discomfort of the living situation

stemmed from Luigi's over-reaction to "simple things" and a "smoking habit that I was not comfortable with around my five-year-old daughter."

She told the court that she had made her discomfort known to Cyril the day she found out that he was coming to stay. However, Cyril, according to the witness, reasoned that he could not turn away his own brother who had no place to go, having been kicked out of the Colony Club.

Ms Marc said that her boyfriend had allowed Luigi to use his phonecard business to raise funds to find a place to live, though he did not move, despite numerous inquiries by Cyril as to whether or not he had found an apartment as yet.

She said at one point in time, "I thought he'd moved because some of his belongings were gone."

Though this was not so, she added, as he'd slept there the same night that she did before she left for work shortly before 7am last Valentine's Day.

Regarding the pitbull, Ms Marc said that "Cougar", whom they had from "when he was a puppy" had been a family gift from Cyril to himself, her and her daughter, purchased long before the morning of the stabbing incident.

In cross-examination by prosecutor Terry Archer, the witness admitted to overhearing the brothers speaking about why Luigi had been kicked out of his previous residence. Mr Archer had suggested to her that it was because of "Cougar", the black pitbull dog that had been staying with Luigi for a short period of time at the Colony Club, that his previous landlord had kicked him out.

After reviewing her statement to the police and her own recollection, she agreed.

Mr Archer suggested to the witness that she was lying about the "habits" of the deceased which were not in the statements – bearing her signature – that she gave to the police.

Ms Marc denied the suggestions put forward by the prosecution. She was asked if any altercation took place between the two brothers before her departure for work at 7am.

She answered: "Not when I was there." The trial resumes today at 10am before presiding judge Senior Justice Jon Isaacs.

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LOCAL NEWS

DNA leader: 'We will not buy votes in campaign'

BY DENISE MAYCOCK
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FREEPORT – The Democratic National Alliance has sufficient funding to run a winning campaign, but will not use a single dollar of it to buy votes, party leader Branville McCartney said.

According to Mr McCartney, from the beginning, raising money was never a problem for the party.

"The pockets of the DNA are sufficient to win the election but we are not going about trying to buy the election," he said during a visit to Grand Bahama.

"We have sufficient funds to carry out the election, but we are not going to do it the way others will. We are not going to ask Bahamians to prostitute themselves by selling their vote. We respect the Bahamian people more than that."

Mr McCartney said over the last eight months, the DNA has been doing more in terms of community work and events "than the other parties

combined". He said: "When we launched the party on May 12, we launched in grand style and had close to 4,000 persons – that has never been done before in the history of the Bahamas.

"We get our funding from persons on the street, we get funding from persons who believe in real change for one Bahamas; and we initially sold our paraphernalia, which has never been done in the history of the Bahamas.

"When we first started, we wanted to determine whether interest in the party was genuine or just curiosity, so we decided to sell our shirts, hats and paraphernalia, and we were unable to keep stock."

Mr McCartney said his party has held town meetings on several serious issues, including crime, immigration, jobs, the economy and education.

He said that if time permits – as he is not sure when the election will be called – they also want to hold a town meeting on the subject of good governance.

In it, the party will discuss a

number of concepts, including limiting the power of the prime minister and restricting an individual to two terms in the post.

"That has been said before by our Prime Minister, and we want to make that law," Mr McCartney said.

If elected, he said, the DNA would fix the size of constituencies, discontinuing the practice of cutting of boundaries.

He said the party would also look into establishing a government ombudsman – a watchdog for the people to ensure accountability on the part of public officers.

Mr McCartney also wants to amend the Public Disclosure Act.

"We want to give more teeth to that Act. As you know, the Act asks for public officers to disclose their income and we would want to extend that up to five years after you leave public service, because we want to determine after you leave public service, what foolishness you have been doing," he said.



DNA LEADER Branville McCartney

CHILDREN INJURED IN FALL FROM SCHOOL BUS

BY DENISE MAYCOCK
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FREEPORT – Two preschoolers were injured – one seriously – when they fell from a school bus on Tuesday morning.

According to police, the bus was at the junction of Wentworth Avenue and John Tinker Street at around 8.30am when the incident occurred.

The ages of the two victims have not been released.

They were taken to Rand Memorial Hospital, where one child is in serious condition and the other is stable.

The police investigation into the causes of the incident is ongoing.

VALENTINE'S DAY DOUBLE DATE FOR MAYCOCK OVER CONVICTION FOR POSSESSION OF DRUGS WORTH \$1M

By LAMECH JOHNSON
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THE appeal hearing of drug convict Melvin Maycock Sr could be heard on Valentine's Day – the same day as his bail application goes before the Court of Appeal.

However, whether the appeal is heard on that day by appellate court president Justice Anita Allen and Justices Stanley John and Christopher Blackman will depend on how soon the transcripts from his trial in Magistrate's Court and submissions by attorneys are ready.

Maycock Sr is applying for bail pend-

ing the outcome of his appeal on a conviction of drug possession with intent to supply and seven other offences.

In May 2008, police seized more than 1,000 lbs of marijuana from a home Maycock rented on West Bay Street, along with three guns and assorted ammunition.

The drugs had an estimated street value of more than \$1 million.

Maycock faced a maximum of five years in prison.

His trial came to an end on November 1, when he was found guilty of drug and firearm possession.

He was sentenced to three years in prison after consideration was given to

the two years he had already been in custody.

During Monday's proceedings, defence attorney Wayne Munroe explained that it was possible to conduct both the bail hearing and the appeal on the same day, as his submissions on bail would take no more than 15 minutes.

However, he added that the court, prosecution and defence would all need to be in possession of the full transcripts from the trial.

Justice Allen agreed, saying that if the records are made available in a timely fashion, both matters could be heard on February 14 at 10am.

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How an oil embargo could hit markets

THE US and Europe are trying to stop Iran, the world's third-biggest oil exporter, from selling crude. Iran's response is to threaten to disrupt shipments from the entire Middle East. Yet oil prices have hardly budged. They're at \$98.95, up just 12 cents since the start of year.

Just a year ago, uprisings in far less important oil-producing countries such as Egypt and Libya sent oil and gasoline prices to their highest levels in three years and prompted Western nations to release millions of barrels of oil from emergency supplies. The reason for such calm this year: No oil has been blocked, and there's a good chance none will be.

The US and Europe want to deprive Iran of the oil income it needs to run its government and, most importantly, fund what the West believes is an effort to build a nuclear weapon. Last year, Iran generated \$100 billion in revenue from oil, up from \$20 billion a decade ago, according to IHS CERA.

The European Union announced Monday it would ban the import of Iranian crude starting in July. The US already bans Iranian oil, but it has placed sanctions on Iran's banks to make it harder for that nation to sell crude.

Iran, in retaliation, has threatened to block the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow Persian Gulf waterway between Iran and Oman through which one-fifth of the world's oil passes. If that were to happen, experts say oil prices could soar toward \$200 per barrel and deliver a blow to already wobbly Western economies. Drivers would pay more for gasoline, airlines would spend more on fuel and shippers would pay more for diesel. That would leave people and companies with less money to spend and invest.

Using oil as a political weapon is an old tactic, but it may not be effective this time. If either side blocks the sale of oil in a meaningful way, it hurts itself. Iran's economy depends on the sale of oil. The economies of Western nations depend on reasonably priced oil.

Here are key questions and answers about what the ban could mean.

Q: What is Iran's role in the world oil market?

A: Iran exports 2.5 million barrels of oil per day, about 3 per cent of world supplies. About 500,000 barrels go to Europe and most of the rest goes to China, India, Japan and South Korea. Iranian fields produce a type of oil known as "heavy, sour" crude. While common, these crudes are sulfurous and require more refining and expense to turn into valuable fuels such as gasoline. As a result, they generally cost refiners less than so-called "lighter, sweeter" crudes.

