



NEWSLETTER

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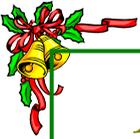
*The lighted fountain in the centre of the
Country Pond*

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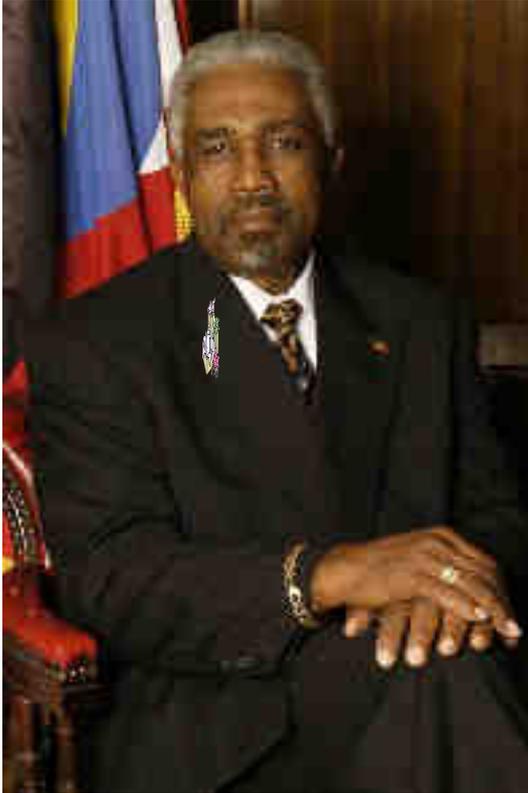
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Digital Photographs by Maurice F. Merchant





*A Message from His Excellency Dr. Carl B. Roberts,
High Commissioner to the Court of St James's*



The historic budget presented on the 30th November by the Minister of Finance and the Economy was the first to be presented to Parliament and passed before the effective date of 1st January. It demonstrated the Government's determination to restructure its expenditure and sources of income to improve the "fiscal and economic situation in Antigua and Barbuda".

We are therefore happy that with the start of a new year at hand, the signs of a rebirth of our blessed country will take place and bring to the fore the warmth and hospitality of our people. May the expressions of goodwill lift our spirits and rejuvenate us all for the tasks ahead.

It is a season of joy and of peace when our thoughts turn to family and friends whether they are near or far. For a new Government, the focus has been on restoring the image of Antigua and Barbuda and strengthening the unity among all citizens in the State.

I therefore take this opportunity to wish all of our readers A Blessed Christmas and a Happy New Year.

H E Dr Carl B Roberts

The visit by the Prime Minister to China and the improvements in the relationship between the Government and one of the State's significant investor, R. Allen Stanford, have been some early initiatives undertaken by the Government to address the state of the economy and the island's large debt of XCD \$3 billion.





Prime Minister Spencer and General Cao signing the military aid agreement at the August 1st Building in Beijing, China

Antigua and Barbuda receives 2 Million RMB for Military Aid

On the 18th November the Government of the People's Republic of China gave the government of Antigua and Barbuda 2 Million RMB (US \$241, 496.31) in gratis military aid.

A signing ceremony took place at the August 1st Building in Beijing China between Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer and the Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission of China Cao Gangchuan.

During discussions with Prime Minister Spencer, General Cao Gangchuan, who is a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) stated that China is willing to further strengthen relations between the armies of China and Antigua and Barbuda. He remarked, "In order to strengthen the ties between our countries I urge further exchanges. These include more Antigua and Barbuda military exchanges and we will accept Antiguan and Barbudan military students to study in our military schools here. The People's Liberation Army PLA is willing to help develop the forces in

Antigua and Barbuda and we will always continue to provide aid to your forces."

Prime Minister Spencer thanked the Chinese Military for their assistance and pledged his government's support in promoting the One China Principle and promoting peace which he considers right, noble and honourable. "I fully support the principle held by the People's Republic of China that all nation's can co-exist peacefully and harmoniously. I am indeed looking forward to our continued cooperation and understanding especially in military and security issues," Prime Minister Spencer remarked.

