

**SANGSTER INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT  
STATEMENT BY DR. THE HON. OMAR DAVIES  
MINISTER OF TRANSPORT, WORKS AND HOUSING.  
25 MARCH 2014**

1. Mr Speaker, in keeping with the GOJ's policy to expand and modernize the international airports, the GOJ through the Airports Authority of Jamaica (AAJ) embarked on a programme of public-private partnerships (PPP). This programme commenced with the Sangster International Airport (SIA) in April 2003, when the private operator (MBJ Airports Limited) took over the operations of the airport from the Airports Authority of Jamaica (AAJ). Since then, the new operators embarked on a drive to distinguish the facility as a centre of excellence in Jamaica.
  
2. SIA was chosen as the first airport candidate because it is the premier tourism gateway into the country. It was in urgent need of upgrading and expansion, and in fact the AAJ had prepared a Master Plan and a defined Capital Development Programme, the implementation of which was made a mandatory requirement under the Concession Agreement.

3. I am pleased to note that the three-phased capital development programme was satisfactorily completed in 2009 at a cost of approximately US\$120m. Other capital improvements were undertaken which, together with related costs and payments, amounted to another US\$60m.
  
4. In 2012, I gave approval for MBJ to acquire a loan for the overlay of the runway at SIA; this work was completed in the last quarter of 2013 at a cost of US\$23m. This project was well-needed by air carriers and was efficiently executed, mainly at nights, causing minimal disruption to airport operations. Discussions are well advanced between the Airports Authority and MBJ for a project to extend the runway by 408 metres. This will enable flights from more distant tourism markets to operate safely and conveniently from SIA.
  
5. However, in the final analysis, it is in customer service that a successful airport “earns its stripes” with the consumer. In 2009, MBJ Airports Limited enrolled in the Airports Service Quality (ASQ) programme that is run by the representative industry body of the world's airports, the Airports Council International (ACI). Based on passenger satisfaction surveys, the programme encourages airports to plan improvements and benchmark their customer services against their own performance and that of 285 other airports around the world. The ASQ programme interviews a minimum of

1,400 passengers per annum at each participating airport and randomly conducts audits to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the data.

6. In the early years of its participation, SIA faced challenges with regard to a lack of adequate facilities - restrooms in particular, and inadequacies in the ambience of the facility. Levels of courtesy at the airport were also found wanting and there were problems with waiting time. The operator was expected to achieve both passenger satisfaction levels and targets set for baggage delivery and equipment serviceability.
7. Customer service training was put in place for all employees and personnel working at the airport, including staff of government agencies. Facilities were upgraded and the airport made more user-friendly. MJB consistently performed well on the ratings - that is, above the minimum of 70% passenger satisfaction and has been ranked in the top five airports in the Latin American/Caribbean region (by airport category, size or region) in five of the past six years (2008–2013).
8. We have now been informed, Mr. Speaker, that Sangster International Airport will be added to the 'Roll of Excellence' in 2014. Started in 2011, the Roll of Excellence was created to recognize those airports, in the opinion

of passengers in the Airport Service Quality survey (ASQ), that have consistently delivered excellent services. There have been only 21 airports awarded this distinction to date and SIA is one of only six airports worldwide that will receive this recognition this year.

9. These developments are taking place in tandem with other initiatives designed to ease and simplify processes that affect users of our airports. Already the process for outgoing passengers has been improved and changes are in development for the processing of in-coming passengers.

10. The Government regards the SIA public-private partnership as a successful example of engagement of private capital and expertise in managing a public asset to the mutual benefit of the parties involved. Against that background, the Government is proceeding with the PPP programme for Norman Manley International (NMIA) and expects to issue Requests for Proposals (RFP) to prospective local and international bidders later this year.

11. As you are aware, notwithstanding the general airport PPP policy, the Government had approved the plan for AAJ to embark on a significant capital development programme, in keeping with the airport's 2004 Master Plan. To date, Phase 1A which involved the building of a new Departures

Building and other significant upgrading works was practically completed and commissioned into service in 2008 at a cost of approximately US\$120m.

12. Phase 1B is in progress; however, the major planned projects under the Master Plan, including the extension of the runway, will be scheduled under the NMIA PPP capital works.

13. NMIA enrolled in the Airports Service Quality programme in 2011. I am confident that I will be able to report similarly excellent performance by that airport in the near future.