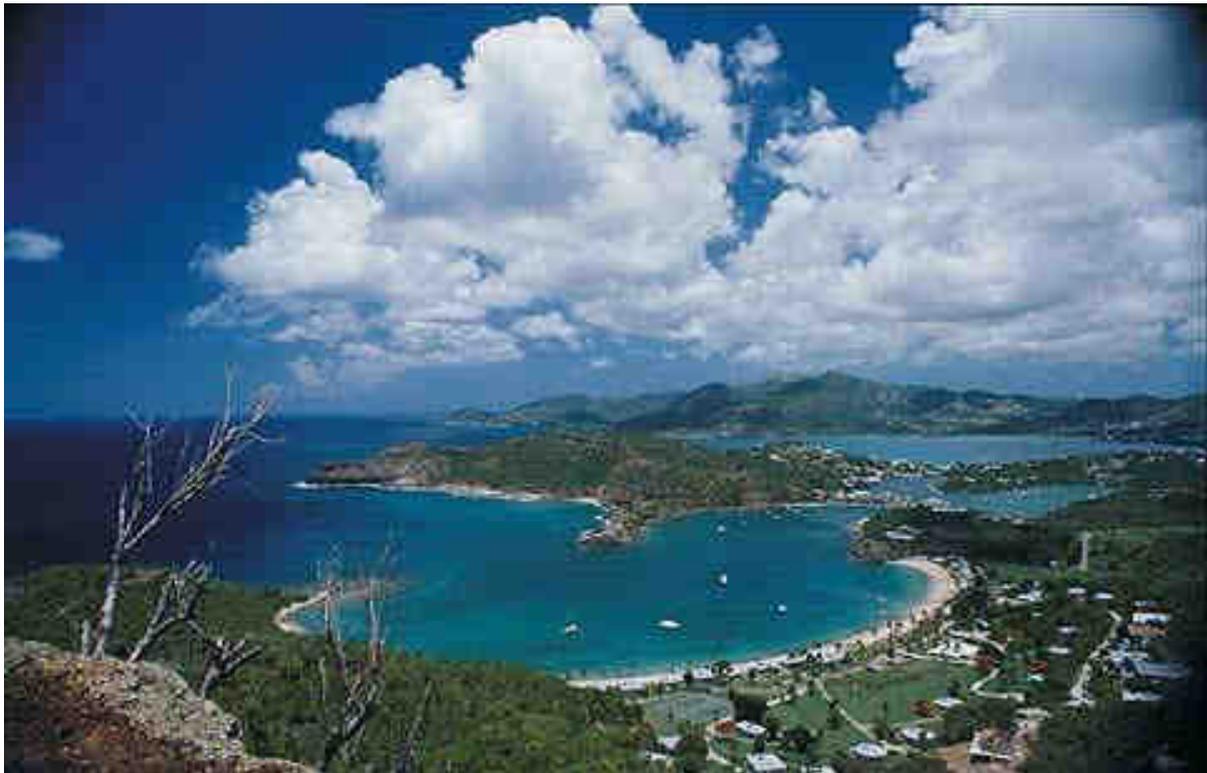




NEWSLETTER

The Antigua and Barbuda High Commission

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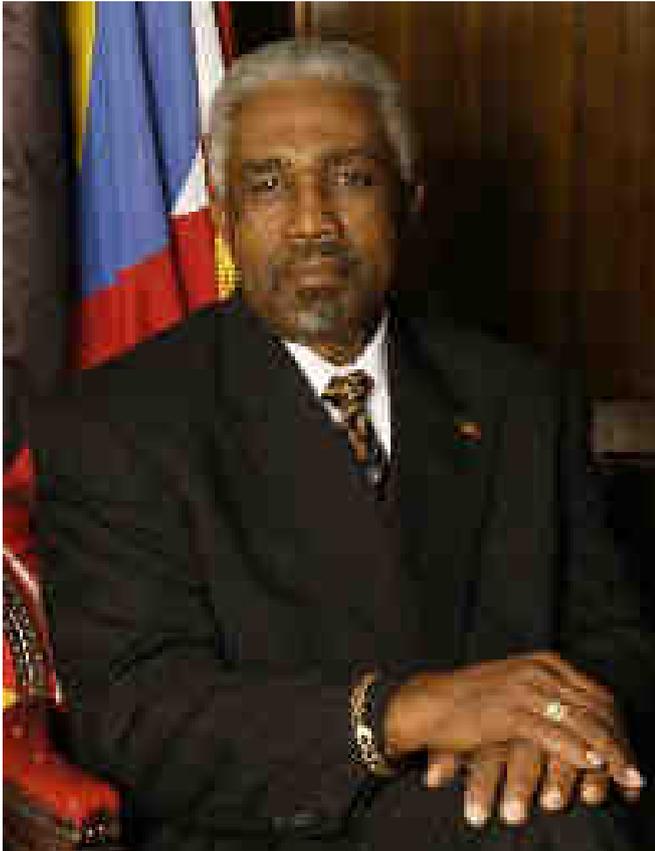
Aerial view of English and Falmouth Harbours

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Digital Photos by Maurice F. Merchant

High Commissioner's message



Greetings!

