

News Items and Public Crime Summary for Week Ending February 27, 2010

Antilles – Dutch Government Collapses: Dismantling Date 10-10-10 in Jeopardy

A last-ditch effort to keep Dutch troops in Afghanistan brought down the government in the Netherlands early Saturday, immediately raising fears in the Netherlands Antilles concerning the dismantling process and the 10-10-10 target date.

The collapse of the Dutch government comes as the political parties in the Netherlands Antilles just agreed upon a second term of De Jongh-Elhage administration. The main focus for De Jongh-Elhage II is the continuation of the dismantling process and the formation of the new Kingdom entities. The PM and other politicians hope that the cabinet crisis in the Netherlands does not negatively influence the state of affairs in the overseas part of the Kingdom and that the current dismantling process is not in jeopardy, but Dutch MPs from several political parties are of a different opinion.

The current state of affairs in the Netherlands will definitely impact the political situation in Netherlands Antilles and Aruba, various Dutch MPs said. It is expected that within two weeks, Dutch parliament will draft a list of specific issues that it declares controversial and on which it will not take action until a new government is formed after the elections. Strictly speaking, it is not prohibited to take action on these issues, but Dutch parliament prefers to shelve them and leave decisions to the next government. The list is bound to include the decision making process on the future of the Netherlands Antilles. Dutch parliamentary elections could impact the Netherlands Antilles Islands' decision to hold new Kingdom entities elections in June. Also, the financial debt relief process was reportedly put on hold temporarily.

Aruban PM Mike Eman said that he respects the Dutch decision and that he is prepared to work with any Dutch government. (Various media)

Antilles – Coalition Agreement Signed; New Parliament Inauguration on March 26.

'Informateur' Atacho submitted his final report to Governor Goedgedrag, yesterday. The PAR, National Alliance, UPB, PNP, DP-St. Eustatius and WIPM Saba have signed a coalition agreement supported by all islands of the Netherlands Antilles and 14 of 22 parliamentary seats.

It is expected that the Governor will ask PM Emily de Jongh-Elhage to head the new government. She has to work on formalizing the details, including proposing new cabinet members. Also, the political parties agreed upon the following division of portfolios:

PAR (Curacao) - Prime-minister, Minister of Finance, Minister of Justice, Minister of Education + Public Health, Minister-Plenipotentiary, President Parliament.

National Alliance (St. Maarten) - Minister of Constitutional Affairs + Minister Traffic & Communications.

UPB (Bonaire) - Minister Labor & Economic Affairs + State Secretary (Internal Affairs).

PNP (Curacao) - Secretary State Justice + VP Parliament

DP (Statia) - Secretary State Justice (Prison affairs)

WIPM (Saba) - Secretary State Constitutional Affairs (BES affairs) (Various media)

Kingdom – U.S. Ambassador Hartog-Levin Meets With Antilles Minister Plenipotentiary Van Der Plank

U.S. Ambassador to the Netherlands, Fay Hartog Levin had an introductory meeting with Netherlands Antilles Minister Plenipotentiary Marcel van der Plank in The Hague. Van Der Plank informed the Ambassador about the new political structure within the Kingdom. (Amigoe)

Aruba - Natalee Holloway Confession Branded 'Fantasy'

Joran van der Sloot, suspect in the disappearance of U.S. citizen Natalee Holloway has confessed to disposing of her body in a swamp on Aruba, according to a Dutch tabloid newspaper and Aruba's chief prosecutor. Van Der Sloot made the statement in a sit-down interview with a television journalist, De Telegraaf reported Tuesday. However, Aruba's chief prosecutor Peter Blanken told NBC News that the suspect's story was "very unbelievable." Holloway was last seen in May 2005 and her body has never been recovered.

Authorities in Aruba have reportedly reopened the investigation after they found out about the alleged confession, which is believed to have been recorded in August, last year. "The locations, names and times he gave just did not make sense," Blanken told NBC News. De Telegraaf quoted Blanken as saying that Van Der Sloot's statement was "held together by lies and fantasy." Van der Sloot claimed that Holloway had died accidentally and insisted that he did not kill her, Blanken said.

In 2008, the suspect was secretly taped saying that Holloway had died after suffering a seizure on a beach and that he had dumped her body in the sea.

