



NEWSLETTER

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CARICOM Heads with UK Prime Minister Tony Blair

On the 21st November Prime Minister the Honourable Baldwin Spencer arrived in London on his way to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Malta. Before departing for Malta Prime Minister Spencer joined his other CARICOM Heads in a meeting with the Prime Minister of the UK Tony Blair at Number 10 Downing Street.

Prime Minister Spencer, who expressed satisfaction with the meeting, said that some of the issues affecting CARICOM countries including crime and security, debt cancellation and assistance in transitioning from traditional trade preferential economies to economies competing in an open market were discussed in detail.

Leaders stressed the importance of crime and security and praised the UK for its role in assisting the region particularly, OECS countries, through the Regional Security System (RSS) mechanism. "This mechanism has worked and we recognize the role played by the UK which has been supportive as it relates to training and the coast guard. We, however, believe that the UK should go beyond that and assist us in providing funding for the programme," PM Spencer stated.

"We would very much appreciate if the UK can provide financial support for the RSS Air Wing Division which has served the region well in drug interdictions and seizures and disaster relief. The acquisition of equipment and training in the form of developing middle management personnel in police forces are urgent needs," he added.

Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer also outlined that the leaders spoke on the issue of debt of small countries. "As far as CARICOM member states are concerned, although we are among the most indebted countries in the world, because of our middle income status, we are not given the benefit of debt cancellation under the regime known as the Heavily Indebted Poorest Countries (HIPC) Trust Fund," he outlined.

"We fully appreciate and laud the efforts of the UK and G8 countries in supporting Africa in respect of debt cancellation and believe that a similar arrangement should be put in place for CARICOM. The record show that we rank among the most indebted countries in the world," PM Spencer said.

During the discussions with Prime Minister Tony Blair, the Heads also addressed the UK assisting CARICOM with the establishment of the Development Fund and Agency that would form part of the establishment of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy. "CARICOM countries are in transition from trade preferential countries to one relying on services which require a number of mechanisms be put in place to make the transition an easy one. We must ensure that we are able to survive in an open market," PM Spencer concluded.

The Commonwealth Heads Meeting addressed issues such as the outcome of the United Nations 2005 World Summit, the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Corporation and the Promotion of the Commonwealth's Fundamental Political Values. While in Malta, Prime Minister Spencer and other Commonwealth Heads was the special guests at receptions hosted by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the II, Commonwealth Secretary General Don McKinnon, Prime Minister of Malta Dr. Lawrence Gonzi and President of Malta H.E. Dr. Edward Fenech-Adami .

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A Christmas Message from His Excellency Dr Carl Roberts, High Commissioner



As we approach the close of 2005, it is an appropriate time to reflect on how a good and gracious Lord has blessed us throughout the year. Though it is also a time to reflect, we take time out to rejoice on God's gifts to each of us and pass on his love by sharing what we have with those we come in contact.

We are reminded of the fragility of life. In December 2004 around 200,000 persons, who might have made exciting plans for Christmas celebrations, were never to see the fruition of those plans. Throughout the year, disaster after disaster, reminded us that we are to constantly and ardently pray for the safe-keeping of our families, friends and fellow citizens. Let us therefore not forget all those who have suffered or have been

impacted by any of these traumatic events.

The God we serve constantly reminds us of the hope of tomorrow. If we trust in him, prayfully ask of him, he will provide our daily needs. Let us therefore ask for wisdom to be granted to those who have been chosen to lead us whether at work, in Government or otherwise. May we be constantly that his all-seeing eyes oversees us and his welcoming arms are always there to receive us. Let us live our lives fully assured that if called upon we may give a proud account of our stewardship.

As you read this newsletter, you will indeed see how busy your representatives have been. Pray for God's protection and guidance in the coming year.

I take this opportunity on behalf of my wife and family, entire staff at the Mission and on my own behalf to wish each of you a Blessed Christmas and a Happy, Rewarding New Year. May God continue his blessings on each and every one of you.

**Dr Carl Roberts
High Commissioner**



Minister of Finance and the Economy,
Dr Errol Cort

Finance and the Economy Minister chairs Inaugural Meeting of the Customs Renewal Steering Committee

The Minister of Finance and the Economy, Dr. L. Errol Cort recently chaired the Inaugural Meeting of the Customs Renewal Steering Committee.

The Customs Renewal Programme of Antigua and Barbuda is a complete transformation of both the public and private administration of import and export trade, and international arrivals and departures of travellers. The Customs Renewal Programme was launched on 1st September 2005.

The Committee comprises Mr. Raphael Brown, Comptroller of the Customs & Excise Division, Mrs. Gaye Hechme, General Manager of the Industrial Development Board, Mr. Joseph Sealey, Industrial Advisor (Ag) of the Industry & Commerce Division,

Dr. Patrick Lay, Director of the Information Technology Center, Mr. Clarvis Joseph, Chairman of the Antigua Port Authority, Mr. Stephen Joseph, Managing Director of Bargain Centre, Mr. Nathan Dundas, Manager of Bryson Shipping, and Mr. Wilbur Edwards, Director of Network/Sales LIAT. The Committee was joined by Mr. Winston Bailey, Customs Renewal Coordinator, Mr. George Brown - Member of the Customs Renewal Team, and Mrs. Gloria Reid, CARTAC Consultant to the Customs Renewal Programme.



Prime Minister Spencer (second from left) joined other leaders at the OECS Meeting in Anguilla

OECS Heads urged to Reform Tax System

The 42nd Meeting of Heads of Government of the OECS was held at the Malliouhana Hotel, Meads Bay, Anguilla early November.

During the first day's working session Heads looked at the OECS economies in external trade negotiations in an effort to formulate ways to deal with the challenges of WTO regulations on international trade and transactions.

During the discussions it was pointed out that countries within the OECS needed to move quickly to reform its tax systems in order to maintain the stability of their fiscal performance.