The Disputes Panel of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) ruled last year that U.S. financial regulations, preventing transactions between U.S. financial institutions and Antiguan-based Internet gambling companies, were in breach of obligations of the U.S. under the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS).

Within 45 days, the Appellate Body of the WTO will again decide whether Antigua and Barbuda can keep engaging in Internet gaming legally or whether the United States would have to change its laws to allow this method of gambling.

As a member of the delegation to the February 21-22 hearing by the Appellate Body of the World Trade Organization regarding the Internet Gaming case I must say that we are optimistic about the outcome.

Finance Minister, Dr Errol Cort, who headed the delegation and under whose Ministry the Directorate of Offshore Gaming falls said "If

the Panel rules in favour of Antigua and Barbuda it would set legal precedence in a number of areas as it pertains to the future of Internet gaming worldwide."

Along with the European Union, Japan and Mexico, support has also come from the CARICOM countries.

At the CARICOM Heads of Government Summit in Suriname on February 17 - 18 CARICOM Heads of Government supported Antigua and Barbuda in its dispute with the United States at the World Trade Organisation WTO on the matter of Internet Gaming.

Following an intervention by Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer, Heads issued a resolution supporting the merits of the case outlining that it holds implications for the provision of services across borders by CARICOM Member States, and all members of the WTO.

During his intervention, Prime Minister Spencer stated that the laws the United States passed were designed to stop the delivery of cross-border betting and gambling services from Antigua and Barbuda into the USA, in violation of the US commitment under the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS).

He noted that it caused several betting companies in Antigua and Barbuda to close, created unemployment among the country's highly-trained young people, and lost the economy tens of millions of dollars per annum.

He also pointed out that following Antigua and Barbuda's success in the matter before the WTO, his government made efforts to settle the matter with the USA amicably, but this was treated by the US very casually.

In its resolution, CARICOM Heads stated that the case was a pioneering one and was instructive in many ways on how small states could defend their rights in the WTO.

**Dr Carl Roberts
High Commissioner**

Ministers negotiate additional 1% bonus for port workers

On the 3rd February, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Works, Communications and the Environment Wilmoth Daniel and Labour, Public Administration and Empowerment Minister Dr. Jacqui Quinn-Leandro resolved a long standing dispute between port workers and the Board of Commissioners over an additional 1% incentive bonus.

The workers threatened to take industrial action if they were not paid the usual 5% incentive bonus. The Board of Commissioners over the Christmas holidays paid the workers a 4% bonus, which it says was due to the financial constraints the port was facing.

Both Ministers met the Board of Commissioners of the Port and issued the following joint statement on the outcome of the meeting:

"Two Ministries have come together to reach an amicable settlement of the dispute over the additional 1% incentive bonus to be paid to Port workers. At a joint meeting with Minister responsible for the Port, Wilmoth Daniel, Labour Minister, Dr. Jacqui Quinn-Leandro and the Board of Commissioners of the Antigua and Barbuda Port Authority, the concerns of the Government, the Board of Commissioners and the Unions were considered.

At the meeting, the Board outlined certain anomalies and irregularities at the Port which required their urgent attention and action. Chief of these is that the Antigua and Barbuda Port Authority is presently undergoing serious financial difficulties inherited from years of mal-administration of the Port operations. These have led to the inability

of the Port to pay the annual incentive bonus. A number of pressing economic problems forced the Board of Commissioners and Port Management to take the decision to pay 4% instead of the 5% demanded by the Unions.

These include:

- a) A large outlay of over \$3.7 million for compliance with the ISPS Security Code and related equipment replacement.
- b) Indebtedness to the Port by shipping agents and other companies as well as large outstanding collectibles;
- c) An inherited indebtedness for the Port building and infrastructure dating back to 23 years, which the previous government did not pay.
- d) Other pressing capital expenditures including the current breakdown of the tugs.

It was agreed that the Board of Commissioners was not wrong in its interpretation and application of the Unions' collective agreements. Both the Ministers were of the view that any industrial action by the workers would be illegal. This, notwithstanding, the Ministers decided that they ought to yield to the Unions' request to pay the workers the additional 1%.