Van der Sloot later said he had been lying in a bid to impress the man he was talking to. He also told a U.S. journalist that he sold Holloway to a man on a boat for \$10,000. However, he subsequently insisted he had also made up that story. (Various media)

St. Maarten – Tourism Bureau to Participate in New York Travel Show

The St. Maarten Tourism Bureau announced their participation in the seventh annual New York Times Travel Show, to be held Feb. 26 to 28, 2010, in New York City. The Travel Show will feature nearly 500 exhibitors representing more than 150 countries. The strategic focus of the event will be to encourage consumers to book vacations for a wide variety of trips, taking advantage of the on-site special offers available only during the Travel Show. For more information, visit <http://www.nytimes.com/travelshow>. (Daily Herald)

Curacao – MP Norbert George Breaks With Party, But Keeps Seat

Curacao Island Parliament Democratic Party (DP) leader Norbert George did not survive a no-confidence vote by his political party management, last week. George's position was under scrutiny after the DP failed to garner a seat in the Jan. 22, Netherlands Antilles parliamentary elections. George announced his DP resignation, but decided to keep his seat in Island Parliament, thus continuing as an independent faction. He is of the opinion that the electorate has voted for him personally in 2007, and not for his political party. Former PAR party Justice Minister and Minister Plenipotentiary in

Washington, Norberto Ribeiro is reportedly one of the candidates to succeed him. (Various media)

St. Maarten – Independent Commissioner Heyliger Starts New Political Party

St. Maarten independent Island Commissioner Theo Heyliger broke with the Democratic Party (DP) in September 2009. He did not participate in the January 22, Netherlands Antilles Parliamentary elections, but announced yesterday he has founded the new political United People's (UP) party. It is expected that Heyliger will draw votes from the DP party and that he will join forces with Gracita Arindell of the PPA party. He did not reveal a party program. (Daily Herald)

Curacao – Escaped Prisoner and Most Wanted List Fugitive Caught

Escaped prisoner Jair Leuteria and long-time fugitive Chavel 'Diablo' Waterfort were caught by police in the Juan Hato neighborhood, on Sunday. Leuteria is one of five prisoners who escaped from the Bon Futuro prison in March last year. (Various media)

Antilles – Positive Interim TIP Assessment Review by U.S. Government

Netherlands Antilles Justice Minister Magali Jacoba reacted pleased by the U.S. Government Trafficking in Persons (TIP) interim assessment report. "The Netherlands Antilles are on the right track," she said. In the 2009 TIP report the Netherlands Antilles were ranked Tier II watch list.

According to a U.S. Government interim assessment report the Government of the Netherlands Antilles made some progress in combating trafficking in persons since the release of the June 2009 TIP Report. The government has not yet passed pending legislation criminalizing trafficking, but, in an initial positive step, the Minister of Justice separated the human trafficking article from the broader code of criminal law in order to facilitate its expeditious passage.

The anti-trafficking coordinator of the Netherlands Antilles formally trained officials, including health officials working with women in the Curacao government-regulated brothels, on identifying trafficking and providing victim assistance. Netherlands Antilles officials also worked with Dutch authorities to establish new procedures giving foreign women in this brothel control of all of their travel documents. The anti-trafficking coordinator continued to initiate anti-trafficking public awareness activities, including dissemination of anti-trafficking information via social media. (Various media)

Kingdom – Shift in Portfolios; Hirsch Ballin Takes Over Kingdom Relations

Dutch Justice Minister Hirsch Ballin will, after the collapse of the Dutch government, additionally take on the management of the Ministry of Home Affairs and Kingdom Relations. PVDA party Minister Guusje Ter Horst resigned from her position after the PVDA discontinued its coalition support. (Various media)

Antilles – Atacho Named ‘Formateur’ in Cabinet Formation Process

Netherlands Antilles Governor Frits Goedgedrag has appointed Pedro Atacho as his envoy to form a new Netherlands Antilles cabinet, yesterday.

„Formateur“ Atacho will start his round of meetings to find candidate Ministers and State Secretaries soon. Atacho has to submit his final report to the Governor on March 16.

(Various media)

St. Maarten – Reward for Information About Missing Amcit Brous

The family of missing U.S. citizen Robert Brous has offered a US \$5,000 reward to anyone who can find their son, dead or alive, in a renewed push to resolve the case that has so far failed to turn up any sign of Brous or the blue BMW car that he was driving while on a short St. Maarten vacation. The 42-year old Los Angeles-based interior designer was staying at La Samanna Hotel and went missing on January 22. French-side prosecutor Jacques Louvier said Tuesday evening there had been no progress in the investigation so far, at least from the French side. (Daily Herald)

Curacao - Debt pay-off to continue

The reorganization of the Antillean national debt will continue and is not up for discussion, said Dutch State Secretary of Kingdom Relations Ank Bijleveld-Schouten yesterday. The caretaker status of the Balkenende IV Cabinet does not change anything about the agreement between the Netherlands, the Netherlands Antilles and the Island Territories to pay off debts, she said. The debt reorganization was established through a General Kingdom Decree, which also included financial supervision. Part of the Antillean 1.7 billion euro debt has already been transferred to the Bank of the Netherlands Antilles (Daily Herald).