The Prime Minister said that the Chinese Government's philosophy of promoting peace around the world by pursuing a policy that all people's and nations are entitled to decision making and discussion on any affair is admirable. "I am particularly pleased with the efforts of China on the Haiti Issue of accepting that the problems of the Caribbean island can be resolved through dialogue and not through force. Antigua and Barbuda will certainly rely on China as a member of the United Nations Security Council to continue playing a meaningful role in resolving the problems of Haiti," said the Prime Minister.

"China believes that rather than countries pursuing their own interest at the peril of others, cooperation and understanding is crucial in resolving any conflict which may arise from differences which may occur from time to time," outlined General Cao who is also the Minister of National Defence and Director of the PLA General Armament Department.

We should join hands and help each other," added the General.

The agreement will allow for the upgrade of the facilities at the Antigua and Barbuda Defence Force ABDF in the form of computers and electrical power generation among other things.

Prime Minister secures additional street lighting for major highway

Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer signed an agreement with the Government of the People's Republic of China to provide aid for the erection of additional street lights from the V.C. Bird International Airport to the round-about at the Antigua Recreation Grounds.

The Prime Minister said that the aid, which is a part of a 5 Million RMB (US \$603, 740.78) package, will be used to provide 1500 street lights to enhance one of the most important highways in Antigua. "The Chinese government has seen the importance of the project and has graciously agreed to provide the assistance. We thank the government of China wholeheartedly for the assistance and pledge to develop our good relations," outlined the Prime Minister. The aid package will also provide funding for the construction of hurricane shelters and the provision of sporting goods to develop the volleyball, tennis, golf, athletics, netball, weightlifting, basketball and football programmes in the schools.

The Chinese Government over the years has provided Antigua and Barbuda with a total amount of 210 million RMB (US \$25,357,112.67) in economic assistance under which the Chinese have built schools, roads, bridge, drainage ditch, exhibition centre and other projects for the Antiguan and Barbudan people.



Ministers take 10% salary cut as Government implements austerity measures

Government Ministers, Ministers of State and Parliamentary Secretaries in the United Progressive Party Administration will take a 10% pay cut as government implements austerity measures to re-energize the country's economy.

Finance and the Economy Minister Dr. Errol Cort made the announcement on 30th November during the presentation of the 2005 "People's Budget – Foundation for a Fresh Start" in Parliament. Dr. Cort said that the 10% cut, which will become effective from January 1 2005, will be an added contribution by the top government officials to a Stabilization Fund which will be financed mainly by the introduction of Personal Income Tax.

"This means that when personal income tax becomes operative on the 1st of April, 2005, our Honourable Prime Minister, my colleague Ministers, Ministers of State and Parliamentary Secretaries, and the Minister of Finance and the Economy, will be taking home a lower portion of our salaries than will other income earners in our tax brackets in Antigua and Barbuda," Dr. Cort outlined.

The Finance Minister also noted that other officials, including Senators and Board Members appointed by the administration, will, more than likely, voluntarily take a similar cut in salaries and fees.

He also challenged the members of the Opposition to do likewise. "I am confident that Honourable Members opposite need no urging to join the United Progressive Party in this symbolic sharing of the burden of adjustment at this time," Dr. Cort said.

R. Allen Stanford fulfils first commitment in Alliance for Development through Education and Empowerment with Government

On 1st December, R. Allen Stanford handed over to Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer a cheque for EC\$1 million towards the completion of the construction of the National Library.

On 30th November, Finance and the Economy Minister, Dr. Errol Cort, announced that Prime Minister Spencer had negotiated an arrangement with Mr. Stanford with the prime fundamental being development through education and empowerment. The arrangement included the donation towards the Library Fund.

During the presentation, it was also announced that further funds which will be raised for the completion of the library in six months will be matched by R. Allen Stanford.

"Not only are you a great Prime Minister you are a great negotiator Mr. Prime Minister. We have just toured the site and I have committed myself that over the next two weeks the monies that the Library Board can raise I will match. I understand that there is about three million dollars needed to complete the library and the Prime Minister and I agree that a year is too long to complete the project, so the additional funds will reduce the time by six months," announced Mr. Stanford.