Q: Will Iran try to block the Strait of Hormuz?

A: It's unlikely. The international naval response would be overwhelming because the strait is the world's most important energy choke point. Each day, 14 tankers on average squeeze through a shipping channel that, at its narrowest, is just 2 miles wide. If Iran could block it, it would send oil prices spiking to \$150 to \$200, analysts say, and badly damage Western economies. If that happened, Iran would hurt itself and its best customers, not just Western nations and producers like Saudi Arabia that also use the strait. Eighty-five per cent of the oil that travels through the strait goes to Asian nations, which are not participating in the embargo. Also, it would be all but impossible for Iran to keep its oil flowing through the strait while it tries to block oil from other countries.

Q: With all this saber rattling, why aren't oil prices soaring?

A: Because the strait is likely to remain open, keeping supplies flowing. And because Asian countries, already Iran's biggest customers, aren't joining the Europeans in banning Iranian oil. Also, the European embargo doesn't start until July, so oil markets will likely have time to adjust. As Europe turns away from Iran to other markets, though, it could push up prices for certain types of global crudes. And the brinkmanship between Iran and the West may already be having some effect on prices, analysts say.

Q: Will the embargo hurt or help Iran?

A: If Iran can no longer sell to Europe, it will have to find other buyers. That won't likely be difficult, especially given Asia's rising demand for oil. But Asian nations may be able to negotiate a discount for Iranian oil.

On the other hand, if global oil prices rise and Iran can sell its oil for somewhat higher prices, Iran's oil revenue will grow.

Q: If supplies of Iranian crude are disrupted, will other nations be able to make up the difference?

A: Eventually, yes. The US is pressuring other Middle East and African nations to increase production to help keep Europe and the world well-supplied as the embargo slowly takes effect. Saudi Arabia says it could increase its supplies to make up for any lost Iranian crude. Iran's relatively heavy crude is easier to replace than the Libyan light, sweet crude that was cut off during last year's uprising.

Still, an increase in production from other nations would leave little wiggle room for those countries to increase supplies further if needed. The oil market gets nervous, and sends prices higher, if it thinks producing nations don't have capacity to pump more oil to make up for a supply interruption somewhere in the world.

This article is by Jonathan Fahey, AP Energy Writer

Contest of David and Goliath

EDITOR, The Tribune.

THERE has been a lot of fanfare and enthusiasm in Grand Bahama over the nomination of noted journalist Pakeisha Parker-Edgecombe for the Free National Movement (FNM) party.

Edgecombe will contest the West Grand Bahama and Bimini constituency, a Progressive Liberal Party (PLP) stronghold.

The fact that the West End and Bimini constituency has traditionally been a PLP bastion could pose a difficult challenge for any candidate who is not a member of the Official Opposition, let alone a political novice, with all due respect to Mrs Edgecombe.

Moreover, Edgecombe will be going against Obediah Wilchcombe, a veteran politician.

Wilchcombe has been in front-line politics since the early 1990s, I think.

I understand that he was a protégé of the legendary Sir Lynden Pindling, the first Prime Minister of an independent Bahamas.

That should go a long way in helping Wilchcombe in a constituency that has stuck with the PLP through thick and thin.

It has often been said by political observers that ever since the formation of the FNM in the early 1970s, most Grand Bahamians have been loyal supporters of the FNM. That is why keen observers of Bahamian politics have dubbed Grand Bahama "FNM Country".

In fact, that term has even been used derisively by opponents of the FNM. Some have even gone as far as alleging that former PLP administrations had intentionally neglected Grand Bahama for its unwavering support for the FNM.

However, the one constituency on Grand Bahama that has perennially rejected the governing party is West End and Bimini. Of course, the FNM won that constituency in the 1997 general election. But that election was not a typical one by any stretch of the imagination.

The PLP was clobbered at the polls. I don't think anyone was surprised to learn that the FNM had captured West End and Bimini.

The FNM has now given the nod to the inexperienced Edgecombe to run against a

LETTERS

letters@tribunemedia.net

seasoned, indomitable candidate. To say that this will be a daunting task for the young FNM candidate would be putting it mildly.

Put bluntly, this would be considered a mismatch by most political observers. The people in West End love their Member of Parliament. In fact, I understand that they had even paid his election deposit for either the 2002 general election or for the election in 2007.

Further, Wilchcombe is the PLP's shadow Minister of Tourism. He had served as the Minister of Tourism in the Christie administration. It is very likely that he will be reappointed to that position if the PLP wins the general election.

In addition to serving in the House of Assembly for nearly ten years, Wilchcombe has also served as a senator and chairman of the opposition. Clearly he has a wealth of experience.

I think that it is safe to say that Wilchcombe is one of the more prominent MPs of the PLP. In fact, a number of years ago, there were rumours circulating through the press that the West End and Bimini MP was aspiring to become the leader of the opposition.

I believe the PLP will use every legal means necessary to keep him in the House. The question, of course, that everyone might be asking is this: Is the FNM party willing to do the same thing for Edgecombe? I am not too certain that the answer would be yes.

Having said that, Edgecombe has at least one significant advantage to Wilchcombe. A few months ago the Boundaries Commission had proposed that the constituency of Eight Mile Rock be eliminated. The community of Eight Mile Rock has been joined to the West End and Bimini constituency.

Historically, Eight Mile Rock has been an FNM stronghold. This large community could very well pose a

problem for Wilchcombe and the PLP. In fact, if I were Wilchcombe, I would have been rigorously canvassing that community from the day it was announced that Eight Mile Rock would be amalgamated to West End and Bimini.

In this day and age, you really cannot take anything for granted. In the past, PLP representatives for West End and Bimini could have gotten away with neglecting that constituency. But now that Eight Mile Rock has been added to that constituency, there isn't much room for error. I hope Wilchcombe understands this. In any event, a lot of pressure will be on Wilchcombe to pull this thing off. Everyone expects him to win. On the other hand, Edgecombe has virtually nothing to lose. Few expect her to win. I also think that there is also going to be a curiosity factor in this electoral contest. Grand Bahamians, especially those who watch ZNS TV news, are going to be closely monitoring Edgecombe's campaign.

Perhaps, another thing that could work in Edgecombe's favour is her celebrity. Everybody who's anybody knows Pakeisha Parker-Edgecombe. She used to read the news for the Northern Service ZNS TV-13 weekday evening newscasts. Also, Edgecombe is young, good-looking and more importantly, she is a woman. One only has to look at the amount of enthusiasm that the former governor of Alaska Sarah Palin had generated after being selected to run with former Republican presidential candidate Senator John McCain in the 2008 US presidential election Sarah Palin was treated like a rock star. I think Edgecombe will do well among female voters.

Nevertheless, the race for West Grand Bahama will be like a David and Goliath mismatch. It will be very interesting to see how the popular journalist does at the polls. I think the eyes of the nation are all on the contest for that constituency.

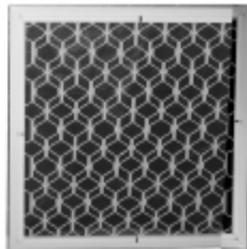
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LOCAL NEWS

MITCHELL CALLS ON PM TO JOIN DEBATE

By **SANCHESKA BROWN**
Tribune Staff Reporter
sbrown@tribunemedia.net

FOX HILL MP Fred Mitchell yesterday called on Prime Minister Hubert Ingraham to stop "ducking and dodging" a national debate with leaders of the PLP and the DNA.

Mr Mitchell said Mr Ingraham must agree "forthwith and without conditions" to a debate on the major issues facing the Bahamas.

He said: "The Prime Minister must account for his decisions. Ducking and dodging will not do. The PLP's leader has already said he will agree to a debate. The leader of the DNA has agreed."

"Now, all that is required is for the man who claims he means what he says and says what he means" to agree."