The Labour Minister indicated her willingness to continue the dialogue with the Board, Port Management and the Unions to assess the manner in which incentive bonuses are granted with a view towards basing future bonuses on the profitability of the Port as articulated in a 2000 Industrial Court Award and the productivity of workers.

Both Ministers expressed their pride, faith and confidence in the Board of Commissioners of the Port and anticipated a continued cordial working relationship.



Government moves to establish Integrated Financial Management Information Systems

The government is closer to enhancing its fiscal management with the arrival of 150 computer systems to be used in the Integrated Financial Management Information Systems (IFMIS).

In announcing the arrival of the computers, Finance Minister Dr. Errol Cort said, "Indeed, any fiscally prudent government must make an investment in the development of the governance infrastructure, necessary to support fiscal management.

"We must ensure accountability for the processing and reporting of government's operational budget, and we must re-establish policy credibility, as essential conditions for private sector led growth."

Dr. Cort said the computers were yet another milestone in the development of a modern and transparent Financial Management System. "I acknowledge the receipt of these 150 computer systems which will be allocated to all ministries throughout the public sector in an effort to facilitate the implementation of the FreeBalance Accounting System."

The Finance Minister advised that the first phase of deployment would be distributed within the accounts sections of the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Finance, Treasury Division, Audit Department and the Public Works Department.

He said it was through a strong partnership with the Royal Bank of Canada that the government was



Minister Cort (right), Mrs Eileen Murraine - Manager of Royal Bank of Canada, Financial Secretary Whitfield Harris and Budget Director David Matthias (back) with the new computers

able to negotiate the pricing and support relationship with Dell for the systems. "For this, we extend our heartfelt and deepest gratitude to Eileen Murraine, Manager, Royal Bank of Canada and Ross McDonald, Senior Vice President of Royal Bank of Canada, Bahamas and the Caribbean.

"The success of this endeavour is what can be achieved when both the Public and Private Sectors work together," he concluded.

Ms. Murraine said that her establishment was delighted to assist the government in this venture and will be willing to come forward once again to assist future beneficial causes that will facilitate the effective functioning of government.

The computers were bought from Dell USA at a cost of \$169,000.

Minister leads delegation to the WTO hearing of the US appeal on Internet gaming case

Minister of Finance and the Economy, Dr. Errol Cort, led Antigua and Barbuda's delegation to the February 21-22 hearing by the Appellate Body of the World Trade Organization of an appeal by the United States against the findings of the WTO Panel, which ruled in favour of Antigua and Barbuda in the now famous "Internet gaming case."

On Monday 21st February, Minister Cort presented a 21-page document to the Appellate Body outlining Antigua and Barbuda's case.

Dr. Cort in reiterating Antigua and Barbuda's position in the Internet Gaming Dispute stressed that "Antigua has not brought this case on behalf of the global Internet gambling industry. Further, Antigua

has always taken the position that gambling services should be properly regulated".

"We believe that any resolution to this dispute will see our two countries developing a scheme reasonably acceptable to both of us that allows Antiguan operators fair competitive access to consumers in the United States. Although the United States is not ready to negotiate with Antigua at this time, we are hopeful that upon Antigua prevailing in this appeal, the United States will consider constructive engagement with us to achieve a speedy and comprehensive solution," the Finance Minister said.

Opening statements were also presented by some of the third party participants to include, the European Community, Japan and Mexico.

Following the opening statements, the Appellate Body proceeded to ask the teams from Antigua and Barbuda and the US a series of questions which continued on the 22nd February.

According to Dr. Cort, most of the questions centred around the countries' interpretation of the GATS rules particularly Articles 14 & 16.

The Panel has reserved ruling and will issue a written decision within 45 days to Antigua and Barbuda and the United States.

Dr. Cort said he was satisfied with the level of argument presented by the legal team which was headed by Attorney-at-Law Mr. Mark Mendel. To this end, he says that he is cautiously optimistic since there are a number of issues that the Appellate Body will have to consider thus, making it a very complex case.

In addition to the Minister, the delegation to the oral hearing included Antigua and Barbuda's Permanent Representative to the WTO, H.E. Dr. John W. Ashe; the Deputy Permanent Representative to the WTO, H.E. Dr. Carl Roberts; Director of Gaming, Mrs Kaye Mc Donald and a legal team headed by Attorney-at-Law, Mark Mendel.



Prime Minister Spencer (centre) and Former President of El Salvador with Ambassador Colin Murdoch, Ambassador Moran and Margarita Escobar, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of El Salvador

Former President of El Salvador visits Prime Minister Spencer

On 10th February the former President of El Salvador and candidate for the position of Secretary-General of the Organisation of American States OAS Francisco Flores paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer.

