

News Items and Public Crime Summary for Week Ending March 26, 2011

Curacao - PM Schotte visits Trinidad

Prime Minister Gerrit Schotte will visit Trinidad and Tobago this week. He will meet with the Ministers of Energy Affairs and Finances to discuss the possibility of importing Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) into Curaçao as an alternative source of fuel for the Isla refinery as well as local utility company Aqualectra. Schotte said that the price of LNG is one-fifth the current price of petroleum. "It is a clean source of energy and there are large reserves of LNG. Aruba has already indicated that they will switch over to LNG in 2012 for the production of water and electricity," Schotte said. Schotte will be accompanied by the chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Curaçao Refinery Company and the acting director of the Isla refinery. (Amigoe, La Prensa)

Curacao - Students sent home again because of refinery stench

For the second time in one week, students from Maria College were sent home due to the stench from the Isla refinery. "We were confronted with an unpleasant situation after many teachers became unwell and went home. As several pupils became unwell as well, we requested permission from the Minister of Education to close the school around nine o'clock," said director of the Roman Catholic Central School Board (RKCS), Lisette van Lamoen-Garmers on Monday. Students at Kolegio Willem Ellis for elementary education became unwell too so their parents came to pick them up. Two other schools experienced similar problems, but remained open. Last week, the Ancilla Domini School had to close twice, and the MIL High School and Kolegio Willem Ellis once. (Amigoe, La Prensa)

St. Maarten - Plans for new prison complex

Justice Minister Roland Duncan announced that plans are being prepared for the construction of a new prison facility. The new facility will cost an estimated 60-80 million guilders (USD33.7-44.9 million). The Attorney General will also meet with Dutch counterparts to discuss the possibility of renting prison cells in the Netherlands as a temporary solution for the current shortage of cells at the Pointe Blanche Prison. The prison in Curaçao has no cells available and attempts to rent cells in Anguilla were unsuccessful. (Amigoe)

St. Maarten - Inmate escapes from prison

Authorities confirmed on Sunday that police are searching for an inmate who escaped from the Pointe Blanche prison. Allegedly, the inmate escaped by climbing to the roof and then jumping over the fence surrounding the prison grounds, but this could not be confirmed. The inmate was serving time for a number of crimes including robbery and car theft. He had not been convicted yet but was awaiting his trial. (Amigoe, Antilliaans Dagblad)

Curacao - Sovereign People against U.S. Forward Operating Location

Curaçao parliamentarian and Sovereign People (PS) party leader Helmin Wiels told the press that his party is completely against the presence of the United States Forward Operating Location (USFOL) in Curaçao. "The United States wishes to increase the number of people that are stationed here, just like they did in Colombia, as well as increase the number of people who enjoy immunity from criminal prosecution," Wiels said. "These contractors and assassins can commit all kinds of crimes without being held responsible. Human Rights Watch has frequently reported about assassinations and other criminal activities conducted by these people on orders of the U.S." Wiels continued to say that the USFOL profits from the local community by not paying taxes, buying vehicles tax free, and not paying fuel tax. He also claimed that the U.S. has 1,400 "paid assassins" in Colombia, murdering women and small children, and another 19,000 of these assassins in Afghanistan, paid by the U.S. Department of State. According to Wiels, Curaçao is in danger of becoming just like Libya, Afghanistan and other parts of the world if it accepts these American contractors on its territory.

Wiels wondered why Curaçao was chosen for establishing the USFOL. He said that there is also a "base" in Aruba, but that they are not allowed to hold exercises there for fear of a negative impact on tourism. He felt that the USFOL should be moved to Bonaire because that is now Dutch territory (Note: Bonaire, Statia and Saba became special public entities of the Dutch government after the dissolution of the Netherlands Antilles in October 2010. End note.).

Information from the Foreign Relations Directorate demonstrates that the treaty regarding the USFOL went into effect on November 2, 2001 for a period of ten years, and will automatically be extended for another five years in November 2011 because none of the parties have indicated that they wish to end it.

Wiels also said that military exercises are a danger to the local population and destroy nature. He alluded to the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) in which several countries such as the U.S., Great Britain, Venezuela, France and Belgium can make agreements with regard to large scale military exercises. A military exercise in Curaçao, coordinated by the Dutch Royal Navy has been planned for May/June of this year.

Minister of Justice Elmer Wilsoe (PS) declined to comment on Wiels' statements. Wilsoe was Curaçao's Lieutenant Governor when the USFOL was established. (Antilliaans Dagblad, Extra, Amigoe)

Curacao – "Hurricane Hunter" Visit a Huge Success

The U.S. Air Force Weather Reconnaissance C-130 "Hurricane Hunter" aircraft visit to Curacao was a huge success. Curacao PM Gerrit Schotte thanked National Hurricane Center (NHC) Director Bill Read for allowing this famous aircraft and its courageous crew to come to Curacao. They routinely fly directly into violent storms carrying sophisticated equipment to measure their intensity. Data collected is used to ultimately predict the storm's direction so that timely preparations can be made on the ground which benefits all countries in the region including Curacao, PM Schotte said.