Mr Mitchell's comments came two days after DNA leader Branville McCartney issued a formal request for a debate. He said the forum would signal a commitment to accountable governance and be a critical step in strengthening democracy.

"Too many of the troubles we now face stem from decisions made behind closed doors, regulations removed when no one was looking, or reckless actions taken while authorities turned a blind eye," the letter stated.

"Our country is strongest when our elected leaders are accessible and accountable to its citizens, explaining their decisions and answering tough questions."

Mr Ingraham neither rejected nor accepted the challenge to a debate when asked by *The Tribune* earlier this month. Mr Ingraham said: "I don't talk foolishness. I debate every day."

According to DNA chairman Mark Humes, there has been no response from Mr Ingraham, or the Free National Movement, to the official request.

Forging links with Nigeria

THE Bahamas and Nigeria are seeking to forge ties in tourism and other economic areas.

This and other matters were discussed when Sir Arthur Foulkes, Governor-General accepted Letters of Commission presented by Her Excellency Laraba Elsie-Bhutto, accrediting her as non-resident High Commissioner from the Federal Republic of Nigeria to The Bahamas during a ceremony at Government House on Thursday, January 19.

"Today begins another chapter in the continued development of strong, mutually-beneficial bilateral relations and cooperation between our two countries. "Our two countries share historical commonalities that cannot be denied, and which will continue to be promoted," he said.

Regarding Nigeria as one of Africa's leading countries, Sir Arthur also described it as a leader in the establishment of the New Partnership for African Development, the creation of the Economic Community of West African States, and significant contributions to the United Nations Peace Keeping Forces in Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Mali, Togo, Ghana and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

He also congratulated Nigeria for its recent contributions to the international community as a Non-Permanent Member of the United Nations Security Council.

Notwithstanding the difference in size, The Bahamas and Nigeria have partnered politically in several major international fora such as the UN, the African Caribbean Pacific Group and, the Commonwealth, Sir Arthur said. Also, both countries are committed to the ideals of democracy, human rights



HER EXCELLENCY Laraba Elsie-Bhutto is accepted as Non-Resident High Commissioner from the Federal Republic of Nigeria to The Bahamas by Prime Minister Hubert Ingraham during a ceremony at Government House on Thursday, January 19.

Photo: **Peter Ramsay/BIS**

and sustainable development. "Our two countries share historical commonalities that cannot be denied, and which will continue to be promoted. We too are aware and share with your

country many concerns as they relate to the environment, security and energy," he said.

Nigeria was also acknowledged for making "significant strides" in confronting environmental challenges on an international, federal and local level and is actively exploring methods of producing renewable and sustainable energy.

"In this regard, I commend the efforts of your government in your country and, in particular, for programmes aimed at mitigating the adverse effects of climate change," Sir Arthur said. And, he also applauded the Government of Nigeria for its efforts to be among the 20 most developed countries in 2020, despite formidable obstacles.

As The Bahamas is known for its robust tourism industry – the mainstay of its economy, he said the country would welcome opportunities to strengthen its relations with Nigeria in this sector.

"It is our hope that, moving forward with these proposals, we can see the fruit of our labour manifest in meaningful progress for both Nigeria and The Bahamas," Sir Arthur said.

High Commissioner Bhutto thanked Sir Arthur for receiving her Letters of Commission, and accepting the Letters of recall of her predecessor, Senator Segun Bamigbetan Bajju. She also offered condolences from Nigeria's President Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan and the people of Nigeria, on the death of Sir Clifford Darling, former Governor-General of The Bahamas. The High Commissioner also paid courtesy calls on Prime Minister Hubert Ingraham; and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Brent Symonette.

CANDIDATE IS 'SURPRISED' BY LEVELS OF SUPPORT

By **DANA SMITH**
dsmith@tribunemedia.net



PLP CANDIDATE Alex Storr.

PLP candidate for Long Island Alex Storr is "surprised" by the amount of support he has received in the constituency and believes he will "do better than most people are expecting."

According to Mr Storr, the first PLP nominee Long Island has seen for years, constituents have been "very receptive" to his campaign.

He said: "The people are excited that they will have a PLP candidate."

Mr Storr said he is also excited about the prospect of running against the other Long Island nominees – Loretta Butler-Turner for the FNM and Mario Cartwright for the DNA.

and he feels confident of a win. He said he will "keep the campaign about the issues," such as the economy and infrastructure.

When asked what he thinks the people of Long Island want in a representative, Mr Storr said: "Just that – they are looking for a representative. They feel for the last several times they elected an MP who really didn't represent them. They want someone who will fight for Long Island."

Following his ratification in 2011, Mr Storr told constituents that change "is on the way."

"I have a vision for Long Island," he said. "Not overcrowded like Nassau, but a place where you have the access to all the amenities,

utilities and standards of living of Nassau."

Mr Storr told Long Islanders: "I have also heard your disappointment with the current level of representation and the feeling that Long Island has been neglected."

"The FNM government has turned a deaf ear and a blind eye to Long Island. I know your relationship with the PLP for some of you has been a bitter-sweet one, but I am here to make amends for any perceived wrongs, to set Long Island on the right track and

to help make Long Island all that it can be."

Although Mr Storr is not originally from Long Island, his family descended from the constituency.

"My mother was born there, she's from there, and I would spend summers and holidays there," he said.

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LOCAL NEWS

Police staff association admits some complaints after vote

By DANA SMITH
dsmith@tribunemedia.net

NEWLY re-elected Police Staff Association chairman Dwight Smith confirmed that some members were disgruntled in the aftermath of last week's elections, but said most were not complaining about the process or the results.

Speaking yesterday morning at the association's headquarters during the announcement of the new executive board, Mr Smith said the complaints mainly concerned the association's by-laws and constitution.

However, hinting at possible internal conflicts stemming from the election, he said: "It's just sad to know that those persons who have complaints about the by-laws actually sat around this table last year and said nothing to it."

"I'm only hearing them say it now, since they were not re-elected. If it was not a

problem then, why is it a problem now?"

He also disclosed the contents of a letter in which one member complained about the election process and internal rules, but according to Mr Smith, the letter was dated the day of the election.

He said: "Why wait until the day of the election to have a complaint? You should have channeled that long before, so that we can look at it and address it."

"And, it's only signed by one person; that does not give us the authority to stop a whole election process".

Royal Bahamas Police Force officers are "peacemakers", Mr Smith said, "so anything we do is peaceful and certainly there was no issue (with the elections). There are one or two persons who might have little issues but nothing that we can not deal with."

He added that the few disgruntled members are still assets to the association.

"These persons that I'm hearing all through the media and sending out letters, they have a good skill. I wish they were on this team, they could have helped in public relations, because obviously they know how to get the message across."

"Persons who are complaining about the by-laws, the constitution, obviously they've got some legal minds so we can sit them down with our legal officer. They can sit down and work it out."

Nearly 2,000 of the approximately 2,200 members voted in the election, and Mr Smith believes the they "could have not chosen a better team of minds for this term".

Four new positions were established, including executive director, chief welfare officer, legal aid and right officer, and information and events officer.

"With these positions, it is our intention to advance the association further to provide professional assistance to our

membership and the general public at large," Mr Smith said.

The executive director will control the resources and expenditures of the association, including the day-to-day management.

The chief welfare officer will "provide aid for the medical, emotional, physical and spiritual well-being" of police officers and their families who have suffered hardship.

The legal aid and right officer will "educate and advise officers in the art of not falling or yielding to temptation or corruption" and will protect officers' legal and constitutional rights.

The information and events officer will update the association's website daily. The position was created "due to members' complaints of the lack of information being disseminated throughout its membership," Mr Smith said.

Already on the table for this year is a proposal to change the chairman's term

from one to two years.