Economies in the OECS rely heavily on revenue from international trade and transactions (import duties), more so from other duties and charges (ODCs). In member states of the OECS, the ODCs comprise at the very least consumption tax and customs tax. The reliance on ODCs has become a problem, given that they are deemed as illegal under WTO regulations.

For Antigua and Barbuda, if the consumption tax and customs tax



are successfully challenged in the WTO it could mean the country losing 86 percent of its Revenue stream.

During the discussions Prime Minister Spencer announced that his country is in the process of reforming its tax structure and is examining the possibility of the introduction of a sales tax. The Heads agreed that introducing a sales tax or VAT are viable options available to protect their revenue stream.

The Heads also looked at the draft OECS Economic Union Treaty and received a progress report on the work of the Regional Coordinating Mechanism for the HIV/AIDS Project.

AHTA commends Tourism Ministry

The Antigua Hotels and Tourist Association has congratulated and complimented the Ministry of Tourism for their bold initiative and foresight, approximately a year and half ago, when they engaged Condor in discussions which have now borne fruit.

According to Acting Chairman of the AHTA Ted Isaac, the result is that Condor has resumed weekly flights from Frankfurt, Germany to Antigua and Barbuda. "The Association also congratulates Dr. Werner Giersch, Honorary Consul for Germany, along with the AHTA members for their tireless efforts in coordinating a most impressive marketing programme to support the flight.

According to Isaac, the Association was made aware that there have been some detractors regarding the programme. "We stand firmly behind the Ministry in this venture as we are confident that the residual benefits will be seen by hotels, local vendors, car rental companies, taxi drivers, local tour operators, restaurateurs, souvenir

shops and duty free stores. Spin-off benefits would include increased visits to historical sites and attractions and increased patronage of cultural and theme events," he said.

Isaac said that the reality is that the airline industry has changed considerably and this dynamism will continue into the future. He said that as a result, the game is being played on a different playing field, where subsidies to these companies have become the norm, particularly throughout the Caribbean. He also pointed out that the value of the subsidies should not only be measured by Government's guarantees to the airlines, but must be looked at from the entire trickle down effect that this creates.

"For the apprehensive-minded, it should be understood that the Government will only be liable for the unsold seats guaranteed. However, we wish to strongly suggest that with the robust marketing efforts to date, and which will continue, the AHTA remains confident that the entire programme will be successful. It is our hope that Antiguan will embrace this initiative and extend to our German guests the usual warm Antiguan hospitality," Isaac noted.

Earlier this year, Mr. Axel Bulthaupt, a prominent German Television personality, was in Antigua along with a film crew that filmed various aspects of our local culture, including Auntie Esther's Sunday morning breakfast. The 30-minute programme, called "Bulthaupt in Antigua", is part of a travel series produced since 1996, and will be aired at prime-time on January 1st 2006.



Dr Mansoor and Counsellor song during discussions on Information Technology

Information Minister discusses cooperation with the People's Republic of China

Minister of State responsible for Information and Broadcasting Dr. Edmond Mansoor held discussions recently with senior officials of the Chinese Information Ministry in an effort to further promote mutual understanding and develop friendly relations between the governments of the People's Republic of China and Antigua and Barbuda.

Counsellor Song Ronghua and Deputy Director Wang Zhiquan of the Information Department of Foreign Affairs Ministry of China also held discussions with Dr. Mansoor on examining the possibilities of cooperation and exchange in the news field between the two countries.

Dr. Mansoor told the diplomats that his government believes in a free press and is currently working at rationalizing, re-branding and re-imaging the state owned ABS Radio and Television making it performance driven.

The Information Minister also discussed areas of training, technical cooperation and sharing experiences in information and media management.



(l to r) Deputy Director Wang, Director of Communications Maurice Merchant and Counsellor Song

establishment of a Regional Language Centre in Antigua and Barbuda to facilitate the teaching of the Chinese languages.

Merchant, during his remarks, also highlighted the close ties between both countries and stated that the government of Antigua and Barbuda will continue to strengthen those ties.

The Minister updated the diplomats on progress being made in Information Technology development in the country, sailing week and the annual carnival festivities.

Counsellor Song said that he is looking forward to discussing with his superiors the proposals put forward by the Information Minister and extended an invitation for the Minister to pay an official visit to China. Minister Mansoor will prepare a detailed proposal on the possible areas of cooperation for delivery to the Chinese officials.

The Chinese Diplomats also held meetings with members of the Government's Information Division and Media Congress to discuss ways of developing cooperation in journalism.

The meeting chaired by Director of Communications Maurice Merchant, highlighted the need for the people of both Antigua and Barbuda and China to learn more about each other since there already exists such strong economic ties.

The media grouping suggested media group exchanges and the need to bridge the language barrier between both countries and it was pointed out that the establishment of language programmes should be explored. Merchant outlined that he is confident that the government would support the

"The relationship between Antigua and Barbuda and the People's Republic of China has been one of mutual cooperation and understanding. The economic relationship is at an all time high with investments in Antigua and Barbuda now largely through grants and not loan arrangements," he said.

"China is an important partner of Antigua and Barbuda. There exists a strong, constructive relationship between our two countries. We fully support the basis principle of "One Country, two Systems" which promotes cooperation in various fields between mainland China and its regions," Merchant concluded.

Counsellor Song also noted that Antigua and Barbuda was the first country in the region to establish diplomatic relations with China and his government cherishes this. Both sides agreed to maintain strong communication links.

Telecommunications Division continues discussions on communications liberalization

The Second Roundtable Discussion on Information Communication Technology organized

by the Telecommunications Division of the Ministry of Information, Broadcasting and Telecommunications was conducted recently centring on the Draft National ICT policy and issues surrounding the full liberalization of the telecommunications market.

The session was moderated by Delreo Newman, Telecommunications Consultant and was attended by stakeholders in the Information Technology field in Antigua and Barbuda.

