



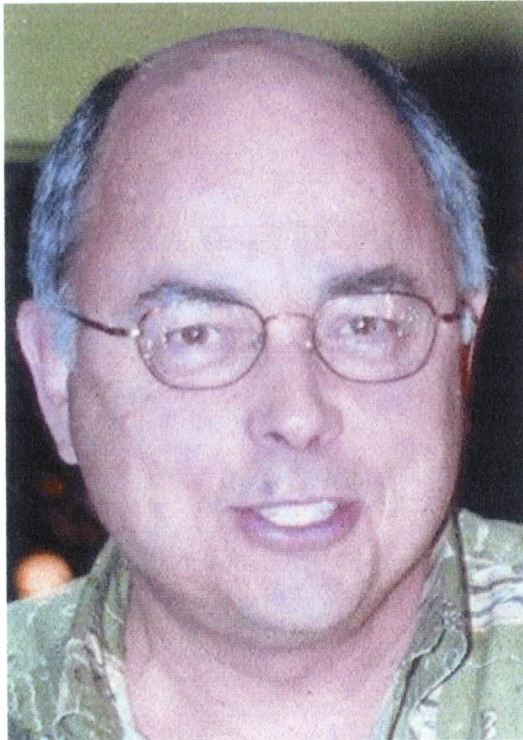
FULL STORY

## LINDQUIST GOES AFTER HART

AG: Criminal probe launched since September

Darren Bahaw News Editor

Thursday, March 11th 2010



bobol buster: Robert Lindquist

A CRIMINAL probe was quietly launched last September against Calder Hart, the former executive chairman of the Urban Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago (UDeCOTT).

The action was taken after UDeCOTT filed legal action to stall the Commission of Enquiry set up by Government to investigate the State enterprise and aspects of the construction sector.

Attorney General John Jeremie made these disclosures yesterday during a media conference at his Cabildo Chambers building, St Vincent Street, Port of Spain, breaking his own policy of not commenting on ongoing criminal investigations.

He said the normal protocol was to await the findings of the Commission of Enquiry, but when it appeared that moves were being made by UDeCOTT to stop the enquiry, 'the Office of the Attorney General moved immediately to initiate criminal proceedings which cannot be stopped'.

Jeremie said he was advised UDeCOTT would not challenge last Friday's High Court ruling which dismissed a lawsuit that sought to strike down the report of the Commission of Enquiry on the basis of apparent bias of the commissioners.

Chairman of the Enquiry Prof John Uff has stated the report will now be delivered to President George Maxwell Richards before April 5.

Jeremie said the criminal probe was sanctioned by the Government.

But questioned on the statements being made by other Government ministers in relation to Hart, Jeremie said: 'The general principle is that you do not publicise a criminal investigation. I certainly knew and the prime minister also knew.'

Canadian forensic investigator Robert Lindquist has been given the mandate to investigate if there was bid-rigging,

manipulation of the tendering process and kickbacks to public officials in the award of contracts for two specific projects-the Ministry of Legal Affairs Towers and the beleaguered Brian Lara Cricket Academy at Tarouba, the Express learned.

Lindquist has had a long history with the country, including his work in the Piarco International Airport Development Project.

The new investigation is 'vast in scope' and will involve the tracking of financial transactions, Jeremie said.

The Cricket Academy has been dogged by delays and nears the one-billion-dollar mark.

No date has been given for the completion of the project.

The Lindquist investigation, he said, was separate and apart from a new enquiry which seeks to verify information published in the media last Wednesday which purports to link Hart as a relative to two directors of a Malaysian-based company, Sunway, which had been awarded the \$368 million contract to build the Legal Affairs Tower by UDeCOTT.

Sunway was subsequently awarded an additional \$300 million contract to outfit the building.

In relation to the Malaysian documents which were obtained by the Congress of the People, Jeremie said after they were put in the public domain by the media, he 'sought and received a written legal opinion' on the assumption that they were authentic last Friday.

As a direct response, he said he spoke to both the Acting Commissioner of Police James Philbert and the Director of Public Prosecutions Roger Gaspard 'and advised them of the need to pursue certain urgent lines of enquiry'.

Jeremie said he was in the process 'of authenticating those documents. I have a preliminary report but not a final report'.

Gaspard and Philbert announced on Tuesday that the Anti-Corruption Investigations Bureau is investigating the allegations of the family link between Hart and the Sunway directors.

Jeremie said he also had a discussion with Prime Minister Patrick Manning on the matter last Friday.

'I gave certain advice to the prime minister on Friday and the resignation of Mr Hart was announced on Saturday. I don't know what took place between the advice I gave to the prime minister on Friday, but Mr Hart's resignation followed on the heels of that advice,' he said.

Hart, his wife, Sherrine, and their daughter, Jean, left the country last Saturday, and Jeremie said Hart is expected back in the country before the end of the month.

Jeremie said had Hart not resigned, he would not have disclosed information relating to the Lindquist probe.

Asked whether, in hindsight, the concerns raised by Diego Martin West MP Dr Keith Rowley, about the transparency and accountability of UDeCOTT and Hart were now justified, Jeremie said: 'I cannot speak to that...I can say that Dr Rowley has reasons of his own for taking positions...he will have to answer ultimately for taking those positions.'

---