Curacao - Dutch Second Chamber urged to handle constitutional laws

Antillean PM Emily de Jongh-Elhage has sent a letter to the Dutch Parliament’s Antillean Affairs Committee Chairman Willibrord van Beek, urging that the pending legislation to realize the dismantling of the Netherlands Antilles and new constitutional relations in the Kingdom be dealt with, despite the fall of the Balkenende Cabinet. De Jongh-Elhage believes that a delay in the legislation trajectory to new constitutional relations could have unforeseen and far-reaching consequences, and that the process can and should be completed as planned. She pointed out that the process of constitutional reform within the Dutch Kingdom is at an advanced stage and that irreversible steps have been taken, expectations created among the population, and commitments made by politicians. A delay will undermine the necessary stability and public confidence in good governance, and create economic uncertainty as a consequence of investors taking a wait-and-see attitude (Antilliaans Dagblad, Daily Herald).

Curacao - Justice Minister to propose new Penal Code

Antillean Justice Minister Magali Jacoba has proposed that Parliament approve and adopt the new Penal Code for the Netherlands Antilles that will bring the country in line

with international regulations. President of Parliament Pedro Atacho said that Jacoba would present her proposal to Parliament's Central Committee on March 3. Jacoba's proposal includes modification of the manner and length of punishments. The modified juvenile system, alternative punishment, the treatment of drug addicts, as well as anti-terrorism regulations are also part of the law proposal (Daily Herald, St. Maarten Island Time).

Aruba - Settlement agreement with Valero reached

PM Mike Eman announced that the Government of Aruba (GOA) has reached a settlement agreement with refinery operator Valero, based on the January 20 Memorandum of Understanding. The agreement includes the elimination of the export sales tax for refinery products, which had long been a point of discussion. As part of the agreement, Valero will pay a profits tax of 7 per cent annually, and in case of losses a minimum of ten million dollars instead. Should Valero eventually sell the refinery, this minimum profits tax will be 15 million dollars. Valero also agreed to pay the GOA 210 million dollars to settle the latter's claims. The agreement must still be approved by the Aruba Parliament (Diario Aruba, Antilliaans Dagblad, Extra).

St. Maarten - Former Commissioner Laveist, Prosecutor appeal conviction

Former Island Commissioner Louie Laveist and the Public Prosecutor's Office both have filed appeals with the High Court in The Hague. In 2009, the Court of First Instance had sentenced Laveist to 18 months, nine of which were suspended, with three years' probation, a 5,000 guilder (USD 2,800) fine and a ban from holding office for five years. Following his appeal, the Joint Court of the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba had partially vindicated Laveist on February 11, acquitting him of forgery and fraud, but finding him guilty on two counts of bribery. He was given a suspended prison sentence of six months with three years' probation, payment of a 5,000 guilder (USD 2,800) fine or 55 days in jail, and a ban from civil service for three years. Both the Prosecutor and Laveist's attorney refrained from providing any details concerning the nature of the appeals at the High Court (Daily Herald).

St. Maarten - Customs arrests man with 5 kg of cocaine

Customs officers at the Princess Juliana International Airport arrested a Guyanese man and seized five kilograms of cocaine on February 22 when he arrived on a Caribbean Airlines flight, en route to Jamaica. The drugs were hidden in the false sides of his suitcase. Customs officer Anthony Doran said in a press statement that Guyana-St. Maarten is an unusual route for smugglers (Daily Herald).

Curacao - Lionel Richie to perform at Curaçao North Sea Jazz Festival

International superstar and Grammy winning singer and songwriter Lionel Richie will perform at this year's Curaçao North Sea Jazz Festival. The first edition of the Jazz Festival will take place September 3 and 4, 2010 at the World Trade Center (St. Maarten Island Time, Amigoe, Antilliaans Dagblad).

"The Weekly Press Summary is a compilation of stories running in the Netherlands Antilles and Aruban press that is intended to alert readers about items of interest to them. There is no interpretation or verification of the facts contained therein."