

Foreign travels

Opportunity answers the door when trade mission knocks

Jamieson in Southeast Asia

By John Schreiner

An excited aide rushed the good news into the office of President Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines halfway through the meeting between Marcos and Donald Jamieson, Canada's Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce. A promising oil-strike — not commercial, as it later turned out — had been made just off one of the Philippine Islands by a drilling consortium that included a Canadian firm. Later in the morning, an elated Marcos spoke to the entire Canadian trade mission Mr. Jamieson had led to Southeast Asia, and quipped that Canada was bringing good luck to the Philippines.

A reputation as a bringer of good luck may be a new role for Canada in Southeast Asia, but certainly Canada is regarded benignly and favourably in the region, a conclusion that can be drawn readily from the red-carpet treatment given the Jamieson mission when it "blitzed" the member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) during the first two weeks of March.

Two objectives

It was a mission with both diplomatic and commercial objectives. Mr. Jamieson met with 30 ministers and the government leaders of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. He signed several treaties eliminating double taxation between Canada and these nations. With Indonesia, he concluded an agreement to extend to that nation \$200 million in soft loans under the aegis of the Export Development Corporation. At the Asian Development Bank headquarters in Manila, he announced a major additional purchase of ADB shares and an additional contribution to the ADB's soft-loan fund, making Canada the second-largest non-regional supporter of the Bank after Japan.

He raised specific questions during his many ministerial meetings (for example, to secure more operating room in local financial affairs for Canadian banks). And specific questions were raised by the host nations, most frequently involving their desire to have better access to the Canadian market and, thus reduce the sharp imbalance of trade in Canada's favour. And, throughout the mission, Mr. Jamieson opened many doors for the 42 businessmen accompanying him. In their turn, they uncovered a broad range of trade and investment opportunities for Canadians in this populous (250 million) and resource-rich region.

While some Canadian firms — notably consulting firms and banks — have done considerable business in Southeast Asia during the past two decades, the Canadian profile has, on the whole, been a low one. The intensive Jamieson mission, which received considerable local media attention, will help give Canada a more substantial image in the region. As the Canadian Ambassador in Indonesia, Peter Johnston, put it: "The mission has created a climate in which we can do business."

Mr. John Schreiner has been based in Vancouver as Western Editor of the Financial Post for the past three years and has been on the staff of that paper for 15 years. He has had a long-standing interest in international affairs, in particular in the "Asian Rim". He edited the Financial Post supplement on Japan in 1970 and is doing so again in 1976. He has also edited the Financial Post reports on Southeast Asia, Sweden, Germany and Britain, and has visited Southeast Asia on a number of occasions. The views expressed in this article are those of Mr. Schreiner.

Jamieson visit should raise Canadian profile in Southeast Asia