

# NATIONS

IN • THE • NEWS

## Outlook:

### Warm and sunny for Canada-Caribbean ties

Canada and the Caribbean have links dating back to the 18th century, when trade routes were established between the Maritimes and the West Indies. Back then, the top sellers were Canadian lumber and salt fish, shipped southward in return for Caribbean sugar and rum. Today, two-way trade exceeds \$1 billion, with Canadian exports reaching \$441 million and imports \$621 million. Among our leading exports to the region are computers and telecommunications equipment; our Caribbean imports include clothing, steel products and industrial chemicals.

The very first Canadian trade mission to the region took place in 1866, when representatives of Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island visited the West Indies and Brazil to explore commercial opportunities. In 1892, the federal government hired West Indian trade agents on a part-time basis to help promote trade with Canada.

By the 1920s, the trade was so important that the federal government created the Canadian National Steamships (CNS) line to consolidate shipping services to the West Indies and Bermuda. From 1928 to the mid-1950s, CNS operated a twice-monthly cargo-passenger service between Halifax and the islands, with a stop at Boston. The trading relationship was supported by banking: Canadian financial institutions have operated in the Caribbean for over 100 years.

Collectively, the 14 countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) now are Canada's fifth-largest trading partner in the Hemisphere, ranking behind the United States, Mexico, Brazil and Venezuela. Trade between Canada and the Caribbean is increasingly diversified, and Canadian investment in the area approaches \$25 billion.

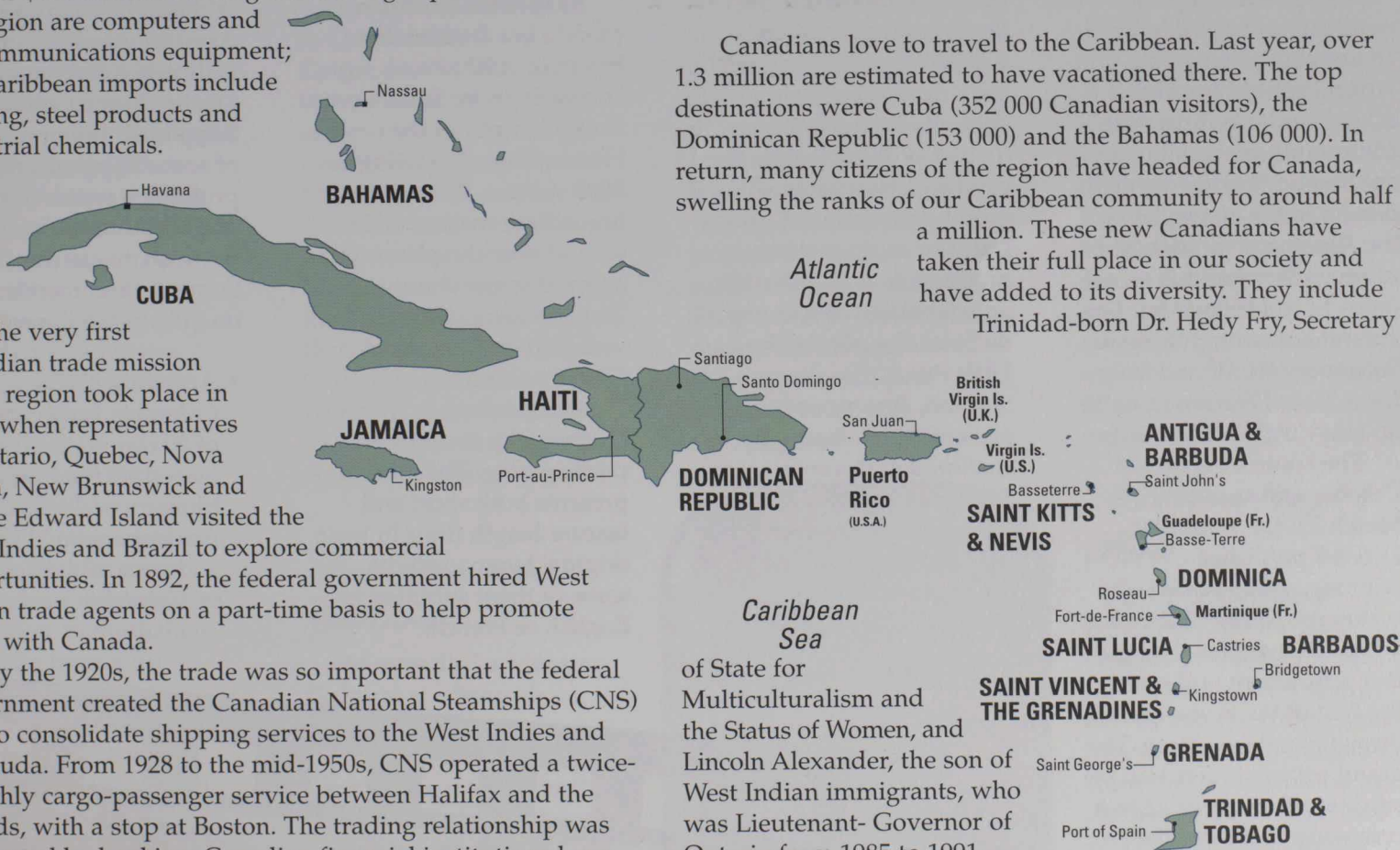
Development assistance is another key feature of Canada's presence in the region. The Canadian International Development Agency is helping Caribbean countries become more economically competitive and strengthen their management of the environment and natural resources.

photo: CANAPRESS



Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien (front centre) poses for a group photo with CARICOM heads of government in Montego Bay, Jamaica, January 19, 2001. Front row, from left: Antigua and Barbuda PM Lester Bird, Bahamas PM Hubert Ingraham, Jamaica PM Percival Patterson, Mr. Chrétien, Barbados PM Owen Arthur, St. Lucia PM Kenneth Anthony, CARICOM Secretary-General Edwin Carrington. Back row, from left: Grenada PM Keith Mitchell, Trinidad PM Basdeo Panday, Haiti PM Jacques Alexis, Guyana PM Samuel Hinds, Dominica PM Pierre Charles, Belize PM Said Musa, Suriname President Runaldo Venetiaan, Dominican Republic President Hipólito Mejía, St. Kitts PM Denzil Douglas.

Canadians love to travel to the Caribbean. Last year, over 1.3 million are estimated to have vacationed there. The top destinations were Cuba (352 000 Canadian visitors), the Dominican Republic (153 000) and the Bahamas (106 000). In return, many citizens of the region have headed for Canada, swelling the ranks of our Caribbean community to around half a million. These new Canadians have taken their full place in our society and have added to its diversity. They include Trinidad-born Dr. Hedy Fry, Secretary



of State for Multiculturalism and the Status of Women, and Lincoln Alexander, the son of West Indian immigrants, who was Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario from 1985 to 1991.

Canada and the CARICOM countries have a tradition of frequent, frank consultations. Leaders gather for formal summit meetings about every two years, and they meet frequently on the margins of other international gatherings. This past January, Prime Minister Chrétien joined his CARICOM counterparts for a two-day summit in Jamaica. The leaders decided to hold discussions with a view to launching negotiations on a free trade agreement between Canada and CARICOM. They also agreed to consult closely on the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas.

All in all, the skies look bright for the Canada-Caribbean relationship in the years ahead. ●