Mr. Stanford also committed technical assistance to the completion of the project.

Prime Minister Spencer commended Mr. Stanford for his contribution and the gesture of matching the funds that will be raised during the special appeal. He said that other business entities should follow Mr. Stanford's lead and make a contribution.

"I urge every Antiguan and Barbudan to contribute to this fund to create a national institution for the education of our people. Whatever you



Prime Minister Spencer accepting the \$1 million cheque from Mr Stanford



can contribute make sure you make a donation which will be matched by Mr. Stanford. We are seeking to do what is right to ensure that we have a library in six months time," outlined Prime Minister Spencer.

The Library is being constructed by the Ministry of Public Works.



PM Spencer addresses the Nation on budgetary matters

Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer addressed the nation on 2nd December on matters addressed in the 2005 Budget Presentation.

On 30th November, Finance and Economy Minister Dr. Errol Cort presented a \$609 million dollar Budget which represents a reduction of \$17 million from 2003. The country's recurrent expenditure is estimated at \$523 million with a deficit of \$86 million.

The Budget package included a number of belt-tightening measures designed to help the government repair the economic woes left by the Antigua Labour Party Administration. The measures include a reduction of the public sector through voluntary separation and retirement, the introduction of Personal Income Tax, a retail tax and an increase in property tax. The removal of a number of tax measures such as the customs service tax and a number of other "nuisance taxes" also formed part of the budget.

Another major component of the budget was the establishment of an alliance for development through education and empowerment with Texan

billionaire R. Allen Stanford. The alliance includes the donation of \$1 million EC dollars to the Library Construction Fund, the establishment of a \$10 million Fund for the empowerment of new entrepreneurs, the construction of a \$25 million higher education complex, the transforming of the Stanford Development Company into a professional management services company outsourcing 70% of its construction projects and the acquisition of Guiana Island for the construction of a \$3 billion dollar upscale resort.

In his address the Prime Minister said, "The Cabinet's recommendation that the government should proceed with the economic opportunities that would result from alliance with the Stanford Group was an economic decision.

I was in China when the matter came before the Cabinet.

I endorsed the Cabinet position, and I acted promptly in negotiating the numerous agreements of the members of Cabinet who were present at the meeting.

I have taken the time to listen to the radio debate on the Alliance for Development through Education and Empowerment that the Government has struck with the Stanford Group.

Some of the slander, the defamation, of decent, upright people on the radio talk shows, has been shocking and deplorable. It is unfair and it is wicked. The imputation against the Minister of Finance that was permitted, if not encouraged by the radio station is reprehensible.

The insinuation that there was misinformation of the reporting of government debt to the Stanford Group is equally offensive. A proper reading would have confirmed that IMF reported external debt due to the Stanford Group.

It is not my intention to get into legal intricacies that surround the Dato Tan deal with the previous administration. I would

observe however, that the range and scope of the entitlement to which the previous government assented in the Asian Village Agreement are repugnant to any concept of sovereignty.

Those entitlements will form no part of the eventual agreement with the Stanford Group and development of the lands that were ceded to Dato Tan Kay Hock by the previous administration.

I am confident that any development of those lands by the Stanford Group will be of the character and the standard they have established in this country.

The government has given approval for the Stanford Group's development of the land-package in the north of Antigua.

The land does not belong to the state. Dato Tan Kay Hock's interests hold the title to the land. The status is that the bulk of the money due on the sale of the land to those interests remains unpaid. The Government has filed court action to recover the land on separate bases. We have no control over how long that process will take; nor can we control its outcome.

Acquisition of the land from Asian Villages is an option open to the government. We have the obligation to establish the circumstances in which the land was acquired for the sole purpose of passing it to Dato Tan.

Those options will be explored. One option we do not have the liberty to explore is to turn away a legitimate investor with a plan that will generate some 2000 jobs in this country."