President Flores was on a tour of the region seeking support for his candidacy. During his discussion with Prime Minister Spencer he outlined his background and the accomplishments of his administration while he was the President of El Salvador. He said that if chosen for the position of Secretary-General of the OAS he will bring the Organisation closer to the Heads of State of the hemisphere and in service of their agenda.

President Flores also congratulated Prime Minister Spencer on the accomplishments so far of his administration, outlining that his government has already projected to the international community that the business of running government has changed in the interest of the people.

Prime Minister Spencer laid out Antigua and Barbuda's vision for the OAS and the kind of support that CARICOM member states would be looking for in any candidate for the leadership of the OAS.

Finance and Economy says they have reviewed the total economic situation and decided to bear the loss of revenue and absorb the increase at this juncture.

However, the government said it will not be in a position to absorb further increases should petroleum prices continue to rise in the immediate future.

HEALTH

CAREC to assist in developing National Cervical Cancer Policy for Antigua and Barbuda.

The Ministry of Health in collaboration with the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC) has formed a Cervical Cancer Prevention and Control Committee to develop a National Cervical Cancer Policy for Antigua and Barbuda.

The policy will facilitate the coordination, standardization and management of the Cervical Cancer Prevention and Control Programme in Antigua and Barbuda. The main goal for such a programme is to reduce morbidity and mortality from cervical cancer.

Coordinator of the programme, Superintendent of Public Health Nurses, Mrs. Lindley Richardson disclosed that the Cervical Cancer Prevention and Control Programme will target females 20-50 years and 60 years and over.

Mrs. Richardson is encouraging women in Antigua and Barbuda to get their Pap smear screening done to detect any abnormal cancer cells, so that it can be treated in

President Flores is among three candidates seeking the position of Secretary General of the OAS. His Excellency Jose Miguel Insulza, Minister of the Interior of Chile and a former Minister of Foreign Affairs and His Excellency Luis Ernesto Derbez, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Mexico are the other two candidates.

Increased cost of gasoline and diesel to be absorbed by Government

The Government of Antigua and Barbuda is to absorb the increased cost of gasoline and diesel in the country.

This proposal resulted from the increase in gasoline purchased by West Indies Oil Company, the sole provider of fuel in the country, by 99 cents per gallon and diesel by 70 cents per gallon. If these increases were passed on to the consumer, the retail price of gasoline would increase to \$9.20 and diesel to \$9.01. Currently consumers pay \$8.21 for gasoline and \$8.31 for diesel per gallon at the pumps.

The absorbing of the increases is expected to cost the Government an estimated sum of one million dollars over the one month period of the consumption of this batch of products.

Although the initiative will put a strain on the Government, the Ministry of

its early stages. Pap smear screenings are presently being provided by the Clare Hall, All Saints, Browne's Avenue and Gray's Farm Health Centres.

The mandate of CAREC is to have the National Cervical Cancer Programme well organized and established by the year 2007.

Health care provision to be improved within Health Institutions

The Ministry of Health has established a flexi-work programme for nurses interested in working sessions at Holberton Hospital, Mental Hospital and Fiennes' Institute.

This initiative is in keeping with a series of actions taken by the Ministry to alleviate the nursing shortage currently being experienced by the institutions.

Clients and patients who access services at the institutions are expected to reap immediate benefits from this programme.

To facilitate the new programme, the Ministry of Health has invited locally registered nurses in the private sector, clinics and nurses currently employed at Holberton Hospital, Mental Hospital and Fiennes' Institute to register at the Nursing Administration Office at Holberton Hospital, or with the Superintendent of Public Health Nurse within the Central Board of Health.

Government negotiates with Stanford Group on Mount St. John Medical Centre Project

On the 9th February, the Government of Antigua and Barbuda commenced a series of meetings with the



Health Minister John Maginley

Stanford Group to discuss issues relating to the Mount St. John's Medical Centre.

Health Minister John Maginley convened the meeting with a team from the Stanford Financial Group lead by its Chief Financial Officer Mr. Jim Davis to discuss the future development of the medical centre and establish new loan arrangements.

During the discussion three areas were identified for negotiations.

- The Stanford Group will continue to work with the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Health to produce a project document to assist in finding a partner to operate Mount St John's Medical Centre
- Debts owing to Medical Benefit Scheme for the Mount St. John's Medical Centre.
- Finding a source of revenue to assist in the redevelopment of Holberton Hospital.

The Health Minister said that he will continue to hold discussions with the Stanford Financial Group, health officials and the Ministry of Finance regarding these three areas.

