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# Fire Officers' Sickout Led to BVI Airport Closure; Concerns Raised Over British Territory's Ability to Grow Capacity

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**The Terrence B. Lettsome International Airport on Beef Island, British Virgin Islands.**

The abrupt closure of the Terrence B. Lettsome International Airport on Beef Island at the beginning of this week was reportedly due to a sick out by fire officers attached to the airport.

The airport was closed for hours on Monday, forcing at least one flight to divert to Puerto Rico in the interim. “The closing of the airport led to a great deal of disruption resulting in persons being stranded at the airport with no money for hotels, persons missing meetings and important events and other challenges known and unknown,” Premier Dr. Natalio Wheatley said in a statement on Wednesday. He offered his sincere apologies for the disruption, and vowed to ensure that it does

not happen again.

In his statement, Mr. Wheatley indicated that a number of fire officers called in sick on Monday, forcing airport officials to scramble officers from Virgin Gorda and Anegada to the airport to fill in for the absentees.

A Monday meeting between the premier and representatives of the Airport Authority covered “better communication with the staff, improved working conditions, building greater capacity, and having contingencies in place to address emergencies,” according to Mr. Wheatley. He also disclosed that a meeting between fire offices and the chair of the authority was “productive,” although he did not elaborate on the details of the grievances of the officers and the solution that was proffered by airport officials.

“I have confidence that there is a clear path forward to addressing the concerns that were raised,” Mr. Wheatley said as he assured that both he and his Communications and Works Minister Kye Rhymer would be closely monitoring the situation.

The airport’s three closures in recent weeks have been raising concerns in some circles about the territory’s ability to not only retain the newly-established direct air service between Miami and the BVI but to also attract new connections to the British territory.