(For the full text of the Budget Speech 2005 and the the Prime Minister's Address to the Nation, please visit our website at www.antigua-barbuda.com, under Latest News)



PM Spencer tells Shanghai and Hong Kong businessmen of investment opportunities in Antigua and Barbuda

During his recent visit to the People's Republic of China, Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer informed businessmen of Hong Kong and Shanghai of the many investment opportunities that are available in Antigua and Barbuda.

Speaking at a breakfast meeting with businessmen, the Prime Minister said that Antigua and Barbuda offers a business-friendly regulatory climate that is conducive to profitability. He noted that his government offers meaningful investments to investors, without restrictions on the repatriation of profits for foreign investors.

"We offer good communications and infrastructure and an educated, skilled and highly adaptable work force. We offer to foreign personnel involved with foreign investment projects ready access. We have introduced integrity legislation intended to eliminate corruption from the approvals processes for investment projects," outlined the Prime Minister.

He noted that his government has completed the preliminary work for the establishment of The Antigua and Barbuda Investment Authority.

"The Antigua and Barbuda Investment Authority will be a one-stop regulatory and facilitation agency that will coordinate and expedite the approvals process for investors," he said.

The Antigua and Barbuda leader also outlined a number of specific investment options that his Government is offering. "We have an established and reputable banking sector, with strong regulatory measures to protect its integrity. We are reorganizing our



Prime Minister Spencer addressing the Chinese Businessmen

international financial services environment," he outlined.

He said that it is geared to significant expansion of the range of financial products available to operators in the sector and pointed out that Antigua and Barbuda and the United States share the same time zone which will facilitate doing business in both countries at the same time.

"I am inviting proposals for the establishment of a major container trans-shipment port in Antigua. Our geographic location is ideal for such a facility. Our proposed container trans-shipment port can be a convenient, cost effective option for distributing cargo to surrounding Caribbean countries, and to Central and South America," Prime Minister Spencer noted.

He also said that his government would welcome Chinese involvement in related Free Zone projects that could be a manufacturing park and a wholesale shopping centre for the Caribbean region.

"I also invite investment proposals for the development of a premium Sea Island cotton industry in partnership with the

Government of Antigua and Barbuda. This will include linkages with textile and garment manufacturing and marketing," he noted.

Prime Minister Spencer told the Chinese business leaders that he would be delighted to follow up on the opportunities outlined. He stated that the country's national Budget for 2005 will also offer special incentives for investment in agricultural and seafood projects.

"We will also offer special incentives to investors in technology operations. Significant incentives will be targeted to manufacturing and assembly of electronic products, including communications hardware," said Prime Minister Spencer.

Investment opportunities in the Caribbean Theme Park and resort development were also pointed out by the Prime Minister outlining that his government is intent on making Antigua and Barbuda the best brand in Caribbean tourism.



Government receives Debt Forgiveness from DEVCON

On the 3rd December the Government began the process of reducing the country's debt with the signing of agreements allowing the government and people to enjoy a debt reduction from US\$29.4 million to US\$11.5 million owed to DEVCON.

The long standing debt to DEVCON of US\$29.4 million was for the dredging of the harbour in 1987 which included the first expansion of the Deep Water Harbour and the Deep Water Harbour pier construction.

The agreements signed between Finance and Economy Minister, Dr. Errol Cort and Director of the Antigua Masonry Product (AMP) and Executive Vice President of DEVCON Mr. Richard Hornsby, were the result of extensive negotiations between the Government of Antigua and Barbuda and the AMP and DEVCON principals. The Antigua and Barbuda Investment (ABI) Bank Limited has facilitated the full payment of the balance on the loan of US\$11.5 million which will be financed through the floating of bonds to cover the new amount at a significantly lower interest rate on the principal of the loan.



Dr Errol Cort and Richard Hornsby signing the agreement

"In order to pay off the loan we have floated a US dollar bond with the kind assistance of ABI Bank Limited. This represents the beginning of what promises to be a fruitful partnership between the Government of Antigua and Barbuda and the ABI Bank Ltd. in a joint effort to improve Antigua and Barbuda's debt situation and also to strengthen investor confidence in our country. The government and the Ministry of Finance and the Economy express our gratitude to them for assisting us in a time of great need," noted Dr. Cort.