Earlier this year Prime Minister Spencer announced his intention of authorizing the Minister of Health to commence discussions with the Stanford Financial group, in an effort to reduce the monies owed to the group so that the Mount St. John's Medical Centre can become operational.



Holberton Hospital surroundings getting facelift

A project aimed at beautifying the surroundings of Holberton Hospital has started.

Health officials along with the Hospital Administrator Gary Thomas and the Health Minister's Advisor, Basil Stuart, toured the institution recently to observe the commencement of the project.

Mr. Stuart said the project which includes the painting of the Causality Department, trimming of the trees and repair work on the bathrooms will uplift the appearance of the health institution.

In addition, a survey is being conducted on the property to update the drawings of the Holberton Hospital and the Fiennes Institute. The survey will also assist the design process for the complete rehabilitation of Holberton Hospital and the Fiennes Institute.

The next project in the pipeline for Holberton Hospital will be the construction of a new laundry room in the proximity of the maternity ward.

Clinton Foundation continues support of Antigua and Barbuda's fight against HIV/AIDS

Antigua and Barbuda will continue to receive technical assistance from the Clinton Foundation in collaboration with the Harvard Medical School.

This was the indication given by the two-member team - Dr. Christina Kim and Lisa Hirschhorn, who were recently in Antigua conducting an OECS Regional Coordinating Mechanism Assessment on the HIV/AIDS Care, Support and Treatment Programme.

During the meeting with Health personnel which included the Clinical Care Team and members of the AIDS Secretariat, a number of areas were highlighted, so as to get a better understanding as to how the care, support and treatment programme is being executed.

These included the needs of persons living with HIV/AIDS and their challenges, pregnant women who are HIV positive, medication, counselling, home base visits and the training of pharmacists, doctors and other health personnel who have direct management with Persons Living With HIV/AIDS.

The main thrust of the Clinton Foundation is also to work in collaboration with other agencies such as the University of the West Indies CHART Programme, to offer affordable Anti-Retroviral Drugs (ARV) to countries, so that they in turn can offer these to persons living with HIV/AIDS.

At present there are 36 persons who are receiving the anti-retroviral drugs from this control care, support and treatment programme in Antigua and Barbuda.

AIDS Programme Manager - Mrs. Janet Weston in her report announced that 23 new cases of HIV positives were recorded between January and September 2004.

Mrs. Weston also spoke of the HIV Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) Sites that have been set up at several Health Centres. The centres offering the service are All Saints, Clare Hall, Browne's Avenue, St. John's, and Johnson's Point Health Centres. The Voluntary Counselling and Testing can also be done at the AIDS Secretariat and the Antigua Planned Parenthood Association (APPA).

From 1985 to September 2004 there were 478 reported cases of HIV in Antigua and Barbuda. Of this total 131 persons have since died of AIDS related illnesses. There were 92 males and 39 females.

Dialysis Unit at Holberton gets new equipment

The Medical Benefits Scheme has purchased a new Dialysis Machine and a Reverse Osmosis Plant for the Dialysis Unit at the Holberton Hospital in order to increase its capacity.

At present, there are four dialysis machines at the Unit. The first three machines were donated by the Chairman of the Stanford Group Mr. R. Allen Stanford, when the Unit was established in July, 1997. The other machine was donated by a well known Antiguan businessman Mr. George John.

Dialysis treatment is for patients with end-stage renal disease/kidney failure, which is mainly caused by uncontrolled hypertension and diabetes

The Dialysis Unit currently accommodates 22 patients three times per

week with each person receiving dialysis treatment for an average of three and a half hours per session.

A Senior Health Official revealed that dialysis treatment is very costly. The Health Official explained that for one person per year it costs EC\$63,434.00 in consumables only. These include needles, dialysis fluids and other medication. That amount does not include costs for the maintenance of the Unit's equipment, machines, staffing and other expenditures.

In the meantime, the Dialysis Unit will be undergoing renovation work shortly.

This was announced by the Hospital Administrator, Mr. Gary Thomas, who also said that the estimated cost for the renovation work to be carried out by the Holberton Restoration Committee, is EC\$28,000.00.

Mr. Thomas said that so far EC\$20,000.00 has been collected for the project from two civic minded non-profit organisations.

He said the Antigua and Barbuda Renal Society has donated EC\$10,000.00 towards the improvement of the dialysis unit.

The other \$10,000.00 was raised from guests' donations at Dr R. A Walwyn and Mrs Myra Walwyn 50th Wedding Anniversary celebration and presented to the Society of Friends of the Holberton Hospital which donated the funds to assist with the upgrade of the Renal Dialysis Unit at the Hospital.