Mr Smith said: "We already have consensus of the whole membership at large. The majority of membership wish for us to establish the two year basis. That is something we are just waiting on Parliament to deal with."

He said the association is also in the process of becoming a member to the National Association of Police Officers (NAPO) in the United States.

"It's the first time in history that a Bahamian or a person outside the United States sits on the executive board," he said.

The arrangement will allow Bahamian police officers to "look at our counterparts to see how they do policing," he said. Mr Smith also hopes it will make more international training programmes available to officers.

The other executive members chosen in the election were:

- deputy chairman, Warren Johnson

- executive secretary, Lisa Saunders Armbrister

- deputy chairman for Grand Bahama, Darrell Weir

- chief welfare officer for Grand Bahama, Chris Barr

- private engagement chairman, Leonard Barr

- private engagement deputy chairman, Claudius Collie

- executive member, Ricardo Walkes

- assistant secretary, Nicola Mackey

- executive member, Kevin Farrington

- executive treasurer, Kirk Bastian

- public relations, Jacqueline Jones

- assistant treasurer, Latroy Bodie

- chief welfare officer, Shanique Ford

- private engagement chairman of Grand Bahama, Ernie Barr

- assistant welfare of the Family Islands, Darius Sealey

- sergeant of arms, Gerard Miller

NO ARRESTS YET AS POLICE CONTINUE SEARCH FOR KILLER OF CHINESE WORKER

By SANCHESKA BROWN
Tribune Staff Reporter
sbrown@tribunemedia.net

leads in their investigation into the murder of 45-year-old Wing Hong Chan.

Assistant Superintendent Stephen Dean yesterday con-

firmed that no one has been taken into custody in connection with the fatal shooting on Sunday morning.

"We are looking at some areas and checking some things."

"We have a composite sketch and have been getting some leads because of it. We are doing a number of things and the investigation is very active," he said.

"Right now, we have little to go on so we are depending heavily on the public. We know people have information that can assist us in our investigations."

"Someone out there knows something and we need them to come forward. We need justice for the family and for the victim. We are confident we will bring this case to a close soon," he said.

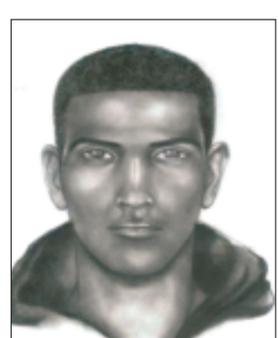
Mr Chan was shot and killed during an armed robbery at his Village Road home early Sunday morning.

He had just returned home after celebrating the Chinese New Year with family and friends when he was approached by a gunman around 3.30am.

The man robbed Mr Chan of his cell phone before shooting him and fleeing the area.

The victim was rushed to the hospital but died a short time later.

The suspect is believed to be in his mid 20s and is described as having medium brown complexion, slim



A SKETCH DRAWING released by police of the man sought in connection with the murder of Wing Hong Chan.

build and standing six feet tall.

On Monday, a statement issued by the Chinese Embassy advised its citizens "to pay due care and attention to their personal safety and security" while engaged in their daily activities.

Consul Zhai Xingfu and the consular officers of the Chinese Embassy, on behalf of Chinese Ambassador H E Hu Shan, urged the police to make every effort to "break the case and bring the murderer to justice as soon as possible".

Anyone with relevant information is asked to contact police by calling 919, the Central Detective Unit on 502-9991 or Crime Stoppers anonymously on 328-TIPS.

Mr Chan was the country's seventh murder victim for the year.

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These renovations are expected to continue for the duration of 2012 and WILL NOT hamper traffic travelling over the bridge.

The Bridge Authority apologizes for any inconvenience caused, and assures its customers and stakeholders, that all efforts will be made to maintain safe and easy access to Paradise Island.

Billy Scavella
General Manager
The Bridge Authority

STOLEN VEHICLES FOUND

By DENISE MAYCOCK
Tribune Freeport Reporter
dmaycock@tribunemedia.net

FREEPORT – Grand Bahama Police are following significant leads into several armed robberies here since making an arrest this weekend which has resulted in the recovery of two stolen vehicles.

Asst Supt Loretta Mackey, press liaison officer, said a jeep that was stolen during an armed robbery on November 26, 2011, at the International Bazaar has been recovered.

She said police have also been able to recover a black Nissan 300ZX car that was stolen during an armed robbery in Arden Forest on January 20, 12.

Ms Mackey said police are thankful to the community and the media for their continued support.

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'KFC STAFF WILL NOT BE BULLIED' from page one

According to the statement, as a result of the "union's unresponsiveness", KFC intends to unilaterally implement the changes by February 20, 2012.

Restaurants Bahamas proposed an almost 15 per cent decrease in wages for all KFC employees six years ago. Ms Martin said Tuesday's statement was just a ploy to force the union to comply.

She said: "In contract negotiations, I thought it to be the case that you negotiate until you come to an agreement.

"But clearly the operators and owners of Restaurants Bahamas are of the view that 'I propose to you something, you give me what I want. If I don't get it, I will wage a public warfare.'

"In the meeting last week Thursday, we left with the understanding that the union would quantify the areas of concession for management.

"In that quantification, we would also say how long the concessions would be for. Those were supposed to be submitted to the company this week Friday," she said.

"We actually thought that negotiations were going pretty good.

"We've only gone through one round of negotiations."

Ms Martin criticised Labour Minister Dion Foulkes for his "back-seat" approach to labour issues.

"It is so discouraging that we do not have a Minister of Labour that would come and talk, but offers no real intervention.

"There is only sitting down, let me hear you and you and let me hear them.

"We need a minister that will stand up for labour in this country.

"When are we going to get that person? When?"

FIVE YEARS AND STILL NO ANSWERS

from page one

statements were denied by the police force and dismissed by National Security Minister Tommy Turnquest as political opportunism.

According to the police, an investigation into allegations of corruption at the Ministry of Housing is still active.

However, in a statement released in December, police indicated that the long-standing probe stemmed from a complaint received from the Ministry of Housing, which requested an "investigation into alleged unethical practices by persons from the Ministry of Housing in the aftermath of Hurricanes

Frances and Jean".

Mr Bell said he was only directed to investigate serious allegations of corruption and breaches of trust within the ministry concerning contractors and housing inspectors.

Allegations of unofficial payoffs was one of two separate issues uncovered during *The Tribune's* series on the Ministry of Housing.

The second pointed to the discrepancies in the cost of houses between the records produced by the ministry and documents obtained independently by *The Tribune*. Both investigations, and the claims raised, have yet to be resolved.

Mr Bell's performance dur-

ing the housing investigation was also criticized by former colleagues.

Former assistant commissioner Paul Thompson noted that proper inspection of the homes in question, detailed examination of the relevant records and skilful interrogation techniques would have been sufficient to determine whether or not there was collusion between contractors and building inspectors in the alleged corruption, or just negligence on behalf of the latter.

According to Mr Russell, these investigations led to the Value for Money (VFM) audit of the former Ministry of Housing and National

Insurance, contracted by the Auditor-General, and conducted by Crown Agents over the period May 12 to June 6, 2008.

The independent report concluded that the political imperative to build homes resulted in major remedial work to government-built houses and an overburdening of both financial and technical resources.

While contracting arrangements were intended to be the main focus of the audit, it was stated that there "was a complete absence of information" on how contracts were awarded.

In an interview with *The Tribune* late last year, Min-

istry of Housing technical director Godfrey Major said he was stripped of his responsibility to contract infrastructure work and house building in 2002 without explanation.

Contracts to build government homes were directly awarded by a consultant, thus reducing the housing director's role to that of an adviser within the former Ministry of Housing and National Insurance.

According to Mr Major, the consultant's name was Anthony Farrington. When asked for contact information on Mr Farrington, Mr Major said he did not have any. Former minister Shane Gibson said that he did not want to get involved.