DEVCON have with Antigua and Barbuda has reached a new level and believes that now is the right time to assist in the restructuring of the economy as his company is impressed with the new approach of the government. He indicated that the provision of this debt relief to the Government of Antigua and Barbuda is intended to facilitate the Government and people's efforts to improve the fiscal and economic situation in Antigua and Barbuda.

He said that the arrangements with ABI Bank Limited and DEVCON signifies that there is a "fresh wind of change" in respect of Antigua and Barbuda and it boosts the confidence level that the region and the international community is displaying in respect of the government.

Executive Vice President of DEVCON Mr. Richard Hornsby said that the forty-year relationship that Antigua Masonry Products and

ABI Bank Limited, as announced in Budget 2005, will also be assisting the government in raising EC\$151 million by placing Treasury Bills and Bonds on the platform of the Eastern Caribbean Stock Exchange (ECSE). This will give government access to regional platforms and a wider capital base and provides investors with an opportunity to invest in higher yielding securities. The listing also provides transparency for investors.

Manager of ABI Bank Limited, Mr. Henley Richardson, said that through prudent fiscal management the



In attendance - left - Rasona Davis and David Matthias of the Ministry of Finance and right - Richard Hornsby of DEVCON and Henly Richardson, Manager of ABI Bank



government could restructure some of its existing debts as well as raise new capital that will assist with the development plan for the 2005 fiscal year. He noted that ABI Bank Limited is happy to assist the government in this endeavour.

Dr. Cort in commending the efforts of ABI Bank Limited and DEVCON made an appeal to government creditors to work with the new administration as it grapples with the near \$3 billion national debt issue.



Michael Freeland , Trade Affairs Officer, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade

Trade Facilitation: Duties Bound for the Port (Part 2)

**By Michael Freeland
Trade Affairs Officer
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade**

In the last issue, there was mention that the customs and exercise division had already begun to implement measures to ease the flow of trade. Consumers are to be aware of the Simplified Declaration Form (SDF) used for the imports of personal and household effects, used professional apparatus and non-commercial items. Clearance of goods should optimistically be effortless, because of the introduction of an Automated System for Customs Data, or ASYCUDA which generates a number of printouts showing an assessment notice, a receipt and a release order in a few minutes.

One forgetful and important subject of the last commentary was that of an appellate body. Such a body shows transparency and offers the customers some level of satisfaction for due recourse. Individuals must have some legal or lawful justification to resolve a dispute or an inappropriate deed.

It is known that the Customs and the Port Authority work closely together.

Thus, customs cannot be improved in an effort to promote free trade, while the Port itself is not enhanced. The question may arise as to the Port being managed by a private firm versus by the government whereby in the former case greater efficiency would be prevalent. This can only prove true if the correct and proper measures are taken to help ease the flow of goods.

Antigua and Barbuda has always held a strong position that being in a strategically geographical spot, it sees itself providing a port hub between the North and the South, especially in the FTAA. For this notion to be accurate, security is just one of the many important factors that is a vital concern.

About two (2) months ago, Antigua and Barbuda had to comply and meet a deadline on July 1 with the International Maritime Organization (IMO) security measures. The changes to the body established new international standards relating to the acceptable security levels at ports, which serve the international maritime transport. Ports which handles ships over 500 gross tones on international passages, had to be equipped at minimum with perimeter fencing, lights, closed circuit monitoring, controlled entry, physical patrol, adequately trained personnel and a response system. The ports which handled less volume of cargo only required lighting, close circuit monitoring and other passive methods. Ports in this twin island state are

placed in both categories. However, the question may loom as to whether these basic requirements can lead to an easier flow of goods.

There are high returns from an efficient security system. The returns are evident in the seizure of drugs, guns and ammunition and goods valued at million of dollars. Security systems have helped to identify several uncustomed goods that would normally have passed through the system. Another security system is the Vehicles and Cargo Inspection System (VACIS). VACIS is in effect

a mobile truck, which is used to scan containers and then create an x-ray image of the contents. This system is in operation at the ports in Jamaica. In addition, there is also a VACIS pallet system, which is a fixed unit in the warehouse, which is used for scanning barrels and boxes.