Minister responsible for Information Technology Dr. Edmond Mansoor initiated the roundtable discussions weeks ago and had been holding on-going discussions with Cable and Wireless' CEO Davidson Charles on the issue of an early end to the exclusive monopoly agreement that Cable and Wireless has over international direct dial access.

"We are committed to opening up the telecommunications market, but there are a number of issues that must be considered, including interconnection, competition regulation and regulatory authority and universal device access," Dr. Mansoor noted.

Minister Mansoor said the current Telecommunications Act which dates back to 1951 is totally archaic and does not meet the robust requirements of a modern telecommunications market.

It was also disclosed that the Government has indicated to Cable and Wireless that the exclusive agreement (which was negotiated by the previous administration for a twenty five year period which expires in 2012) will expire on December 31, 2005.

"The exclusive monopoly arrangement has prevented the market growth of Antigua and Barbuda's



international access. We must create an environment that will permit greater access to broadband technology at cheaper rates. In this regard, the landing of additional submarine fibre optic cable systems is an important component in the thrust to developing Antigua and Barbuda as a Regional Centre of Excellence in Information Communication Technology," he concluded.

Foreign Ministers meeting a success for Caribbean Countries

PM Spencer Chairs Session on Implementation of Small States Agenda

Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer hailed the two day Commonwealth Foreign Ministers Meeting in Malta a success for small developing states.

Prime Minister Spencer who chaired the Session of the meeting dealing with the Implementation of Small States Agenda, said that a number of issues were reviewed and it was emphasized that in this world of economic, political and social transformation, the problem of small states such as Antigua and Barbuda must be taken into account as we move forward. He outlined that the CARICOM Foreign Ministers present were very strong in their view that special and differential treatment must be given to small island states and other small nations if they are to play a significant role in this new economic dispensation.

"We were very strong that the communiqué coming out of the Foreign Ministers Meeting must clearly highlight that special and differential treatment must be given to small island states. I



Prime Minister Spencer (fourth from left) at the Foreign Ministers' Meeting. High Commissioner Dr Carl Roberts seated behind the Prime Minister.

can report that we have been successful in ensuring that the decisions of this conference will be so communicated where special and differential treatment must now be an integral part of the deliberations going into the Hong Kong Ministerial with the World Trade Organisation WTO in December," PM Spencer noted.

"We are satisfied that this was a significant break through because it was felt that reference to special and differential treatment must not be in the communiqué. The CARICOM delegations all spoke with one united voice with other small states supporting that concept as well," he added.

"The question of how small island states are going to play a meaningful role in new dispensation was a major topic for discussion and the Caribbean countries were able to point out that our contribution to the issues of peace and security, stability and democracy far outweighs our size and resources and if we are to continue to contribute significantly then we must be treated in such a way to make the transition from traditional economies to the new economy which the WTO is calling on us to adopt," PM Spencer pointed out.

He said that the Caribbean can make the transition but need time and special and differential treatment and the support of developed countries and international agencies and organizations that have developmental agendas.

"The vulnerability of these small states was clearly recognized and even though we are considered middle income countries and therefore our per capita income is too high to allow for other considerations, we were able to make the point which was accepted that we are more vulnerable to internal, external and natural shocks to our respective economies that require attention over and above the fact that we are considered middle income countries," he said.

PM Spencer continued, "We believe that the message got over very well indeed and that the Commonwealth as an institution now has a responsibility to take the message to the WTO and other international organizations supporting the claim for justice, equality and a level playing field in the world economic arena for small developing countries such as Antigua and Barbuda."



He made clear that the issue is one of human rights for small states because it is a human right for small states to be given the opportunity to develop. "It is a right that we are claiming that we have and we are not begging and preaching to the international community. We are saying that we have a right to be given the opportunity to develop and the avenues should be given for us to do so. We hope we have sent the signal that small developing states would not stand idly by and allow our countries to be marginalized by the world community," he concluded.

The Prime Minister of the Antigua and Barbuda felt that the meeting ended on a high note and paved the way for the Commonwealth Heads Meeting. CHOGM received the communiqué coming out of the Foreign Ministers Meeting which set the pace for their deliberations which took the form of retreats and executive sessions.

The Foreign Ministers over the two days also addressed issues of peace and security, terrorism, combating corruption, bridging the digital divide, the Millennium Development Goals and investment among others.

Internet Gaming giant BetonSports expands operations in Antigua and Barbuda

Following on the heels of the Budget presentation in Parliament on Wednesday November 30th, 2005, David Carruthers, CEO of BetonSports announced to the Government his company's firm commitment to expand its operations in Antigua and Barbuda.

"The Board of Directors of BetonSports at its Annual General

Meeting, which was held on December 2, 2005 in Antigua, took the decision to expand its marketing and research development unit in Antigua. This will initially create 25 new jobs," a statement from the company outlined.

Mr. Carruthers indicated that his board's decision to expand the company's base in Antigua was as a result of the Government's commitment to the industry and the proactive stance the Government, through the Minister of Finance has taken to win-back gaming companies. The CEO stated that the Minister's "Win-Back Initiative" held in San Jose Costa Rica signalled to him and the Board that Antigua and Barbuda is being proactive in branding itself as a well-regulated premiere i-gaming jurisdiction with regulations which are of the highest international standards and best practices. As a result, the Board deemed that Antigua and Barbuda would fit their strategic plans for future development.

The Minister of Finance and the Economy was very pleased by this announcement and indicated to the CEO that the Government was encouraged by the decision of BetonSports to expand operations in Antigua and Barbuda. The Minister underscored the point that the Government remains very committed to the future growth of Internet Gaming in the jurisdiction and expressed the Governments appreciation to the company for positively demonstrating its commitment to Antigua and Barbuda and looked forward to the company increasing its complement in the future.