UNION SAYS NO INCENTIVE FOR TEACHERS

from page one

have a home in New Providence and while they would like to experience the Family Islands, they cannot afford a mortgage and rent."

Addressing allegations that Family Island schools are understaffed, Mr Bannister said he is shocked by the low number of graduates who choose to seek employment outside of the capital.

He said: "I could not believe how many Bahamian teachers, and I have said it publicly so many times, come out of the College of the Bahamas and do not want to go to the Family Islands.

"Then I go and see foreign teachers serving so valiantly in our Family Islands, giving service."

Encouraging Bahamian teachers to consider other

posts, Mr Bannister said it is important that Family Island residents have access to the same level of education.

"We have made outstanding progress in having Bahamians posted in the Family Islands and we are going to continue to do that - we continue to seek to do that," said Mr Bannister.

But, Mrs Wilson said, it is not enough for the minister to "just generally say" there is a difficulty getting teachers to go to the Family Islands - "He should have also have said what our Family Island teachers face on a daily basis".

She said while teachers that are posted in the Family Islands receive government salaries, those that wish to volunteer are not provided housing or any form of assistance with accommodation.

"If they would change that

policy, which the union has been agitating for a while," she said, "then the union would be willing to use whatever influence we have to go to encourage them to go to the Family Islands."

Additionally, Ms Wilson said the lack of employment opportunities for the spouses and other family members and limited access to tertiary educational institutions for their children present further obstacles.

"A lot of our teachers are already family oriented and they are unable to move their spouses and children because there are very few opportunities in the Family Islands for employment," she said.

Mrs Wilson also noted that some Family Islands are seen as "hardship islands", that suffer from a lack of amenities and conveniences - for exam-

BOY, 5, SLIPS INTO COMA DURING TREATMENT

from page one

Dsoargi's unresponsive state has taken a great toll on the entire family, as the couple's first two children did not survive more than a few months.

Mrs Hanna gave birth to a premature baby girl in 1997,

and a full-term baby boy in 1998. The girl survived nearly three months, while the boy only lived for one week.

Dsoargi celebrated his fifth birthday last Friday.

Gloria Pitter, Dsoargi's 62-year-old grandmother, said: "We want justice, we want a

second opinion. We want to know what went wrong with the baby.

"Three weeks he's been just lying there. We want justice."

Mrs Hanna lodged a formal complaint with the hospital administration yesterday.

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Speakers:



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PC, MD, MBA, FACR, FACRO, FAAMA
Director of Radiation Oncology & CEO of McGill University Health Centre



Professor Dr. Karol Sikora
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LOCAL NEWS

A question of medical trust

IN a recent Tribune article, heart specialist Dr Conville Brown complained about Bahamians spending millions of dollars in the US for medical care that could easily be obtained at home.

He was arguing in favour of local healthcare providers building a large-scale medical tourism industry.

"The same things that all tourists do," he said, "the medical tourist has to do. (And) if the ownership is Bahamian, then the economy really wins because those funds will stay here."

But at the same time, he felt constrained to point out that Bahamians were offsetting the income from foreigners by flying off to get treatment in the US.

"We boost their economy big time. We are reverse medical tourists. Several hospitals in South Florida say their biggest international clientele is from the Bahamas."

Medical tourism is a multi-billion-dollar growth industry that hospitals, doctors and tourism marketers around the world are eager to tap into. By some accounts, more than half a million Americans travel to other countries for medical treatment – partly for cost reasons and partly to take advantage of procedures not



yet approved in the US.

There can be no disagreement with Dr Brown's position in terms of the Bahamian economy. And for patients, the benefits are equally obvious and compelling. If Bahamians obtained their medical treatment at home, they would significantly reduce the logistics, expense and stress of being treated abroad.

Why then, do so many of us spend so much money overseas for treatments that are available right here at home? We can answer that question fairly confidently – given a choice, patients will seek medical care from the doctors, hospitals and clinics they trust the most.

This is a personal decision, and it is usually an informed decision. Patients must feel assured that the doctors and facilities they choose are both accountable and able to provide the best quality care they can afford.

So what processes do we have in place to convey such

assurances to Bahamians?

Well, there are three statutory bodies that are capable of providing quality assurance and oversight to the Bahamian healthcare sector.

The Public Health Authority has managed government hospitals and clinics since 1999, under the direction of the Minister of Health. As an independent public body, the Authority is responsible for planning, policy, monitoring, evaluation, and management, as well as programme development and oversight.

However, the PHA's legislation has no provision for the investigation of complaints about the healthcare facilities managed by the Authority. Instead, PHA patients are advised to contact the "patient representative" to discuss any concerns they may have.

The Hospital and Health Care Facilities Board was created by Parliament in 1998 to license private hospitals and clinics. This legislation does include a specific mandate to investigate complaints into the "diagnosis, management and treatment" of any patient.

Physicians are the primary providers of healthcare, whether in the public or private sector, and since 1974 they have been licensed and regulated by the Medical Council. According to its website, the council was established "to regulate the medical profession, to upgrade doctors through continuing education requirements, and to safeguard the public through receiving and disposing of complaints".

However, despite the fact that it represents one of the richest professions, the council is made up of a handful of volunteers with virtually no



'There is no stonewalling. We take this very, very seriously because we want to ensure that the public will be well-served at the end of the day by this groundbreaking precedent.'

Dr Duane Sands

administrative staff. Their website, for example, includes dead and departed physicians on its registry.

So do the records of these three bodies help to inspire confidence and trust in the delivery of healthcare services in the Bahamas?

Well, it would be useful to know how many complaints have been processed by the PHA's "patient representative" and how they were resolved, but unfortunately that information is not publicly available. As for the Hospital Board and the Medical Council, a summary of the case history of one complaint to these bodies over the past decade is instructive.

In 2004, a complaint was made to the Hospital Board concerning the treatment of a 42-year-old man who unexpectedly died in 2002 in a licensed Bahamian healthcare facility.

The board initially refused to deal with the complaint. But after several board members were replaced in 2005 by then Health Minister Dr Marcus Bethel, he ordered that the complaint be investigated. This order by Dr Bethel more than six years ago is the high-point of the case.

The 2005 board met with the complainant's legal and medical representatives in 2006. Afterwards, the Board chairman advised that "since the patient was dead, the file should be closed."

The board did, however, reconsider, and an investigatory panel was to be formed. However, the government changed before this happened.

The new government reinstated the 2004 board chairman, and other members. This chairman reported to a

Rotary Club meeting in 2008 that the board didn't want to investigate any complaints, or "be involved in that detailed level of work".

The board said it would seek to have its enabling legislation amended, to remove the investigative requirements, and also to remove the requirement for licensed facilities to report deaths occurring on their premises – a legal mandate never complied with, and never enforced, over the board's entire lifetime.

(It should also be noted that over the past 14 years the board has issued only two "annual" reports to Parliament, something which it is required to do by law every year. And even obtaining copies of those two reports presents enormous challenges).

At a public meeting in 2008, Health Minister Dr Hubert Minnis also promised to investigate the 2004 complaint. But it is now 2012 and the board has taken no action

whatsoever. Neither has it ever responded to the complainant.

As for the Medical Council, it received a complaint about the same patient's treatment and care in 2008. The disciplinary committee of the Medical Council met twice on the matter, and three years ago, then council chairman Dr Duane Sands assured Tough Call that: "There is no stonewalling. We take this very, very seriously because we want to ensure that the public will be well-served at the end of the day by this groundbreaking precedent."

He also told me that the medical act (which has been stalled for almost a decade now) was being strengthened to deal with "a finite group of people who are discrediting the profession without any real repercussions – from charging extortionary fees to providing less than appropriate care".

However, in December of last year, the Medical Council's disciplinary committee suspended the 2004 complaint investigation indefinitely.