To be considered as an efficient Port, the turnaround time is very important. What need to be keenly looked at are the latest technological devices and the capacity to increase the size of the Port. Installing new ship to shore gantries to move at twice the speed as the originals, and have larger storage areas to accommodate increased traffic is ideal. The ability to handle more than 1,200 vessels and more than 1 million containers (TEUs) breathes a more competitive stance. With such a proposition, the implementation of a global positioning system for aide in the accurate parking and identification of containers should be incorporated. A port cannot be operational unless there is a 99% and higher reliability on power supply.

Many consumers would appreciate the fact that they can clear their goods before arrival at the Port. An electronic commerce (e-commerce) system which involves a value-adding IT-business solution and superior customer service is fundamental



towards efficiency and accountability. Inefficient payment and credit arrangements remain an obstacle to trade, often resulting in long delays for the payment of goods. Payment should be as easy as a click of a button rather than being subjected to waiting 45 minutes at the one cashier and/or additionally paying rent if the goods have arrived over 5 days. Therefore, rules that recommend faster payment methods and faster bank handling of transactions should be created. Rules providing greater flexibility on payment methods where foreign controls persist also need addressing.

The crucial ingredient to the suggestions mentioned above is personnel. No new advanced method can be integrated without proper training of new and existing employees. A comprehensive programme must be developed relevant to people skills and personal expertise. Training of employees should have a special emphasis on multi-skilling. Extensive mechanical and electrical surveys followed by a systematic repair and maintenance programme to improve the reliability of all container-handling equipment are necessary for improvement.

However, employees of the Port must appreciate their work to ensure that the plans put in place are executed in a beneficial manner. Hence, the introduction of a productivity scheme, which could take on the form of rewarding operations and engineering employees when set levels of performance on vessel output and truck turnaround times have been achieved, could be an example. A similar approach could also be taken into account for supervisors and other areas of the Port staff.

Trade facilitation can only be achieved if obstacles are removed. The critical aspect of such lies heavily on measures to ensure fewer complications and loss of revenue. In this article, as well as the previous, some of Jamaica's programmes have been mentioned.

Reason being that this island is the closest within the region that is already on the path of readiness towards the free movement of goods. Also, and very noteworthy, its Port is ranked 63 among all the ports (some 250 ports) trading in the world.

In another issue, a discussion on tariff elimination to accommodate Trade Facilitation will be the viewpoint. It has been suggested that a country can reap benefits from reduced trade transaction costs by easing border procedures. However, there is a grave concern that to spend scarce resources on developing infrastructure to facilitate trade is not greater than meeting the basic social needs of the people.

PM Spencer meets Commonwealth Secretary General

On the 6th December Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer and Commonwealth Secretary General, Donald McKinnon, held wide ranging discussions on

the Commonwealth's assistance to Antigua and Barbuda.

The main focus of the meeting was the Commonwealth's work in connection with relations between Antigua and its sister island Barbuda. Prime Minister Spencer told the Commonwealth Secretary General that the people of Barbuda have a new attitude towards the new government and the issue now is how to cooperate in moving forward. He said that secession is no longer an issue. The review report of the Commonwealth Review Team on the Antigua/Barbuda relationship conducted in September this year is due out shortly.

Another major issue discussed during the meeting was Antigua and Barbuda's indebtedness to the Commonwealth Secretariat and a number of its institutions. The government presently owes the Commonwealth Foundation over £109,000 while the Commonwealth Secretariat is owed over £185,000.



Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer with Commonwealth Secretary-General Donald McKinnon



For every dollar Antigua and Barbuda pays to the Commonwealth it gets \$10 in return. The organisation has assisted the country in debt management, public sector reform, legislative drafting, reform of the financial services sector and skills training for over 81 Antiguan and Barbudans over the past five years.