The Director of Gaming, Ms. Kaye McDonald, is very pleased with the recent decision taken by BetonSports and stated that the initial expansion will bring the companies Antigua staff compliment to about 38 which is positive as it will create employment opportunities for a young

and dynamic labour pool. She further stated that FSRC, Division of Gaming welcomes this expansion as there are recommendations being proposed by the Division to ensure, through regulatory measures, that gaming companies licensed by the state to conduct Interactive Gaming and Interactive Wagering have a physical operating presence in Antigua and Barbuda.

BetonSports is one of the largest on-line sports book and casinos in the world and is a publicly listed company on the Alternative Investment Market (AIM), which is a part of the London Stock Exchange (LSE). Presently, most of the company's operations are based in San Jose, Costa Rica.

Antigua and Barbuda voted Best Wedding Island of the Year

The twin island destination of Antigua and Barbuda was recently voted "Best Wedding Island of the Year" by Caribbean World Magazine at their 11th International Caribbean World Awards in Britain.

The British travel and lifestyle monthly, Caribbean World Magazine, honours leaders of excellence in hospitality and service in a variety of categories including Best Honeymoon Island, Best Luxury Resort, and Best Sailing and Yachting Island. Winners are chosen by the magazine's readers.

Although Antigua and Barbuda remains untouched and unspoiled, it boasts international acclaim: World class sailing and diving, sensational resorts, and premier cuisine making the destination one of the world's top wedding and honeymoon tourism destinations. The pristine beauty of this tropical paradise



gives couples a chance to escape from everyday life while the soothing trade-winds spread romance all over the island.

Antigua and Barbuda offers the perfect setting for romance to flourish whether couples seek privacy, beauty or adventure in their destination wedding locale. Betrothed couples may opt to exchange vows on one of our 365 sugary white sand beaches as the lucid turquoise water gently laps upon the shores. Or, the true romantics may opt to say "I do" against a backdrop of the most breathtaking sunset-- made even more spectacular by the legendary green flash that accompanies that last dip of the sun.

Many of the resorts on the islands offer couples the expertise of an on-site coordinator who arranges all aspects of the ceremony or honeymoon, thereby eliminating much of the pre-nuptial stress many betrothed couples experience. A variety of packages offered can create the perfect intimate or extravagant event.



Millennium Naturalization Act ruled Constitutional

Justice Louise Esther Blenman has dismissed the case brought by Mr. Glentis Goodwin Chairman of the Organization for National Development Party ONDP against Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer and Attorney General Justin Simon, seeking to invalidate Section 3 (1) of the Millennium Naturalization Act of 2004 which provides for the acquisition of Antigua and Barbuda citizenship by persons who were lawfully resident in Antigua and Barbuda on and since the first day of January 2000.

Attorney Ralph Francis who represented Glentis Goodwin in the

matter claimed that Section 3 (1) of the Millennium Act infringes section 114 (1) c (ii) and Section 116 (1) of the Constitution, making it invalid and unconstitutional.

It was further claimed that the constitution provides for the entrenchment of Section 114 and Parliament cannot amend the provisions without confirming to the dictates that deal with entrenched provisions. He noted that the effect of the section being entrenched is to prevent parliament from amending it without confirming to the provision of the Constitution that address the amendment of entrenched provisions. He argued that in effect parliament has amended section 114 of the Constitution by enacting Section 3 (1) of the Millennium Act.

Learned Counsel Ralph Francis further argued that Section 3 (1) of the Millennium Act violates certain section of the constitution by permitting persons who are not Commonwealth citizens to obtain citizenship of Antigua and Barbuda in a short time as four and a quarter years instead of a period of seven years. This he said is a breach of the Constitution.

In defense, Attorney General Justin Simon Q.C. disagreed that the Powers of Parliament to make laws for the acquisition of citizenship in Antigua and Barbuda are restricted as contended for on behalf of Mr. Goodwin. He advocated that Section 114 of the Constitution states the factors that entitle a person to acquire citizenship as of right, in Antigua and Barbuda.

The material section provides that a person who has been ordinarily resident for a period of seven years and person who have been domiciled in Antigua and Barbuda for a period of seven years are entitled to acquire citizenship. He maintained that there is

nothing in section 114 which prescribes that domicile and residency are the only two qualifications for acquiring citizenship in Antigua and Barbuda.

Elaborating further, the Attorney General outlined that section 114 of the Constitution does not specify how persons who are non-commonwealth citizens may acquire citizenship in Antigua and Barbuda. He said that parliament is given the power to pass laws to confer citizenship on person who are not eligible under the Constitution.

In arriving at her decision to dismiss the case brought against the Prime Minister and Attorney General, Justice Blenman quoted from the learned author Dr. Winston Anderson in his book Elements of Private International Law in which he gives careful consideration to the issue of Citizenship and provides a very helpful exposition in stating that International Law leaves it up to the states to determine the conditions under which they will grant citizenship to individuals but that the rules governing the acquisition and loss of nationality are to be found, as would be expected, in the Constitution.

In stating that Section 3 (1) of the Millennium Act is constitutional, Justice Blenman noted that she accepts the submissions by the Attorney General as they represent the correct interpretation of the law.

Since the Millennium Naturalization Act took effect on July 18, 2004 over 300 persons from Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth countries have become citizens of Antigua and Barbuda.





Minister Maginley (second from right) with Ambassador David Shoul (second from left) and Chinese officials

Government moves to complete Mount St. John Medical Centre

Government is now moving ahead swiftly to resume work on the multi-million dollar Mount St John Medical Centre, with completion date set for the latter part of 2006.

Health Minister John Maginley met Non-resident Ambassador to the People's Republic of China Sir David Shoul and several Chinese delegates to discuss the work leading up to the completion date.

Minister Maginley said the discussion also centred on the completion of the documentation of the Export and Import Bank Loan of China for the completion of the project.

The Minister further stated that the contractors have confirmed that the project should be completed within 10 months time. The Ministry of Health he says is looking for the completion date to be late September, early October 2006.

The Mount St. John's Hospital will have a capacity of 187 beds and will offer medical attention from a modern, high-quality institution for everyone,

regardless of their economic circumstances, providing first class medical care and service.