Hospital Administrator Gary Thomas lauded both organisations for their contributions and encouraged the general public to fully support the Antigua and Barbuda Renal Society and the Society of Friends of the Holberton Hospital in their future fund-raising efforts.

The Society of Friends of the Holberton Hospital has been associated with Holberton for many years and continues to make immeasurable contributions to the institution from its fund raising efforts.



Antigua and Barbuda strengthens ties with Mexico

Relations between Antigua and Barbuda and Mexico were further strengthened when Her Excellency Mrs. Luz Elena Bueno presented her credentials to Governor General Sir James B. Carlisle on 14th February .

In presenting her credentials, Ambassador Bueno assured the Governor General of the high regard in which her country holds Antigua and Barbuda and expressed the desire to develop a formal mechanism for cooperation between the two countries.

Prior to her visit to Government House, Ambassador Bueno paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Baldwin Spencer. The Prime Minister took the opportunity to express appreciation for Mexico's recent donation of twenty-six scholarships to the people of Antigua and Barbuda

PM Spencer also expressed his admiration for President Vicente Fox's



Prime Minister Spencer and Ambassador Bueno with Ambassador Joan Underwood and Sr. Ambassador Ramez Hadeed

administration and his accomplishments since coming to office in 2000. The Prime Minister alluded to the similarities between the two countries in that – like his UPP administration – President Fox came to office after waging a campaign against corruption and pledging to dismantle the existing bureaucratic structure which he described as corrupt and inefficient.

In response Ambassador Bueno acknowledged the accomplishments of the new UPP administration and the challenges that it was encountering in executing the necessary changes. She again invited the Prime Minister to call on her country for technical assistance whenever and wherever necessary.

While in Antigua the Mexican Ambassador also met Senior Ambassador Sir Ramez Hadeed and her counterpart Ambassador Joan H. Underwood. During that meeting Ambassador Bueno presented an outline of Mexico's programme of cooperation for development and communicated her country's commitment to fast tracking a programme of assistance for Antigua. Ambassador Underwood has been

tasked with following through on this initiative.

Ambassador Bueno's visit was followed closely by the arrival of a Mexican technical team which collaborated with the Ministries of Education and Foreign Affairs and selected the twenty-six students who will shortly take up the scholarships in Mexico.

EDUCATION

Government to establish Antigua and Barbuda Institute of Continuing Studies

The Government of Antigua and Barbuda, through the Ministry of Education, will later this year establish the Antigua and Barbuda Institute of Continuing Studies (ABICS).

Coordinator of Technical Studies in the Ministry of Education Reginald Peterson said the initiative will allow interested persons to attain the skills necessary to make themselves more marketable throughout the world.

Mr. Peterson, who was at the time attending the Board of Education Exhibition of Works at the Multi-Purpose Centre, made it clear that the Antigua and Barbuda Institute of Continuing Studies (ABICS) will be established to facilitate the ongoing education and training of nationals and other residents. This programme is expected to commence in September and will offer a wide variety of courses.

Mr. Peterson said that ultimately the Antigua and Barbuda Institute of Continuing Studies expects to move on to offering first degree studies.

Minister of Education says Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting a success

At a recent Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting in Jamaica, Minister of Education Bertrand Joseph said the most important report was that of the UWI Task Force on the Liberalization of Higher Education and its impact on the UWI and Tertiary Education in the region.

The report which was prepared by Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Principal of Cave Hill Campus in Barbados, Hilary Beckles, looks at the question of higher education in the Caribbean, in the context of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). The report also calls for the harmonization of Governments approach in dealing with the delivery of educational services by UWI.

Challenges were also looked at and the whole aspect of higher education institutions invading the Caribbean or UWI's space. Out of this, regional governments were urged to not only agree on a regional approach like the WTO negotiations, but also national strategies that will take the UWI into account as the regional university, and a partner to national tertiary institutions.



Antigua and Barbuda deposits CCJ Instruments with CARICOM Secretariat

Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer has deposited Antigua and Barbuda's Instruments of Accession and Ratification of the Caribbean Court of Justice with the CARICOM Secretariat.

As part of the process towards the full implementation of the Caribbean Court of Justice CCJ, countries within CARICOM must deposit various instruments pertaining to the body passed in their respective Houses of Parliament, to bring the agreement establishing the CCJ into force.

