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News

Gov't seals sugar deal with COMPLANT

Chinese company investing US\$156m in industry

BY LUKE DOUGLAS Senior staff reporter douglas@jamaicaobserver.com

Tuesday, August 16, 2011

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Prime Minister Bruce Golding (left) exchanges documents with Tang Jianguo, chief executive officer of the COMPLANT Group of Companies, following yesterday's signing of an agreement for the transfer of the Frome, Bernard Lodge and Monymusk sugar factories to the Chinese firm at Jamaica House. (Photo: OPM)

PRIME Minister Bruce Golding handed over the remaining state-owned assets in the sugar industry to the China-based company COMPLANT International at Jamaica House yesterday, signalling what both parties say will be a new era of development for the sugar industry in Jamaica.

The deal seeks to achieve the twin goals of pumping massive investment into the ailing sugar sector over the next four years while removing the accumulation of further debt on the public budget.

The Chinese company is paying US\$9 million for the three sugar factories — Frome in Westmoreland, Bernard Lodge in St Catherine, and Monymusk in Clarendon — as well as the lands immediately surrounding them. It has also leased hundreds of thousands of acres of government lands earmarked for growing sugar cane.

COMPLANT is committed to investing at least US\$156 million to renovate the three factories and sugar cane lands over the next four years.

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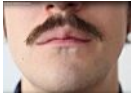
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Stating that the industry needs to transform radically in order to turn around its flagging performance of the last 40 years, Golding urged stakeholders to adopt the Chinese culture of hard work while promising that the Jamaican tradition of collective bargaining for workers is maintained.

"I welcome the introduction of the Chinese culture into our production process," Golding stated. "There is going to be a culture change. Some of the practices of the past are going to have to go."

The hand-over of assets came just over a year after the parties signed an agreement for their divestment. The agreement means that the island's entire sugar industry is currently in private hands.

Tracing the long history of the sugar industry in Jamaica, Golding said the industry had the potential to supply the region's demand for refined sugar of 300,000 tonnes. He urged COMPLANT to consider establishing a sugar refinery for this purpose.

He singled out Mozambique as a country comparable to Jamaica "which is one of the more efficient producers of sugar in the world."

After years of decline sugar production levels in Jamaica stands at below 150,000 tonnes, a far cry from its heyday of 500,000 tonnes in 1965.

Chief executive officer of COMPLANT, Tang Jianguo, expressed the hope that his company would get continued support of the Jamaica Government in renovating and developing the industry.

"We will try to work together with the Jamaican side to set up a new type of relationship (with) farmers," he said, adding that COMPLANT was committed to the localization of the management of the industry.

He said the company would "make efforts to strengthen communications and set up harmonious relations" with labour and the community.

Yuting Lin, chairman of the Pan Caribbean Sugar Company Ltd — the company established in Jamaica by COMPLANT to operate the sugar factories — said three to four years was needed to renovate the factories without stopping production. He said more than US\$8 million was invested in the cane fields by COMPLANT over the previous year. He said US\$20 million in materials and spare parts had been ordered already for arrival next month.

The sugar industry lost about \$18 billion over the years, which will be repaid by generations of Jamaicans to come, the Prime Minister indicated.

"My grandchildren will have to finish paying that off; I won't be able to do it," he said.

COMPLANT is a diversified company with interests in communications, construction and also sugar in that it operates sugar companies in parts of Africa.

In Jamaica, the company has built the Trelawny Multi-purpose Stadium and the Montego Bay Convention Centre and is developing housing solutions in St Ann and St Elizabeth.

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