The hospital was incorporated under the Companies Act in 1998 and is wholly owned by the Government of Antigua and Barbuda. Government has indicated that it intends to complete the construction of the building but will not be in a position to operate the facility. Government has received proposals from a number of organizations to operate the facility.

CARICOM's Agenda addressed at CHOGM in Malta

Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda has termed the recently concluded Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Malta as a success noting that two very important issues relevant to CARICOM were addressed. He said that multilateral trade and the vulnerability of small states were two of the issues which were seriously deliberated on and resulted in two powerful statements being issued.

"I think that under the circumstances, CARICOM could be satisfied because the issues that we

wanted to bring to the fore at this meeting took place and CARICOM leaders were extremely active in the deliberations and we played a significant part in ensuring that we had an input in these two important declarations. From that point of view I would want to believe that CARICOM is feeling reasonably satisfied that we have achieved our objectives," he said.

Prime Minister Spencer noted that with respect to multilateral trade, Heads made it clear that with the accelerating influence of globalization, trade issues can no longer be negotiated in isolation and that human security in its totality must be reflected in the outcomes of multilateral trade negotiations. He said that Heads concluded that weak vulnerable small states must benefit from an equitable share in the universally available opportunities provided through international trade.

It was also pointed out that the leaders called upon negotiators of small developing states at the WTO Ministerial Conference scheduled for Hong Kong in December to be flexible and to place priority on a genuinely development-oriented negotiations reaching agreement on all forms of subsidies by 2010 and for a significant improvement to market access by developing and small states into the developed countries.

The Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda also showered praise on Prime Minister of Jamaica P.J. Patterson who announced at CHOGM that it was his last meeting as he was preparing to retire from active politics.

"It was an interesting conference because one of the leading figures in the Caribbean and the Commonwealth made his final speech at the meeting. P.J. Patterson has made a significant contribution to the



deliberations. I want to compliment him for the tremendous work that he has done on behalf of Jamaica, CARICOM and developing states throughout the Commonwealth," PM Spencer said.

He said that Patterson, who attended his first Commonwealth meeting in the 1970, was a well known international figure and has made significant contributions to world affairs. "I have had opportunities to work directly with PJ and I have found him to be genuine and committed about developmental issues as they relate to small states such as Antigua and Barbuda. I wish him well as he prepares to depart from direct political office," he stated.

The next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting will be held in Uganda in 2007 while the 2009 meeting will be held in Trinidad and Tobago.

Baptiste says more resources needed to combat crime

The Minister of Housing, Culture & Social Transformation has called for regional governments to help equip the Regional Security Services (RSS) with updated and modern equipment to help combat drug trafficking.

Minister Baptiste echoed these sentiments during the graduation exercise of the RSS Basic Seamanship Course, which was recently held at Camp Blizzard, base of the Antigua and Barbuda Defence Force.

According to Minister Baptiste, until receiving a brochure which outlines the roles and functions of the RSS, he was always sceptical over the large budgets that were awarded to the

Antigua and Barbuda Defence Force. Baptiste said that he is now convinced that additional resources need to be pumped into security to help combat criminals, who are plying their trade with state-of-the-art equipment.

To this end, Baptiste said that RSS officials should boost their public relations strategy.

"Whoever is responsible for public relations in the region need to begin to work. There should be programmes on television explaining the role of RSS and let the community know the areas that are covered and the police, army and custom officials are apart of it."

The Minister of Social Transformation said that he will "encourage his Government to put more money into the RSS and to encourage the entire business community to look at this area and to support it".

Over the past few weeks, twenty-nine (29) service men from the eight-member countries of RSS focused on several topics including basic seamanship, instructional training, maritime operations and planning and first aid.

This year's top student was PC Bernard Titre of Dominica, who received a plaque for his outstanding work.

inet Repositions APUA in the Communications Market

The introduction of **inet**, an Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line (ADSL) Internet service has repositioned and reestablished the Antigua Public Utilities Authority APUA Telephones at the forefront of the

technological revolution in Antigua and Barbuda.

Information Minister Senator Dr. Edmond Mansoor during the launch of the product said that the unmistakable economic and technical advantages of the digital subscriber line technology, **inet** as APUA Telephones has called it, has become enormously popular as a broadband access system for data transmission in recent years.

"Due to the ever larger data volumes on the public and private networks, more and more carriers are turning to technologies that can deliver high bandwidths, even in the access area," he explained.

The Minister further stated that **inet** is the optimal choice, since it supports both analogue telephone lines and Digital lines.

He noted that as the internet continues to gain rapidly in popularity, many of today's telephone networks are reaching their limits under modem connections to Internet service providers (ISPs), often for hours at a time. He said there is a growing need to unburden networks by providing broadband DSL connections, some of which already are in place.

Advantages of **inet** include:

- leaving your internet connected open and still use the phone line for voice calls.
- The speed is much higher than a regular modem.
- **inet** doesn't necessarily require new wiring; it can use the phone line you already have.
- APUA Telephones also provided the modem as part of the installation.



In congratulating APUA Telephones on the launch of *inet*, Minister Mansoor stated that he is confident that this will be one of the "gap closing" mechanisms of ending the digital divide in Antigua and Barbuda.

Antigua and Barbuda at WTO Hong Kong Ministerial Conference

On the 13th December the sixth WTO Ministerial Conference formally opened with trade and economic ministers from the 149 member countries of the WTO hoping to conclude negotiations for a free trade accord.

"At this very moment, the prospects for an agreement are not very good," said the head of Antigua and Barbuda's delegation, Dr. Errol Cort, Minister of Finance and Economy. "There is no indication that WTO members will break the stalemate over cutting subsidies and import tariffs, which has pitted the rich developed countries against the poor developing ones," he added.

