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NEWS

Buju out - J'can reggae artiste gets bail in immigration court

Lawyer says Buju thankful to fans for support

BY PAUL HENRY CRIME/COURT CO-ORDINATOR henryp@jamaicaobserver.com
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Banton, whose real name is Mark Myrie, was offered bail with tough conditions following a hung jury in his gun and drugs trial.



David Oscar Markus — the entertainer's lead attorney — said Banton, was "tired" but "relieved" that he had been released to spend time with his family before the commencement of his second trial next February.

"Free at last," Markus told the Observer of his client's release. "We're thrilled that Buju will have some time to regroup before we try this case again." Banton, he said, was thankful to everyone for their support.

Attorney **Marc Seitles**, another member of Banton's legal team, said the artiste was overjoyed that he had gained some "measure of freedom".

"Buju can't wait to have a nice meal and sleep in his own bed," Seitle told the Observer yesterday.

Banton has been in jail since last year December when he was arrested by federal agents for conspiracy to possess, with intent to distribute five or more kilogrammes of cocaine.

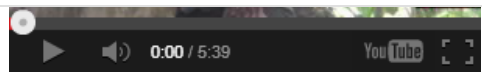
He was also charged with possession of a weapon. His arrest on December 8 followed that of his friends Ian Thomas and James Mack. Both men have since

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pleaded guilty and will be sentenced this month.

Banton was placed on trial in September but following a week on evidence a 12-member jury could not reach a unanimous decision about his innocence or guilt after three days of deliberation.

He was granted bail in the sum of US\$300,000 in the federal court last month but an appeal of an aspect of his bail condition set by US magistrate Anthony Porcelli by the prosecution held up his release, along with his visa issue that resulted in him having to apply for bail in the immigration court to prevent his further detention.

Banton's entertainment visa was revoked following his arrest.

As part of his bail condition, Banton will have to wear a tracking device and will be under 24-hour surveillance from a security company. He has also signed an extradition waiver and will not be allowed to leave the Middle District of Southern District of Florida until his trial begins.

He will only be allowed to visit a doctor and his lawyer. He must also submit himself to urine tests to prove that he is not using banned substances.

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