

An Interview with John Bell — Continued from page 4

CanadExport: In the meantime, how can businesses that missed out on these events take advantage of some of these opportunities?

Ambassador Bell: They should continue, or begin, to deal with the International Trade Centres in their area, to find all the relevant information about markets. They should be encouraged to participate, selectively, in the international bilateral business associations. Above all, they should focus on one or two markets — visiting those regions and maintaining contact with the trade officers at the Posts. The trick is to find niches, partners and representatives that fit their particular interests.

CanadExport: What do you consider APEC's accomplishments since its creation in 1989?

Ambassador Bell: There has been considerable movement on trade liberalization for the benefit of all APEC members. In 1993, for example, there was an agreement towards fully liberalized trade in Asia Pacific by 2010 for developed countries and 2020 for developing countries. And the development of individual action plans and corporate action plans by APEC economies was instituted to review what they are doing towards meeting that goal. At the Trade Ministerial Meeting in Montreal last March, it was agreed to accelerate the investigation of sectors for voluntary liberalization. Originally this was to have been done by 1999. Now it will happen two years earlier.

We are also working towards streamlining of customs clearances through common databanks and other procedures that would mean that what could take three weeks

will be reduced to five minutes.

A third area APEC is working on is the whole question of economic co-operation in infrastructure, environment, human resource development technology, and so on. What really distinguishes our Canadian chairmanship of APEC this year is our efforts to involve a wider community, beginning with business through the APEC Business Advisory Council and expanding to involve youth, women and other groups in the entire APEC process.

CanadExport: Many of the Asia-Pacific countries could use Canadian products and services to further their economic growth. Do any specific sectors come to mind?

Ambassador Bell: Let's take environment, with the serious problem in Southeast Asia caused by the so-called haze. Canadian companies like Bover — which got involved in Malaysia via the Enterprise Canada-Malaysia program — are right at the forefront of providing air and water-quality analysis. Infrastructure is another area. Take, for example, the well known site of the tallest buildings in the world, Kala Lumpur city centre. A great part of those buildings involved Canadian architects and environmental experts.

Another area that is at the forefront of what we have been doing in Asia Pacific is education. Our institutions of higher learning have a product to market, and there is a tremendous demand for such products and services in many countries of the world, but particularly in Asia-Pacific countries.

So there are tremendous opportunities, and the challenge is to study the market, speak to people who

come from those regions who know the area, get a sense of the best way to proceed, and be selective.

CanadExport: What in your view has been the real impact of Canada's Year of Asia Pacific?

Ambassador Bell: I guess where we really had an impact, from my perspective, was in the numbers of people who got involved. This was really about telling Canadians that we're a Pacific nation and working towards creating opportunities and taking advantage of opportunities in that region. What I found particularly interesting was that there were so many people who got involved in a cultural project.

CanadExport: Are there plans for any follow-up, such as future trade missions, to channel all the energy generated from CYAP?

Ambassador Bell: I think that we have successfully peaked people's interest in the region. You know, it used to be that people went to Europe after they graduated from school. Now, more and more are going to Asia.

P.S. Just before going to press, Ambassador Bell gave CanadExport the following concluding remarks on CYAP and APEC.

Ambassador Bell: The APEC Leaders' Meeting was a great success, both substantively and logistically. The identification of nine sectors for early voluntary liberalization should lead to increased opportunities for Canadian firms in the future.

There will be a follow-up to CYAP at a conference at the University of British Columbia in March, which will coincide with outreach activities in Canada for Heads of Mission from Asia Pacific.