During the formal opening ceremony, the delegates heard statements from Donald Tsang, Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China; Mr. John C Tsang, Secretary for Commerce, Industry and Technology of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China and the Chairman of the Ministerial Conference; Mr. Pascal Lamy, Director-General of the WTO; H.E. Ms. Amina Mohamed, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Kenya to the WTO and Chairperson of the WTO's General Council; and Dr. Supachai Panitchpakdi, the former Director-General of the WTO and the current Secretary-General of UNCTAD,

who spoke on behalf of Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations.

During the presentation by Director-General Lamy, several protesters chanted anti-WTO slogans from the back of the hall where the opening ceremony was taking place. "The atmosphere surrounding the negotiations has been intense, with thousands of anti-globalization demonstrators marching through the streets of Hong Kong carrying anti-WTO banners and banging drums," said Ambassador Ashe, Antigua and Barbuda's Ambassador to the WTO.

"This meeting is beset by many challenges," said High Commissioner Roberts, Antigua and Barbuda's Deputy Permanent Representative to the WTO. "As a result expectations for a successful outcome are very low," he added.

Elliott Paige, the Minister Counsellor at the OECS Mission to the WTO, observed that a failure for the Hong Kong meeting, coming on the heels of the unsuccessful ministerial meeting in Cancun, Mexico in 2003, would destroy the credibility of the multilateral trading system.

Minister Cort, however, remained hopeful, noting that the negotiators hope to lay the groundwork while in Hong Kong to establish a global trade deal sometime next year. "I hope that, at the end of the day, WTO's member nations, who have debated for years the best way to promote free and fair trade, will resolve to hash out an acceptable agreement given that freer and fairer trade can, according to the World Bank, add some US \$300 billion to the global economy," he said.



Antigua and Barbuda's delegation to the WTO Ministerial conference headed by Minister of Finance and the Economy, Dr Errol Cort (centre) with Dr John Ashe, Permanent Representative to the WTO (seated to the right of the Minister) and Dr Carl Roberts, Deputy Permanent to the WTO and High Commissioner (seated on the Minister's left)

The current round of WTO talks -- the "Doha Round" that was launched in 2001 in the Doha, the capital of Qatar, was organized to address the concerns of poorer nations. The major issues at the Hong Kong meeting include opening farming and service industries to international competition, and a call by the developed countries for the developing nations to open their telecommunications, tourism and banking sectors to international companies.

FCCA and the Norwegian Jewel spread the cheer of Christmas to charitable organizations

On December 7th, the technical staff of the Ministry of Tourism and the crew onboard the Norwegian Jewel took time out to don their hats as Santa's helpers spreading Christmas cheer to the children of five charitable organizations.

Children from the Amazing Grace Foundation, the Good Shepherd Home, the Sunshine Home for Girls,



Children receiving their Christmas gifts from the FCCA Representative

the Citizens Welfare Division, and the Barbuda Pentecostal Church, were the recipients of a total of some 200 gifts.

The gifts were distributed to the students after a brief ceremony during which Director of Marketing and Promotions Joyce Henry praised the Florida Caribbean Cruise Association (FCCA) for the initiative which spans some three years.

Also on hand to speak on behalf of the charitable organizations, which fall under his Ministry, was Minister of Social Transformation, Hilson Baptiste who took time out of his busy parliamentary schedule to thank the organizers and more particularly the FCCA for the gesture.

Minister Baptiste reported that Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer saw the occasion as being most worthy of national attention and as such sent his sentiments of gratitude on behalf of the nation of Antigua and Barbuda.

Karen Maybury, Chief Organizer and FCCA Representative spoke on behalf of the organization, by

relaying that it was all worth it to see the smiles on the faces of the children and to know that you (and your organization) are the cause of that smile.

The children, who sang carols and interacted with Santa Claus, were also treated to a dynamic performance by a juggler (crew member on board the Norwegian Jewel).

Land transfer deal paves the way for Hatton Bay Development

The transfer of lands, paving the way for a multi-million dollar development at Hatton Bay in Antigua was completed last week in Washington D.C with members of US development consortium of the Federal/ Owens Group.

Mr. McChesney Emanuel, Honorary Consul General for Antigua and Barbuda in New York, attended the ceremony at the Ronald Reagan Building in Washington DC.

The land transfer ceremony and reception featured, tennis players, Venus and Serena Williams who were brought on board to brand the Ocean Grand Resort at Hatton Bay development in Antigua which will commence construction by June 2006. The first phase of the project includes a resort hotel, convention centre, casino and international entertainment venue.

According to Honorary Consul General Emanuel, the Federal/Owens Group is the partnership of two real estate firms- Federal Development LLC and Owens Development Inc. "This group specializes in the master development of publicly-owned real estate assets. The Williams sisters were brought on board to brand their exclusive resort development," he said.

According to Consul General Emanuel, "meeting the Williams sisters was great, but what is even more exciting is to have them as partners in this project, which will be a huge boost for Antigua and Barbuda's tourism product."

"My commitment is to continue working hard to bring more celebrities on board to brand other projects [that are] currently in the pipeline. This is one of several projects I have been working on for the last fifteen months [and] there will definitely be other announcements in the coming months," he said.

Consul General Emanuel was instrumental in creating the synergy and lead negotiations between the Federal/Owens Group in Washington DC and local Antiguan businessman, Mr. George Martin Jr. who are collaborating on the Hatton Bay project.



Financial Secretary, Whitfield Harris

Ministry of Finance and Economy officials return from important CARICOM meeting

Senator Lenworth Johnson, Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy and Whitfield Harris, Financial Secretary represented Antigua and Barbuda at the first Special Meeting of the CARICOM Council for Finance and Planning (COFAP) held in Kingston, Jamaica on 12th December, 2005.

The primary purpose of the meeting was to determine the modalities and related financial issues for the operation of the Regional Development Fund established under Article 158 of the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas. The Fund will provide financial and technical assistance to Disadvantaged Countries, Regions and Sectors including the OECS countries when the Caribbean Single Market and the Economy (CSME) comes into force on 1st January, 2006.