Prime Minister Spencer outlined that his government is willing to commit to the new regulations of contributing to the Commonwealth Secretariat and will negotiate the arrears left by the previous administration. As a result of Antigua and Barbuda's indebtedness to the organisation, the country has seen a reduction of benefits and will be reclassified as a "special member" if the arrears are not covered. If Antigua and Barbuda is classified as a special member it will have implications for its participation in the next Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting next year.

East Bus Station to be transformed

The East Bus Station will soon be transformed into a modern bus terminal and car park facility.

Minister of Public Works and Deputy Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, Wilmoth Daniel, made the announcement during his presentation on the 2005 Budget in the House of Representatives.

The Minister noted that the multi-storey car park facility, which will house at least 300 cars, will be undertaken by a Trinidad and Tobago consortium which will fund the project and within 15 years the government will have ownership of the property.

"The company is well known to the government and we are confident that some 200 jobs will be created during the construction phase of the project. They

have presented their proposals to the Cabinet and will be conducting further studies shortly," Minister Daniel outlined.

The facility will also feature commercial space for rent, a mini-mart, and areas for vendors. The bus terminal will be a covered facility, while the adjacent park will be remodelled to include a playground with uncovered seating.

During his presentation the Minister also announced that the government will be constructing a new headquarters for the Antigua Public Utilities Authority (APUA). The government pays \$80,000 per month in rent for the present facility in Cassada Gardens. In addition, Minister Daniel stated that a headquarters for the Antigua and Barbuda Transport Board will be constructed and a sewage treatment system will be introduced in the city of St. John's.

Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Light-Up transformed Country Pond

On the evening of 16th December, Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer, Deputy Prime Minister Wilmoth Daniel and Engineer Gordon "Sunshine" Chambers flicked the switch turning on the lights and water fountain in the transformed historical Country Pond in St. John's.

The Country Pond, formerly known as Congo Pond, is believed to have been fashioned off ponds in Burundi, Africa and built during the latter days of slavery/early post emancipation period by Congolese with special skills. The Country Pond which is fed by an East Pond was said to be the main source of water supply for the surrounding villages during that period.

The historical site has been transformed into a tourist attraction with the addition of lights reflecting on the huge body of water, a fifteen-spray fountain located in its centre and a back drop of a mural painted by a Haitian resident depicting pre and post colonial living in Antigua and Barbuda.

The project, which was the brainchild of the Deputy Prime Minister Wilmoth Daniel, was funded by contributions from members of the public and business community in the country. "This project bridges the political divide in this country as contributions were received from staunch supporters of the Opposition Labour Party and the government. We believe that the time has come to transform our country into a place where visitors and locals alike can be proud of," remarked the Deputy Prime Minister speaking to a throng of people gathered to witness the event.

Tourism Minister Harold Lovell said that he is delighted that the Deputy Prime Minister came up with the idea to beautify the area as it falls within his Ministry's thrust to re-brand Antigua and Barbuda providing additional attractions and activities for visitors to the nation's shores.

Prime Minister Spencer who also spoke at the function noted that his government is committed to changing Antigua and Barbuda into a better place and having the lighting ceremony before the Christmas Season is a special gift to the people from his Government.

The government has also engaged the services of the local electrical company APUA to construct water pumps in the area to assist the young men who utilise the pond to carry out the business of washing vehicles.





Tourism season off to a grand start

(Excerpted from the Antigua Sun)

On the 2nd December, the 2004-2005 tourism season began in a high gear when four ships carrying 10,360 passengers pulled alongside Heritage Quay dock for a warm Antiguan welcome from Tourism Minister Harold Lovell.

Accompanying Minister Lovell were Minister of State in the Ministry of Tourism, Hilson "Brother B" Baptiste, Director of Tourism Shirlene Nibbs and President of the Antigua and Barbuda Cruise and Tourism Association Nathan Dundas.

In welcoming the visitors to Antigua, Lovell said, "We expect an increasing number of visitors by sea and air. This means therefore that all Antiguan and Barbudans can look forward to earning the income that they so richly deserve.