The council decided it could not proceed because of an ex-parte injunction granted by a Supreme Court judge against the disciplinary committee in 2009, on the application of a doctor concerned in the matter. Since then, the Medical Council has taken no steps either to have the injunction removed or to proceed with the investigation.

The injunction itself is a curious feature in this story. It is perhaps "the one and only" injunction to be granted by one Supreme Court judge against another Supreme Court judge (who sits in his judicial capacity as a member of the statutory disciplinary committee).

Kerzner's branding of the Ocean Club as the "One and Only" has given a high profile to the Bahamas as an attractive destination, but the "one and only" injunction against a Supreme Court judge could have a converse effect on the Bahamas as a destination for medical tourism – quite apart from the collateral damage inflicted on the public oversight function of the Medical Council.

If doctors and politicians want to attract medical tourism to the Bahamas, they need first to inspire confidence in Bahamian medical services among Bahamians themselves. Putting the legislation that already exists to work on behalf of the public interest by providing quality assurance and oversight of healthcare delivery is the obvious place to start.

• What do you think? Send comments to larry@tribunemedia.net or visit www.bahamapundit.com.



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Majority Rule and the PLP

By **KHALILA NICOLLS**
khalilanicolls@gmail.com

EVERY year when January 10 rolls around, I often feel as though the Progressive Liberal Party's glorification of Majority Rule Day is a political strategy to guilt me into pledging my allegiance to the PLP as a show of respect for all they did to bring about the liberation of the black masses in the Bahamas.

As an African woman who should surely see the importance of Majority Rule, the feelings are troubling. Not because the political strategy, if it were one, is tasteless, but because I believe contrarily that the PLP has failed to bring about true advance for black Bahamians as a collective body.

That is not to say I deny the contributions of our nation-builders and the significance of their accomplishments. But that is to say I do not think the PLP is exempt from the scrutiny of black Bahamians. The political organisation has a 59-year-old history, and it seems to me, all of their black cred(ibility) is based on pre-1980s glory.

Furthermore, I believe a true test of national progress is not to be found by assessing the best of us, speaking here in terms of economics and access, but the least of us.

And one only needs eyes to see that the underdevelopment of black Bahamians over the past 30 years has been and continues to be a national disgrace.

Surely there has been progress, but many examples are anomalous: black Bahamians who received handouts under Sir Lynden Pindling's arm of influence; who profited from illicit activity, whether drugs or gambling; who benefited from political connections or exceptional educational opportunities; and black Bahamians with destiny working in their favour.

Outside of those examples, the PLP would have to admit



TALKING SENSE

KHALILA NICOLLS

that economic progress for black Bahamians predated the PLP. By the time Majority Rule slipped through, there was already a thriving black middle class, for which the PLP cannot lay claim. This progress was achieved under the United Bahamian Party (UBP) government, albeit in spite of the UBPs efforts.

Within the black middle class, there was the Adderley family of Wilford Parliament Adderley, which was comprised of lawyers, politicians and doctors; the Bethel family of Marcus Bethel consisting of undertakers and politicians; Sir Milo Butler, patron of Milo B Butler and Sons, who produced a line of grocery merchants; Jackson Burnside, a dentist, who paved the way for his future lineage of professionals; noted patron of the Eneas clan, Bishop Wilmore Eneas, who was a religious leader.

Others in the black middle class included Dr CR Walker, restaurateur James Russel, banker A Leon McKinney, candy maker Ulrick Mortimer, and clothing retailer Erdley Moss. Irwin McCartney and Dwit Thompson owned a custom brokerage business; Audley C Kemp was in the liquor business, as were Charles and George McKinney; Hugh Campbell Cleare owned an East Bay Street bicycle shop; and Harcourt Carter sold Japanese electrical appliances.

The PLP did not make these men. On the contrary. Many of these men made the PLP. And since then, what? What progress has there been for black Bahamians who are not counted amongst the established lot.

On balance, as a collective community, black Bahamians are still in an economic and social quandary despite the hope-filled promises of better for blacks and the idealism of the Majority Rule era.

Although the PLP is still the most vocal champion of Majority Rule, whatever momentum it had as a galvanising force for the black community back then, today it has no credible basis to portray itself as the people's party.

For all of its former glory, the PLP has turned into just another political party, arguably no better or worse than any of the others, white, black, red or green. Far from being revolutionary, the PLP has been a mere "tweaker of the status quo". So what then is the meaning of Majority Rule, the PLP's symbol of black liberation?

Many of the people who take exception to the concept of majority rule at the same time promote the concept of One Bahamas. But both constructs are based on race. Proponents of One Bahamas try to express a raceless reality, but there is no such thing.

One Bahamas simply expresses an identity based on the negation of race. Majority Rule on the other hand does so based on the affirmation of race. In either case, without a racial consciousness One Bahamas and Majority Rule would be meaningless, redundant phrases.

For One Bahamas to have relevance and validity, it needs to express a vision of racial cohesion in the Bahamas, not based on the denial of race but on the

acceptance of race.

Racial difference is not something to shun. It is part of our cultural diversity, and it is an important to understanding our cultural heritage. We should not seek to deny or inflate race, which exposes us to insult and political manipulation. We should accept it.

In one sense, Majority Rule is an inherently paradoxical concept, because in a system of political representation, presumed to be democratic, any elected government is a majority government. Therefore, even under the UPB's tenure there was majority rule.

One could argue that based on the UBPs racially discriminating laws that privileged white people, men and land owners, the body of eligible voters represented a national minority. If this were statistically true, then any claim to majority rule prior to the 1962 election could stand to be challenged. But even still, within the legal framework of governance, the UBPs was without question a legitimate majority government.

So what then do we make of the 1962 election, which represented the first vote in which there was universal suffrage, and the 1967 election, which represented first time in Bahamian representational politics that the racial composition of the House of Assembly reflected the racial composition of the Bahamas society? In order to give majority rule significance beyond its racial character, some point to the fact that in 1967 for the first time, "the will of the majority was finally expressed and converted into political power".

After all, in 1962, the PLP won 32,399 votes. But because of seat distribution, with only 26,826 votes, the UBPs retained its power and went on to lead the next government.

However, the argument does not stand scrutiny. First, the 1962 conundrum was a flaw of the political system, not the racial dynamics or a kind of social imbalance peculiar to the age.

Although the gerrymandering related to seat distribution was a major obstacle, the fundamental flaw in the system was inherent. It still exists today, and it is globally felt.

In the modern democratic system, a government can form a majority even without the popular vote. Arguably it happened in 1967 - which questions the very basis of the PLP's claim to majority rule.

In 1967, the PLP won only 18,452 votes. Collectively, the PLP opposition secured 24,633 seats.

That hardly represents a popular majority. And in terms of seat distribution, the PLP came out even with the UBPs: 18 seats each.

It was only after forming an alliance with Randol Fawkes of the Labour Party and independent candidate Alvin Braynen that the PLP was able to secure a majority. So what does that really say about Majority Rule?

From the standpoint of a popular uprising or black advancement then, 1962 was a much more impressive showing, because at least then the PLP won the popular vote hands down.

Given all that has been said, clearly Majority Rule requires further examination to separate fact from fantasy, and to arrive at true meaning over myth.

Another element that flies in the face of Majority Rule's traditional narrative is the PLPs struggle with an ideology of black empowerment.

Compared to the likes of black nationalists in the United States like Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael) or Marcus Garvey, the PLP's concept of race was very tame. And the accomplishment of Majority Rule was no sign of black power. It represented change, yes, even political progress, but a revolutionary concept of black empowerment, no.

So what I find interesting



NINA SIMONE, musician and activist, whose feet were kissed by Bahamian journalist Oswald Brown as a show of support during a concert in Nassau.

and often overlooked is that, for all of its rhetoric, the political leadership who led blacks into an era of majority rule did so while at the same time running away from its black identity. Although it used race as a political tool to galvanise its constituents, the PLP did not use an affirmative ideology of blackness.

