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TRADE MINISTER VISITS SOUTHEAST ASIA

The Honourable Gerald Regan, Minister for International Trade, returned today from a two week trade mission to Southeast Asia which took him to Hong Kong, Malaysia, Brunei and India.

During his visit to Hong Kong on February 20 and 21, Mr. Regan met with senior government officials and Canadian business leaders to discuss a variety of topics of major commercial interest to Canada. In his meeting with Eric Ho, Hong Kong's Secretary of Industry and Trade, Mr. Regan set out Canadian views on the operation of bilateral textile arrangements and outlined Canadian interest in a government exhibition centre project. The Minister also met with Hong Kong Secretary of Monetary Affairs, Douglas Blye, and the Chairman of China Light and Power, Lord Kadoorie, to discuss projects of interest to Canadian firms in the telecommunications and nuclear fields.

Mr. Regan's visit to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on February 22, also focussed on specific commercial opportunities being actively pursued at present by Canadian firms. During a call on Daud Isahak, Malaysian Director General of Telecommunications, the Minister stressed Canadian expertise in this field and drew to his attention current Canadian bids for the supply of a multi access subscriber radio system and of PABX equipment. In other meetings the same day with the Malaysian ministers of Trade and Industry and of Finance, as well as with the Chairman of the National Electricity Board, Mr. Regan spoke in support of a bid by Canadian manufacturers of power generation equipment and also raised the possibility of sales of thermal coal from Canada.

In Brunei, Mr. Regan attended Independence Day Celebrations at Bandar Seri Begawan on February 23 as Special Representative of the Canadian Government. On behalf of Canada he presented a tapestry entitled "Les Nuages" by Canadian artist Joanna Staniszki, as an independence gift to the people of Negara Brunei Darussalam.

Mr. Regan's visit to India February 26 and 27 was highlighted by a meeting with Mrs. Indira Gandhi, India's Prime Minister. Their discussion focussed on expanding economic cooperation and bilateral trade between India and Canada.

Mr. Regan also called on the Minister of Railways of India, Mr. A.B.A. Chani Khan Choudhury, to promote the interests of Canadian firms in the computerization of Indian railways. India has a vast network of railways--equalling that of Canada--but it has not yet modernized its passenger and freight traffic control systems. Several Canadian firms are seeking contracts financed by the World Bank to provide modern telecommunications and computer systems to ameliorate inefficiencies in the railroad network.

During a call on the Indian Minister of Energy, Mr. Shiv Shankar, Mr. Regan stressed the great experience and capability of Canadian engineering and manufacturing companies in providing design and construction services and equipment for hydro and thermal power stations. Although India is capable of providing much of the equipment required for hydro projects such as Chamera, the country will have to import significant amounts of power generation equipment to achieve its ambitious expansion programme necessitated by domestic demand for electricity. "Canadian manufacturers and engineers," said Mr. Regan, "recognize the importance of power to India's growing industrial sector, and have indicated to me that they will compete vigorously for Indian power projects. Both EDC and CIDA are prepared to assist them, EDC by providing competitive project financing and CIDA by aiding India's power development plans." Mr. Regan also drew to the Minister of Energy's attention Canada's interest and capability in the design, construction and operation of large natural gas pipelines. "Canadian pipeline companies are the best in the world," said Mr. Regan, "and want to cooperate with their Indian counterparts in sharing the technological advantages we possess".

Mr. Regan also called on the Indian Ministers of Commerce and of Chemicals and Fertilizers, raising with them Canadian concerns about a recent cutback in Indian imports of newsprint, and Canadian interest in establishing a vaccine plant in India respectively.

On the final day of his visit to India, Mr. Regan addressed a luncheon of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, an organization representing some 100,000 Indian businesses. In his address Mr. Regan praised the work of the Federation, of the Canada-India Business Council, of the Association of Indian Engineering Industries, and of the Canadian Manufacturer's Association, in their efforts to increase trade, investment, and cooperation between Canada and India. While recognizing that much has been accomplished, he called upon these groups, particularly the Canadian members, to increase their efforts.

Mr. Regan noted that India is the tenth largest industrial power in the world with a growing appetite for modern technology, and an increasingly liberalized import regime. Mr. Regan stated, "Canadian companies are only now beginning to recognize the many business opportunities which exist--both in terms of investment and of trade--and I intend to take home the message that I have received from Indian Ministers: that Canadians can and should do much more business in India."