The Minister emphasised the need for excellent delivery on service to visitors as this will ensure that Antigua maintains its competitive edge in the tourism industry. Heritage Quay was alive with activities and entertainment as the Tourism Department presented a full cultural package featuring poetry by Sylvanus Barnes, and a musical treat by Calypso Joe, Dell Richardson, and the National Youth.

The Antigua Dance Academy, Mr. Moves, Sunny Dale dancers also entertained the tourists while a fashion show was put on by Vanda Neile.

The Greenbay Iron Band brought the curtains down on the programme.

Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer and Vice President of the People's Republic of China, Zeng Quinhong. Seated on the Prime Minister's right is the Minister of State, Dr Quinn-Leandro

Antigua and Barbuda listed as a destination for Chinese tourists

On Prime Minister Spencer's recent visit to China, Vice-President of the Peoples Republic of China, Zeng Quinhong announced that Antigua and Barbuda is listed as a destination for Chinese tourists.

The announcement was made during talks between Prime Minister Spencer and the Vice President at the Great Hall of the People. Both governments also pledged to continue to develop economic, trade and cultural cooperation.

During the discussions Vice President Zeng outlined that the decision to list Antigua and Barbuda as a tourist destination is designed to bring economic growth to the country and further develop cooperation between both countries. "My government will also make every effort to further expand the economic, trade,

cultural and military friendship that exists between our countries," outlined the high ranking Chinese official.

Prime Minister Spencer said that his government is pleased that Antigua and Barbuda has been listed as a tourist destination as his country is heavily dependent on Tourism for economic development. "I am looking forward to the day when Air China makes its inaugural flight to Antigua and Barbuda packed with Chinese tourists," he noted.

Vice President Zeng noted that President Hu Jintao, who is on a trip to Latin America, attaches great importance to the relationship between Antigua and Barbuda and is looking forward to bringing the bilateral relationship to a new high. He said that his government is pleased to see that the assistance provided have contributed and continues to contribute to the development of the society in Antigua and Barbuda.





(left) bmi in the background of Mrs Florence Cash who is flanked by Sir Michael Bishop, chairman bmi - left and Nigel Dolman, Senior Manager Regions - bmi - right

bmi now flies from Manchester to Antigua

Antigua and Barbuda's Tourism Officers have over the years been asked about the prospect of a direct flight from Manchester to Antigua. We now have such a service and sincerely hope that nationals and non-nationals alike will use what we think is an excellent service.

Mrs Florence Cash from Antigua and Barbuda's Office in London was invited on the inaugural flight; she reports that the service was very good and the reception on arrival in Antigua was well organized - dignitaries from all areas of the tourism industry were on hand to welcome the journalists and special guests.

It was a prestigious occasion for all involved. The Antigua service was hosted by Chairman Sir Michael Bishop. Along with Nigel Turner and Florence Cash from Antigua and Barbuda Tourist Office, he welcomed the first passengers and then departed with a press group to introduce them to the island.

At the end of their visit the press unanimously announced that Antigua was the place to be - "the sun shone all week!".



World Travel Market 2004

Antigua and Barbuda was recognized as a premier destination among the myriad of competing destinations in the Caribbean and the world, and increased its standing among the UK travel trade on the heels of significant growth in the UK visitors in 2004.

With UK visitors increasing by 23% up to September, compared to overall growth in visitor arrivals of 12%, a number of extensive meetings were held with the Minister of Tourism, Harold Lovell, and Antigua and Barbuda's existing partners, tour operators and airlines who indicated their satisfaction with the growth of business over the past year. Plans were extended to work jointly with the destination to continue the growth particularly among high yield sectors of the UK and European market.

World Travel Market 2004 will be remembered as a high point for trade fair participation by Antigua and Barbuda have definitely left its mark among the international media, trade visitors and general public who clamoured for autographs from the cricketing greats - Sir Vivian Richards, Richie Richardson and Curtley Ambrose - and their colleagues Joel Garner and Brian Lara congregating around the pulsating rhythms of Rawdon Edwards and Lacu Samuel on the lively stand representing the best of Antigua and Barbuda.



English Harbour Rum

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