I spoke to one of the few living black parliamentarians of the 1967 election, and he admitted that black Bahamians were not joined in their common struggle for equal rights and justice, by an affirmative black power struggle. There was no such concept within the PLP's public platform.

I found further proof of this in an account of Sir Arthur Foulkes, who documented in short what he called the "PLP's long lie about race".

"Miriam Makeba, the celebrated black South African singer, was among a number of prominent blacks in America who wanted to do business in the new Bahamas.

"But Sir Lynden stopped her when he heard she was romantically linked with black power firebrand Stokely Carmichael. She left Sir Lynden's office in tears and never came back. The new Bahamas was having nothing to do with that," stated Sir Arthur.

He also recounted the story of Lady Marguerite Pindling, African American songstress Nina Simone and Bahamian journalist, Oswald Brown. Nina Simone, a known activist who used her music to share the struggles of black people and spread black protest songs, performed a concert in Nassau with Lady Marguerite and Mr Brown in attendance.

Mr Brown was so moved by the performance that he ran on stage and kissed Ms Simone's feet. By his own account, it was a sign of support, because there were some in the audience who started to boo her.

Lady Marguerite was reportedly unimpressed with Mr Brown and Ms Simone. According to Sir Arthur, Mr Brown was rebuked and chastised by the party.

Some would argue that the PLP supported black power, just a moderate version of it, but I wonder if the documented contradictions call this into question.

The PLP was not alone in this contradiction. The black dilemma was most notably played out in the United States between the differing ideological stances of Martin Luther King Jr and Malcolm X.

However, what is often overlooked is that even Martin Luther King became more radical in his latter years. His famous lament was, "I fear I have integrated my people into a burning house".

In the white community, Sir Lynden is vilified as a being a black radical who racialised the country. In the black community he is heralded as a pragmatic moderate who knew how to balance delicate dynamics.

To me, there are any number of anecdotes that speak to a black government that was simply conscious of its inherent lack of power.

Nothing can invalidate the fact that Majority Rule represented the shattering of a glass ceiling for black Bahamians seeking political office. But there is much to question about some of the traditional narratives of Majority Rule: that it represented the expressed will of the majority; that it represented a form of black liberation; and that it established some incontrovertible black cred for the PLP.

It is not that I have a problem accepting Majority Rule as a mammoth accomplishment for black Bahamians. I believe Majority Rule marks an important political milestone; it recognises the political progress of black Bahamians in breaking a new barrier. I do not, however, believe it is a sign of black liberation or progress.

History has shown that black representation failed to bring about progress for black Bahamians as a collective body. The Bahamas still has an economic structure that favours the merchant class. Now, instead of profiting families like the Moskos and Pinders, the policies profit the likes of Franklyn Wilson and Tennyson Wells.

Although there was growth in the black middle class in the 70s and 80s, it has remained virtually stagnant since then. In the industries of merit, finance and tourism, Bahamians still have little ownership, and struggle to assume some of the top posts.

For Majority Rule to have had meaning beyond a recognition of progress for blacks in political representation, the PLP would have needed a true black mandate rooted in the affirmation of blackness.

In its 1968 constitution, the PLP stated as one of its objectives "to strive for and maintain the political emancipation of all the people of the Bahamas". For a political organisation, this would seem appropriate. After all, black people were under-represented in the House of Assembly. Looking skin deep, that was obvious.

What would have been more visionary and appropriate as an objective for a black majority government rooted in a shared ideology of blackness was the emancipation of every black person from the shackles of mental slavery. It is a task no white individual or white government can achieve for black people, and to this day, few if any black governments have undertaken the task with institutional purpose or strength.

A black government undertaking a black mandate would have examined all of the institutions of black oppression and represented the self-interests of black people.

To me, the promise of Majority Rule suggested that now we are going to make black people better off. Not just those at the top, but as a nation of black people we are going to grow. And no matter how much the PLP boasts, I just cannot see how it has lived up to that promise.

• **Pan-African writer and cultural critic Noelle Khalila Nicolls is a practising journalist in the Bahamas.**

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INTERNATIONAL NEWS

US SEEKS DAMAGES OVER BANK CLOSURE

US REGULATORS are seeking \$176 million in damages from officials at what used to be Puerto Rico's second-largest bank.

The Federal Deposit Insurance Corp accused six former Westernbank officials and directors of gross negligence, violating loan policy and ignoring auditor warnings in a suit filed last week.

Regulators shut down the bank and its 45 branches in April 2010, citing a \$4.25 billion loss.

The FDIC, which took over the bank, said the damages it seeks represent the total loss of 10 construction loans, seven asset-based loans and four commercial real estate loans that the bank approved from January 2004 to July 2009.

The FDIC accused Westernbank officials of approving loans to make a quick profit through an "aggressive and reckless growth strategy".

The agency also accused former director Cornelius Tamboer of not disclosing a personal financial interest in a \$12 million loan before it was approved. It said his daughter was a principal of the borrower.

Westernbank opened in March 1958 in the western coastal city of Mayaguez. In 1994, it became a full-service commercial bank, and its assets grew from \$3.4 billion to \$17.9 billion from 1999 to 2009, according to the lawsuit.

The FDIC has filed dozens of similar lawsuits in the past two years to recoup losses from bank failures that regulators blame on negligence and misconduct. FDIC attorneys have been in settlement talks with many of the executives.

Last week, the FDIC filed a suit against another Puerto Rican bank, R-G Premier, which collapsed in April 2010 with a nearly \$1.5 billion loss.

GUN DEALERS ADMIT GUILT

TWO men pleaded guilty to buying guns that were destined to be smuggled into Mexico, the first convictions in the federal government's botched Operation Fast and Furious.

The men were so-called "straw buyers" who acknowledged purchasing guns that they knew were headed to Mexican drug gangs.

The goal of the federal government's investigation was to catch weapons-trafficking kingpins, but firearms agents lost track of many weapons they were trying to trace to smuggling ringleaders, and some guns ended up at crime scenes in Mexico and the US.

Jacob Wayne Chambers and Jacob Anthony Montelongo each pleaded guilty in federal court Monday to a conspiracy charge. Montelongo also pleaded guilty to dealing guns without a license.

The pair admitted being part of a 20-person smuggling ring that is accused of running guns into Mexico for use by the Sinaloa drug cartel.

BRAZIL JET FORCED DOWN

A TAM Airlines jet was forced to return to Paris about 90 minutes after taking off Tuesday because of an unknown technical problem, the company said.

The A330 Airbus jet was en route from Charles de Gaulle airport to Rio de Janeiro when the problem occurred.

It safely landed and nobody was injured in the incident, said TAM spokeswoman Antonia Silva.

"It was a technical problem, and as a safety measure TAM turned the flight around to Paris," she said.

"The problem is being investigated."

Silva gave no more details about the nature of the technical problem. She said the plane is undergoing maintenance.



REPUBLICAN presidential candidate, former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney gestures during a Republican presidential debate on Monday.

ROMNEY'S TAX RETURNS MAY LAND HIM IN ELECTION TROUBLE

MITT ROMNEY'S newly released tax returns represent an extraordinary accounting of the household finances and far-reaching corporate investments of one of the richest US presidential candidates in generations, with an annual income that tops \$20 million.

How the details of Romney's extensive wealth will play among Republican taxpayers, rival campaigns, the media and the American public only started to emerge Tuesday, as more than 500 pages from a 2010 tax return and a 2011 estimate spilled out both significant and minor revelations about Romney's scattered holdings, tax strategies and charitable donations.