The Ministers of Finance of the Region (who make up COFAP) agreed

that a Technical team should be established to evaluate options for the funding and structure of the Regional Development Fund and how member countries will access the Fund. The Technical Team, which is to be headed by Professor Compton Bourne, Chief Executive Officer of the Caribbean Development Bank, will report to a second Special Meeting of COFAP on 23rd January, 2006 just prior to the CSME signing ceremony in Jamaica on the 24th January, 2006.

Meanwhile, two CARICOM countries have pledged a total of US \$12 million to inaugurate the Fund on 1st January 2006. The first special Meeting of COFAP also considered the Management Structure of the Petroleum Fund set up by Trinidad and Tobago to provide relief to member countries of CARICOM which are experiencing economic hardship because of persistently high prices for crude oil and petroleum products on the international market. Recommendations will be made to the Heads of Government.

The first Special Meeting of COFAP also considered options for the establishment of an integrated Capital Market in the Community.

Senior Officials bring Christmas Cheer to Health Institution

With the Christmas season fast approaching, senior government officials are spreading Christmas cheer at health institutions. On 19th December Governor General Sir James Carlisle, Lady Emma Carlisle, Health Minister John Maginley, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Health Clara Emmanuel and other health officials visited the Mental Hospital to participate in their annual Christmas celebrations.

The celebration which brought laughter and joy to the residents heard Governor General Sir James Carlisle reminding the patients that Christmas brings a message to everyone, and it is God's unselfish love for all mankind that brings tolerance, respect and real understanding to the foundation of our society.

Sir James Carlisle also added that he sees noticeable improvement in the health institution and hopes that the staff and patients of the institution will strive for excellence in their continual growth of the establishment. The Governor General also encouraged the staff to do their best with their patients despite the lack of major working equipment.

He wished the staff and patients a Merry Christmas and a Prosperous New Year and says he looks forward to many more visits in the near future.

The Minister told the patients that Christmas is a time to share and celebrate the birth of Christ with the rest of the world and reflected on the joyous celebration that brings families, friends and communities together. Minister Maginley also noted that his government is planning on amending the Mental Health Legislation Act. The Minister said that this new Act is getting the assistance from Health Canada, the Pan American Health Organization, as well as the Acting Superintendent Clarence Pilgrim and other health care professionals.

Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Health Clara Emmanuel urged volunteer groups to donate food supplies and gifts to the health institutions to make life more comfortable for the residents and staff of the homes.



Minister Cort promotes Antigua and Barbuda business readiness at WTO Ministerial Conference

Antigua and Barbuda's Minister of Finance and the Economy, Dr. Errol Cort, led a slate of ministers and representatives from the Caribbean region, including Belize, Grenada, St Kitts and Nevis and St Vincent and the Grenadines, in addressing the plenary of the WTO Ministerial Conference in Hong Kong.

Minister Cort's address comes at a time when trade ministers from 149 countries and customs territories are trying to salvage a partial agreement aimed at, among other things, cutting taxes on poor countries' exports, liberalizing trade in cotton, ending agricultural export subsidies and linking lower tariffs for manufactured goods to lower tariffs for agricultural products. It also comes at a time when a particularly acrimonious dispute has broken out over the extent to which countries should be required to let foreign competitors into their markets for services like banking, telecommunications, hospital management and computer programming.

In his statement to the plenary, Minister Cort began by responding to the challenge of the Director General of the WTO, Pascal Lamy, who called on WTO members to be prepared to take some risks; to improve the rules; and to level the playing field in the quest for free and fair trade and to preserve development at the heart of the Doha Round.

"Antigua and Barbuda has heard and heeded [Director General's] battle cry and I hereby reaffirm our

commitment to work assiduously to address the issues at hand. I do so secured in my belief that the Doha Development Round provides Members of the WTO with an opportunity to make trade an essential tool for economic growth and development," said Minister Cort.

The Minister noted that in order for the twin island nation to benefit fully from trade that it needed to put in place the necessary structures to nurture the seeds of economic growth and development. He also noted that his government had embraced a path of macro-economic and social reform; introduced fiscal consolidation; taken steps to reduce the deficit while establishing an efficient tax system; established a priority public sector investment programme; created an enabling environment for the private sector to flourish; introduced social protection of the most vulnerable in our society; and had embarked on a programme of legal reform.

"My government's goal is to increase Antigua and Barbuda's attractiveness as a place to do business, with good governance and transparency as the building blocks of the programme. Concomitant with this are ongoing efforts to reduce economic vulnerabilities, eliminate barriers to competitive global trade and investment, increase competitiveness in the private sector, improve domestic employment, and enhance our capacity for sustainable growth in the face of external circumstances," he said.

The Minister also sought to underscore the unique concerns of the nation's economy, which he characterized as "small, vulnerable, [and] highly open," and which he said would "... require flexibility and policy space for implementing the provisions and commitments of various WTO agreements."

He also noted that an economy such as ours needs "...longer transitional periods for implementation [of these agreements] and fair market access for [its] products and services," and expressed alarm at "the prospect that [the country] could be forced into liberalization of tariffs without a suitable timeframe and without the necessary flexibility to institute and complete needed tax reforms..."

Touching on the all-important issue of services, Minister Cort said that "...Antigua and Barbuda's services export in value terms was in the order of 900 to 1. Services today contribute over 80% to our Gross Domestic Product. Given our relatively smaller manufacturing and agricultural base, the services negotiations are extremely important for Antigua and Barbuda, since the services sector present one of the greatest opportunities for economic progress in this the Doha Development Round."

The Minister concluded by noting that in order for there to be any progress in the negotiations on services, "...all WTO Members [will need] to make quality offers that address constructively the requests of trading partners in a commercially meaningful way. Major trading nations must lead by example through the offers that they make, thus allowing others to commit further for the mutual benefit of all. In the same vain, we must also preserve the individual right of countries' to regulate domestic sectors in accordance with international best practices in pursuit of their own developmental goals."