Bill Read and representatives from the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) were on hand at a press conference to answer questions about their work and raise public awareness about hurricanes and disaster preparedness. PM Schotte welcomed around 800 local school children from 19 primary schools who witnessed the arrival of the aircraft and took advantage of the opportunity to take a tour. The general public of Curacao was also invited. (Various media)

Kingdom – “Hezbollah Case” Server Crashes; Pivotal Data Lost

A server crash at the Public Prosecutors Office in Curacao reportedly caused the loss of pivotal “Hezbollah Case” data, including information gathered via wiretaps.

International cooperation among law enforcement authorities in Curacao, the Netherlands, Belgium, Colombia, Venezuela and the U.S. resulted in the arrest and conviction of 17 people in Curacao who participated in an international drug and money laundering organization in 2009. The organization was held responsible for having trafficked at least 2,000 kilos of cocaine annually.

Four of the 18 criminals were sentenced to 10-18 month prison terms at the Court of First Instance. 13 others received sentences ranging from 4-7 years while one suspect was acquitted in 2009. The group shipped containers with cocaine from Curacao to the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain and Jordan. From Venezuela, containers with drugs went to West Africa and then to the Netherlands, Lebanon and Spain. Carriers smuggled the cocaine as airline passengers from Curacao and Aruba into the Netherlands. The proceeds were allegedly invested in several countries. As part of the investigation, which was initiated by the Curacao police, the National Crime Squad intercepted 300 kilos of cocaine in the port of Rotterdam in 2008 resulting in the arrest of three Colombians. Initially the public prosecutor’s office assumed that the organization was in contact with other criminal networks that supported Hezbollah financially. Any assumptions that large sums of money from the drug trade became available in Lebanon through underground banking were unfounded, a public prosecutor said. The convicted criminals have a good chance to win their appeal cases, after the server crash, a lawyer said. (Extra)

Aruba – U.S. Waste Company Bouldin & Lawson Wins Court Case

The Aruba Ministry of Environment has lost the court case against McMinnville, TN-based Bouldin & Lawson LLC. The Aruban government signed a US \$18 million contract with Bouldin & Lawson LLC in 2005 for the construction of a waste disposal installation by Bouldin & Lawson daughter company WastAway.

WastAway developed facility at the edge of the landfill which is operational since 2009. WastAway process eliminates the need for costly and time-consuming garbage segregation, but the government stopped paying the company for their services. A judge ordered the Aruba government to pay US \$900,000 in outstanding debts and interest to WastAway. (La Prensa)

Curacao - PM Schotte Strikes Deal; LNG Import From Trinidad

Curacao PM Gerrit Schotte said he struck a deal with the Trinidad and Tobago Energy Affairs and Finance Ministers concerning the import of Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) into Curaçao as an alternative source of fuel for the Isla refinery as well as local utility company Aqualectra. Details of the deal will be worked out later, Schotte said. (Various media)

CURAÇAO

Crime March 18 – 24

On March 22, a security guard at a drugstore was robbed. (Amigoe)

ARUBA

Crime March 18 – 24

On March 19, a pedestrian in Oranjestad was robbed by four men. The same evening, a minimarket in Tanki Leendert was robbed. (Diarario Aruba, Amigoe)

ST. MAARTEN

Crime March 18 – 24

On March 18, there were three robberies. A pedestrian in Soualiga was robbed, another pedestrian in Philipsburg was robbed by two vehicle occupants, and a pedestrian in Cul de Sac was beaten and robbed by four men. (Daily Herald, St. Maarten Island Time)

Security camera project may be implemented

St. Maarten Chamber of Commerce members unanimously agreed to implement a fully-functioning surveillance system in Philipsburg in efforts to reduce crime. The public-private partnership project has been discussed since 2004, but new proposals may now meet with the approval of all stakeholders. Members of the Indian Merchants Association, the St. Maarten Hospitality and Trade Association (SHTA), and the Chamber of Commerce were recently informed of an update in the status of the proposed street camera system. The estimated cost for the equipment is USD650,000. The cost of staff and monitoring station is approximately USD718,000. Maintenance, project setup and management will cost an additional USD200,000. The proposal entails 18 cameras in Philipsburg and seven more in Cul de Sac in the school zone. The Chamber will organize a team to put together a suggested set of laws and regulations, which will be presented to the government. Chief of Police Peter de Witte was the chief of police in Aruba when its camera system was adopted. He is believed to be supportive of the initiative and has experience in dealing with the issues surrounding such a system. Particular attention has to be given to individuals' right of privacy whilst at the same time being an effective measure to deter and solve crimes. The funding measures taken in Aruba included a small charge of each tourist entering the country. (Daily Herald)

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