While in Suriname for the 16th Inter-Sessional Meeting of Heads of the Conference of the Caribbean Community Prime Minister Spencer presented to the Chairman and Secretary General of CARICOM President Runaldo Ronald Venetiaan and Dr. Edwin Carrington, the following instruments of Accession and Ratification:

- Revised Agreement establishing the CCJ Trust Fund
- Protocol on the status, privileges and immunities of the CCJ and the Regional Judicial and Legal Service Commission
- Agreement Establishing the CCJ



Prime Minister Spencer presenting the Instruments to President Venetiaan. Ambassador Colin Murdoch (left) and Dr Edwin Carrington witnessed the event

- Protocol to the agreement establishing the CCJ relating to the Juridical Personality and Legal Capacity of the court.

Antigua and Barbuda has only signed on to the CCJ in its Original Jurisdiction, with a referendum and two-thirds majority in the House of Representatives needed for the country to adopt the court in its Appellate Jurisdiction.

In the exercise of its original jurisdiction, the CCJ will be discharging the functions of an international tribunal applying rules of international law in respect of the interpretation and application of the Treaty. In this regard, the CCJ would be performing functions like the European Court of Justice, the European Court of First Instance, the Andean Court of Justice and the International Court of Justice. In short, the proposed CCJ is intended to be a hybrid institution - a municipal court of last resort and an international court with compulsory and exclusive jurisdiction in respect of the interpretation and application of the Treaty.



Prime Minister Spencer cutting the ribbon to commission the plant. Barbuda representative Trevor Walker looks on.

BARBUDA

Barbuda gets Reverse Osmosis Plant

On the 21st February Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer commissioned a Reverse Osmosis Plant in Barbuda allowing the residents to have pipe-borne water for the first time.

In addressing the gathering the Prime Minister said that it is incomprehensible that to this day, in the sixth year of the 21st century, Barbuda, just 20 miles away from Antigua, has been left without pipe-borne water. He noted that since coming into office his administration has developed a new relationship with the people of Barbuda and that relationship has so far produced benefits for the people of the island.

"The Commonwealth Review team reported that Barbudans had confirmed a vastly improved relationship between Barbuda and Antigua. There is an abundance of evidence that insofar as Barbuda is concerned, my administration is manifestly living up to the United Progressive Party's Motto: People first. This water treatment plant is a striking example. In our Agenda for Change we

promised that this water treatment plant would be a high priority. We made it a high priority. From today, with the United Progressive Party less than a year in office, Barbudans have their own water treatment plant," the Prime Minister noted.

Prime Minister Spencer said that with the UPP Administration it is a win-win situation for the people of Antigua

and Barbuda. He pointed out that in less than one year of his administration, it has been proven that his government is about performance. "My administration is all about

performance. That is why the material is here for the road construction programme which is about to begin in Barbuda. The United Progressive Party Administration is all about performance. That is why we have sourced funds for a new Secondary School for Barbuda, which will open for the new school year. My Administration is performance driven. That is why Cabinet has approved the funds for a Barbuda Justice Complex. The Barbuda Justice Complex will accommodate a Magistrate's Court, a Police Station and Police Quarters. We promised you a better Barbuda. We are giving you what it takes to make Barbuda better," he concluded

The Reverse Osmosis Plant has the capacity to produce over 20,000 gallons of water per day.

Fiennes Institute receives gifts from Antiguan national living in the UK

Mrs Debbie Matthias, in collaboration with Ms. Olivette Browne and Rams' Shipping, recently donated much needed gifts to the Fiennes Institute in Antigua and Barbuda.

Mrs Matthias outlined that she was informed by Ms. Browne that the Carlisle Home in Rickmansworth was about to close and that the beds and furniture would be discarded. Knowing that the Fiennes Institute could make good use of these items, she and her husband John journeyed to the Home to ascertain that the beds and furniture were worth sending home. In all, she received nine zimmer frames, ten single beds with base and a box of disposable commodes and urinals. These were shipped, free of charge, to Antigua and Barbuda by Rams' Shipping.

In a letter dated 4th February, 2005 to Mrs Matthias, the Master of the Fiennes Institute offered utmost thanks to her and all her colleagues for the generous gift package. "Words" he said, "will not be enough to express our appreciation but can assure you that your efforts will not go in vain". He promised her that the items "will go a long way in caring for the elderly."

For her part, she is extremely grateful to Ms. Olivette Browne and family, the Hornsey Moravian Church, her husband John and Rams' Shipping for all their assistance and hard work.

Ministry of Tourism hosts Trade in Tourism Services Workshop

As the Caribbean States approach imminent deadlines in a number of global trade negotiations including the World Trade Organisation/General Agreement on Trade in Services (WTO/GATS), the African, Caribbean, Pacific/European Union (ACP/EU) negotiations for Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), it is critical that tourism stakeholders in both the private sector and the Government are fully aware of the impact such economic arrangements will have on the tourism industry.

The Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation sought the assistance of the Caribbean Tourism Organisation in conducting a two-day workshop to enlighten participants on the implications for Caribbean tourism of these regional trade agreements.

On 14th February the workshop commenced with top Government officials in trade, tourism and foreign affairs, as well as managers of major hotels and tourism attractions at the Antigua and Barbuda Hospitality Training Institute.

Minister of Tourism, Harold Lovell, who spearheaded the effort to stage this workshop in Antigua, said that the exercise helped to create an informed partnership of public and private sector stakeholders with a sound knowledge of the language and issues relating to trade in tourism services. "Of most importance is that Antiguans and Barbudans are better equipped to function and do business in the liberalised global economy."



Prime Minister Spencer and Chilean President Lagos during their discussions

Antigua and Barbuda and Chile move to closer cooperation

Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda Baldwin Spencer and President of Chile Ricardo Lagos Escobar have pledged to deepen bilateral relations between both countries.

Prime Minister Spencer and President Lagos while in Georgetown, Guyana for the opening of the CARICOM Secretariat Headquarters, held high level discussions on a number of areas of cooperation.

During the discussions, Prime Minister Spencer informed President Lagos that it was very significant that he had journeyed to Guyana to participate in the ceremonial launching of the CARICOM Secretariat, which was a symbol of Caribbean unity.

President Lagos said that what CARICOM had accomplished was very significant and extended an invitation to

Prime Minister Spencer to make an official visit to Chile.

On matters of cooperation, President Lagos indicated that the Chilean candidacy for the Secretary General of the Organisation of American States OAS was a national candidacy, supported by all political parties in Chile. Prime Minister Spencer and his CARICOM colleagues addressed the issue during the Inter-sessional Meeting last week in Suriname.

Antigua and Barbuda and Chile in January of this year commenced discussions on ways of collaborating in the areas of Agriculture and language training. Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer initiated the discussion last June while attending the European Union-Latin America and the Caribbean Summit in Mexico. Since then Antigua and Barbuda has submitted five project proposals for consideration by the Chileans. Based on the preliminary review of these proposals, both countries are optimistic that a mutually beneficial system of technical cooperation can be implemented within the short-term.

Lorraine Headley, Coordinator of the workshop indicated that interest in the workshop had been immense. The seminar was facilitated by Mr. Lawrence Placide, Director of the International Trade Negotiations Unit of the Trinidad & Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce, and Jan Yves Remy, Services Analyst of the Caribbean Regional Negotiating Machinery.

Port Charge not responsible for recent state of Cruise Affairs!

The \$2.50 port charge which was recently the focus of much debate as it related to the future of Antigua and Barbuda's Cruise Tourism Industry, cannot be blamed for the present state of affairs, when scrutinizing the "Summer Fall" Cruise phenomenon.

This was signaled by Tourism Minister Harold Lovell during a recently held press conference to relay information on his most recent mission to Miami, Florida to speak with officials of the FCCA (Florida Caribbean Cruise Association). The Minister noted that this suggestion has been "thrown out of the ring" of possible initiatives geared towards boosting profits in the Cruise Sector.

Minister Lovell backed by other partners within the Cruise Tourism Sector revealed the details of the phenomenon, such as "an ever increasing number of cruise liners are now departing from US mainland ports instead of the more traditional San Juan departure (this taking the vessels out of the region)". As a result of this trend during the summer months, cruise vessels are now migrating to the Mediterranean area and even Alaska.

Cruise ship in Harbour



This could be attributed to a number of factors ranging from the merger or "buy-out" of various cruise lines by a single entity because of bankruptcy or other such economic trends, to current market situations and the demand for specific destinations, varying definitively from season to season.

As may have been recently implied, the \$2.50 Port Charge IS NOT a factor that contributes to this phenomenon.

According to Cameron Frazier, Director of Antigua Pier Group Ltd, (another cruise sector partner), by the end of Sea-trade 2004 to be held in March, precise announcements will be made with regard to the success of efforts to lobby more vessels to make the eastern Caribbean their area of call during the summer months. Already one vessel has been secured to make calls to Antigua during this period.

Tourism Minister Lovell pointed out that "the Eastern Caribbean has to address the problem collectively...the idea now is to work with the Cruise lines to arrange long term agreements for long term growth."

Antigua and Barbuda's Cruise Tourism Industry has recorded extraordinary growth for the year 2004, with approximately 522,743 passengers arriving on island. This is the impetus for the major efforts being embarked upon by the Tourism Ministry in negotiating for additional cruise ship visits during peak periods and off-seasons geared towards surpassing this mark in 2005.



English Harbour Rum

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