Minister Cort describes agreement reached at the WTO Ministerial Conference as “modest”

After six days of intense negotiation, Ministers from the 149 member nations of the World Trade Organization (WTO) reached agreement on a series of narrow but troublesome issues that have blocked a global trade agreement for the last three years.

“There was some progress in a number of areas,” said Minister of Finance and the Economy and head of the Antigua and Barbuda’s delegation to the talks, Dr. the Honourable Errol Cort. “But the consensus view -- which I share -- is that the overall agreement is not enough to make the meeting a true success. In particular, it falls far short of the ambitious deal that we had all originally hoped to reach in Hong Kong: Agreeing on formulas for cutting farm and industrial tariffs and subsidies,” he said.

“I am particularly disappointed that, at the end of six days of talks, significant obstacles remain in the way of a comprehensive global trade agreement and a lot more work needs to be done in areas of agriculture and market access. At least, wave a proposed date --April 30, 2006 -- as a deadline for reaching a draft for the Doha round,” he added.

The agreement, which has been endorsed by the United States, the European Union and a coalition of developing nations led by Brazil, calls for:

- The worldwide end to all agricultural export subsidies by 2013.
- The elimination by industrialized countries of their tariffs

and quotas on 97 percent of their import categories for goods coming from the world’s poorest 50 nations.

- The elimination by the end of next year of all cotton export subsidies and a series of moves to help West African cotton-growing nations, whose complaints had led to the collapse of the previous W.T.O. ministerial conference two years ago in Cancun, Mexico.

- Several billion dollars a year in aid from the United States, the European Union and Japan to poor countries to help them expand exports and adjust to rising global competition.

- New rules designed to streamline further negotiations early next year to achieve a global agreement reducing tariffs on manufactured goods and allowing greater international competition in services like banking, insurance, telecommunications and express package delivery.

- A broad agreement to ban all fishing industry subsidies that lead to over-fishing.

“At the outset, we were urged to “act decisively and with real urgency” to create a freer and fairer global trading system,” said Dr. John W. Ashe, Ambassador to the WTO. “But while there are some elements of the agreement that can be viewed as positive, I think that by failing to eliminate all export subsidies by the developed countries we may have missed an opportunity to tackle one of the root causes of poverty in developing countries,” he said.

“We had hoped that this meeting would have paved the way for a global free trade treaty in 2006,” said Dr. Carl Roberts, Deputy Permanent Representative to the WTO. “Instead the WTO will need to hold further talks on issues such as reducing import tariffs on agricultural produce and freeing up

trade in industrialized goods after making no headway,” he added.

Taking a more sanguine view, Elliot Paige, Minister Counsellor, OECS office – Geneva, said: “This was a modest but not insignificant deal which could be a driving force to make real cuts in agricultural subsidies, and while the meeting did not make a great deal more progress, it did not end in failure like Cancun and Seattle.”

The Hong Kong document is intended to guide ministers in further negotiations, with the goal of approving a final trade liberalisation deal and completing the current round of negotiations by the end of 2006.

Cuba and Venezuela expressed reservations about the agreement, objecting to the potential future liberalisation of services industries such as banking, insurance and tourism.

As the meeting was winding down, the magnificent harbour-side conference centre where the meeting was held was totally sealed off, with police out in force to prevent more rowdy anti-WTO protests after clashes on Saturday in which 116 people were hurt, according to authorities.

Police used tear gas, fire hoses and pepper spray Saturday to hold back hundreds of demonstrators led by militant South Korean farmers, some of whom were armed with bamboo sticks and metal bars. More than 1,000 people were detained, according to Hong Kong police. Nearly 200 of them had been released as of late Sunday. The violent scenes were highly unusual for Hong Kong and were not repeated during a protest on the final day that drew 6,000-7,000 people. It was conducted amid a heavy police presence.



Antigua and Barbuda to commence issuing Machine Readable Passports in January

The Government has completed preparations for the issuing of Machine Readable Passports in January 2006.

The passports which meet International Civil Aviation Organisation ICAO regulations will be issued in three colours and categories:

- Regular Passport – blue in colour;
- Official Passport – green in colour;
- Diplomatic Passport – red in colour.

The passports bear the CARICOM logo, which identifies Antigua and Barbuda as a member state of the regional grouping and the Coat of Arms of Antigua and Barbuda which will be on the cover of the document.

The Passport Division within the Office of the Prime Minister outlined that the last date for accepting the old passport application forms will be December 30. The new application forms will be available for distribution from January 3, 2006 with the first set of machine readable passports to be issued from January 16.

The Passport Division pointed out those persons holding valid passports will be allowed to continue to do so until a phased out period is announced.

The Division also announced the fees structure for the Machine Readable Passports. The fees payable are as follows:



New Passports

- Passports for persons 16 years and over (32 pages) £50.00
- Passports for persons 16 years and over (64 pages) £100.00
- Passports for persons under 16 years (32 pages) £25.00

Replacement Passports

- Passports for persons 16 years and over (32 pages) £100.00
- Passports for persons 16 years and over (64 pages) £200.00
- Passports for persons under 16 years (32 pages) £50.00

Emergency Issue of Passports

- Passports for persons 16 years and over (32 pages) £100.00
- Passports for persons 16 years and over (64 pages) £200.00
- Passports for persons under 16 years (32 pages) £50.00

The new standard in the issuing of passports (machine readable) is essential for meeting ICAO global objectives, to minimize delays in border-crossing formalities and to safeguard international civil aviation operation against acts of unlawful interference.

Machine Readable Passports are readily recognized by officials at security, immigration and customs check points and by embassies and consulates worldwide, and thus make it easier for a person to obtain visas for travel and to be cleared at airports.



SEASONS

GREETINGS

TO ALL

FROM

HIS EXCELLENCY

THE

HIGH

COMMISSIONER

AND

MEMBERS

OF

STAFF