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Gov't moves to buy back airport lands

By OBSERVER News - Tuesday, January 3rd, 2012.

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ST JOHN'S, Antigua – Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer has revealed that the government is trying to buy back two parcels of land at the VC Bird International Airport from a development company owned by jailed Texan financier, R Allen Stanford.

In his New Year's address, the nation's leader said the land is needed for the construction of the new airport terminal, which had its groundbreaking ceremony back in early November last year.

Spencer said the government aims to have construction for the two-year project begin this month. However, he said the project "necessitates the utilisation of two parcels of land currently owned by Stanford Development Company Limited: the small parcel (.64 of an acre) to the east which was used by the taxis as a parking area, and the former government car park parcel of 5.42 acres," Spencer said.

Stanford had in February 2003 purchased from the government 25.59 acres around the airport compound, including these parcels at a concessionary price of EC \$1.10 per square foot, according to Spencer.

The prime minister said he hopes to have an agreement reached that would allow the government to take control of the land immediately.

"I have instructed the Airport Authority to hold discussions with the company officials early next week towards arriving at a reasonable sale price of the two parcels of land back to government and on terms that will allow for immediate occupation," Spencer said.

There is no indication on whether the company plans to comply with the request but Spencer said he is anticipating full co-operation and a quick resolution.

"Given the national interest at stake and the imminent commencement of construction works, I expect that the necessary co-operation and good faith on both sides will allow a settlement of this matter in the shortest possible time," Spencer said.

Meanwhile the prime minister has responded to two separate resolutions introduced in the US Senate and US House of Representatives that call for sanctions against the country in relation to the alleged Stanford Ponzi scheme and the Half Moon Bay acquisition.

"Both of these resolutions reflect a lack of appreciation of our judicial process, which clearly is not subject to government directives and the serious financial

instability for the OECS region, which was posed by the run on the Bank of Antigua which necessitated immediate intervention by the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank," Spencer said.

(More in today's Daily OBSERVER)

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1. *sio*
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During the preliminary planning stage, all of this should have been worked out. I understand that with the turmoil surrounding the Stanford Companies it would have been a bit more protracted and difficult, but that is how government agencies are supposed to function.

On the other hand, who on Antigua was so smart to sell 25.59 acres of land surrounding a strategic asset like an airport to a private entity. With the advent of larger planes and the need for longer runways and larger arrivals/departure facilities, it seems illogical to sell land surrounding an airport, especially at the cheap price of USD \$17,541 an acre. This was really dumb.

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2. *Justice for all*
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So they have already started to build on land that they do not own? They have no money to pay government workers but they are going to "buy" back land at the airport? Where is the money coming from? They want "a reasonable sale price" for prime land? Surely they should be expected to pay the going rate for this prime piece of land, let's not forget that the Antigua Government already owe Stanford's companies US\$ millions that they "borrowed" from him and have not paid back, and they still owe US\$ millions for their compulsory takeover of BOA. Let them settle their existing debts before they start running up any more and let them pay a decent price for the land they want. We all know they will make promises of payment but getting them to actually pay will NEVER happen.

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