The returns outline both the dimensions of Romney's finances and the complexity

of the tactics used to reduce his effective tax rate close to the low 15 percent paid by many middle-class Americans. Among the details contained in the documents are Romney's continuing profits from the private equity firm he founded but no longer runs, a Swiss bank account closed just as Romney launched his White House run and new listings of investment funds that were set up in offshore locations from the Caribbean to Luxembourg.

Romney's advisers stressed that he met all his federal tax obligations, provided maximum transparency and did not take advantage of "aggressive" strategies often used by the ultra-rich.

Tax law experts familiar with the formidable financial portfolios of investment fund

managers said Romney's returns would at the very least reinforce the rising public issue of income inequality.

"The average American has a hard time understanding their own two-page tax return let alone Gov. Romney's 200-page return," said Joseph Bankman, a Stanford University professor of business and law who has testified to Congress on tax issues. "What would jump out at anyone is the sheer amount of money and low tax rate he pays, as well as the enormous complexity of his financial transactions."

Romney paid about \$3 million in federal income taxes in 2010, having earned more than seven times that from his investments. That income, \$21.7 million, put him among the wealthiest of American taxpayers.

Barefaced cheek of the Barefoot Bandit

SEATTLE Associated Press

BAREFOOT BANDIT Colton Harris-Moore ridiculed police and prosecutors in emails and phone calls from prison recently, undercutting his claims that he's sorry for his two-year crime spree, the US attorney's office said in court documents filed Tuesday.

The 20-year-old, who awaits federal sentencing, referred to Island County Sheriff Mark Brown as the "king swine", called prosecutors who handled his case "fools", and referred to news reporters as "vermin".

The self-taught pilot bragged about his two-year crime spree, during which he hopped the US in stolen cars, boats and small planes before being captured in the Bahamas in July 2010 a hail of bullets.

"The things I have done as far as flying and airplanes goes, is amazing," he wrote in one email last August. "Nobody on this planet have done what I have, except for the Wright brothers."

Federal prosecutors included excerpts from the emails and phone transcripts in a sentencing memorandum filed Tuesday in U.S. District Court.

Harris-Moore was sentenced last month to more than seven years in prison for a long string of state crimes, mostly on his hometown of Camano Island and in the San

Juan Islands, but he is still scheduled to be sentenced on Friday for federal crimes, including stealing planes.

Prosecutors are seeking a six-and-a-half year sentence, the most they can ask for under the terms of Harris-Moore's federal plea deal. His lawyers asked for a sentence of just under six years in their own memorandum filed Tuesday. The plea deal calls for proceeds from a movie deal to be used to pay more than \$1.2 million in restitution to his victims, and the judge can issue a sentence outside the plea deal's suggested range.

Emma Scanlan, one of Harris-Moore's lawyers, said the excerpts were cherry-picked from more than 700 pages of emails and phone transcripts. None of the excerpts suggests that Harris-Moore doesn't feel sorry for the people he victimised, she noted.

"Maybe he doesn't like the sheriff's office, maybe he doesn't like the prosecutors," Scanlan said. "But he's recognising the most important group of people."

Prosecutors said the excerpts offered a striking difference in tone to the apology letter Harris-Moore wrote to the state and federal judges handling his case.

In the letter, he said he did not want to glamorise anything he had done, and he apologized profusely to his victims, saying he learned only too late of the fear he was instilling in them.

He said his childhood —



COLTON HARRIS-MOORE, better known as the Barefoot Bandit, whose emails and phone calls from prison have mocked police and prosecutors.

with an abusive, alcoholic mother and a series of her ex-boyfriends — was one he would not wish on his "darkest enemies".

He also wrote in the letter that he wanted to apologise to the Island County and San Juan County sheriffs' offices, "who I know were only doing their jobs".

In a monitored telephone call Dec 9, a week before his sentencing, he said he wanted his supporters in the courtroom because "the more people I have from my camp the

better, because that's just one less seat that will be filled by the media vermin or the swine, the king swine himself, Mark Brown".

The judge who sentenced Harris-Moore in state court emphasised his difficult childhood, called his case "a triumph of the human spirit" and suggested it's remarkable that he didn't commit worse crimes, given his background.

In an email a few days after the sentence, Harris-Moore recounted the sentencing.

"When all the acting and

spreading of high propaganda on the part of the state was over and my lawyers argued the true facts, the judge gave me a much-appreciated recognition and validation, calling my story a 'triumph of the human spirit'," he wrote.

"She wasn't having none of the weak argument the prosecution tried to peddle, and ended up handing down a sentence that was the lowest possible within the range. ... Once again, I made it through a situation I shouldn't have."

FINANCIER ACCUSED OF LYING TO INVESTORS

TEXAS financier R Allen Stanford lied to investors and stole their hard-earned savings so he could live the lavish lifestyle of a billionaire, a prosecutor said Tuesday at his fraud trial.

Prosecutor Gregg Costa told jurors in Houston federal court that Stanford used investors' money to buy homes and yachts and fund cricket matches.

"He treated depositors' savings like it was his own personal piggy bank," Costa said.

The prosecution says Stanford's business empire was built on smoke and mirrors and he bilked investors out of more than \$7 billion over 20 years as part of a massive Ponzi scheme centered on sales of certificates of deposit from an Antigua bank he owned.

Stanford, who denies the claims and says his businesses were legitimate, is charged with 14 counts, including wire and mail fraud. He faces up to 20 years in prison if convicted.

Robert Scardino, one of Stanford's attorneys, told jurors the financier was a clever and resourceful busi-



R ALLEN STANFORD arrives in custody at the federal courthouse for a hearing in Houston in August 2010.

nessman who for 22 years paid investors every penny that he promised them.

"We're going to prove to you that (his business empire) was real and it existed," Scardino said.

Scardino told jurors that Stanford didn't need to steal depositors' money and use it as personal loans.

"If he needed money, could go to a bank and borrow up to \$1 billion," he said.

Stanford, 61, is expected to testify during the trial, which

will likely last at least six weeks.

Once considered one of the US's wealthiest people, with an estimated net worth of more than \$2 billion, Stanford snatched up luxury homes and cars, private jets and yachts, and became so prominent in his adopted country of Antigua, where he took on dual citizenship, that he was knighted by the Caribbean island's government and became known as "Sir Allen".

SYRIA VOWS TO SOLVE OWN PROBLEMS DESPITE PRESSURE

WITH Arab pressure mounting to end 10 months of bloodshed, the Syrian regime vowed Tuesday to solve its own problems even if "half the universe" is conspiring against it.

The remarks signaled that Arab League efforts to stem the violence are collapsing — something that could pave the way for the UN Security Council to step in, even though Russia is firmly opposed to punitive measures against its longtime ally.

Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem brushed off the threat of referring the issue to the Security Council — a move that could lead to tougher sanctions — rather than trying to resolve it regionally. The prospect of

UN involvement has raised fears in Syria that an international intervention could be next.

"If they go to (U.N. headquarters in) New York or the moon, as long as we don't pay their tickets, this is their business," al-Moallem said at a news conference in Damascus.

He was reacting to an appeal by the Gulf Cooperation Council for the UN Security Council to take all "necessary measures" to force Syria to implement an Arab League's ambitious peace plan announced Sunday to create a national unity government in two months. Damascus has rejected the plan as a violation of national sovereignty.

FIVE POLICE SHOT DEAD IN MEXICO

OFFICIALS say five police officers were fatally shot after they stopped a vehicle in a town outside Mexico City.

Mexico State prosecutor Alfredo Castillo Cervantes says the municipal officers from the town of Ixtapaluca had stopped the vehicle when a taxi and a van pulled up and a group of attackers opened fire with high-powered weapons.

Castillo said Tuesday investigators suspected the Monday attack was an attempt to free people who had been stopped by the police.

Two civilians were found at the scene, one dead and one wounded and unconscious.

Police assume they were among the attackers or the suspects originally stopped by the officers' two patrol cars.