

Premier plans job-hunting tour of Asia

By DON RICHARDSON

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FREDERICTON - Premier Frank McKenna plans to mix business with business during a two-week overseas trip later this month.

McKenna will journey to the Indian Ocean island of Mauritius for the International francophone summit. He will use that trip as a springboard to a job-hunting tour through southeast Asia, which will keep him out of the province until late October.

The trip will be a bargain for New Brunswick taxpayers, the premier said.

The federal government and the host country will be paying most of the cost of the trip and both ventures should help bring jobs to the province.

"We have a chance here to kill two birds with one stone," McKenna told reporters Sunday. "In addition to the work we will be doing in Mauritius, we

are also taking advantage of being in that part of the world to undertake several commercial initiatives with a number of New Brunswick companies."

The three-day conference of French-speaking nations that begins next Saturday is more than a cultural event, McKenna

said.

He hopes to use the meeting to develop business contacts among French-speaking countries in the developing world.

He said the province plans to use the conference to promote its expertise in distance education to other French-speaking regions.

He also hopes to provide exports to francophone fisheries schools throughout the Third World.

This will be the third time McKenna has attended the biennial event. Previous trips have brought criticism from the opposition Confederation of Regions Party, but McKenna believes they are worthwhile for the economic benefits they produce.

"This is a summit that has more opportunity for us than ever before. We have refined our strategy and focused in on several areas of expertise that New Brunswick has. I think we are going to get a big economic

impact from our participation."

McKenna will be the senior Canadian politician at the Mauritius conference, as Prime Minister Kim Campbell and Quebec premier Robert Bourassa have both declined to attend.

Benoit Houchard, the former Tory cabinet minister who is now Canada's ambassador to Paris, will represent the federal government at the conference.

Ottawa will pay most of the travelling cost for the New Brunswick delegation and Mauritius will pay for

accommodations.

McKenna said the province's share of the bill will be "modest" but did not supply a precise figure.

New Brunswick will have a delegation of five at the conference, including the premier and Intergovernmental Affairs Minister Edmund Blanchard.

Following the summit, McKenna will lead a New Brunswick delegation to Thailand and China on a trade and investment mission.

Joined by six local companies - including Canong Bros.

chocolates of St. Stephen, Universal Systems Ltd. of Fredericton and NH Power - the delegation will visit Bangkok and Shanghai in search of jobs and investors.

McKenna was in the Far East last year and said the province's efforts to make itself better known there have produced some dividends. Companies such as WIK Wovens of Edmundston and Atlantic Canada Textiles of Chipman have roots in the Pacific Rim.

McKenna will wrap up his tour in China on Oct. 24.

FROM: