

## India-CARICOM Bilateral Relations

CARICOM, Caribbean Community and Common Market, which is known as the Caribbean Community, was established on 4th July 1973 by the Treaty of Chaguaramas, and has 15 members – Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname and Trinidad & Tobago. Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands and Turks & Caicos Islands are Associate Members of the Community.

The High Commissioner of India in Georgetown is accredited as Ambassador to CARICOM headquartered at Georgetown. While India has diplomatic relations with the individual Caribbean countries for a long time, India thought of developing relations with CARICOM countries as a group. A CARICOM delegation under the leadership of Hon'ble K.D. Knight, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Jamaica and the then Chairman of the Community Council, visited India in November 2003. The major outcome of the visit was that an agreement was signed between India and CARICOM Secretariat for establishing a Standing Joint Commission on Consultation, Cooperation and Coordination.

The first meeting of India-CARICOM Foreign Ministers was held on 15th February 2005 at Paramaribo (Suriname) on the sidelines of CARICOM Summit. Indian delegation was led by the Minister of State in the Ministry of External Affairs, whereas Foreign Minister of Barbados headed the CARICOM delegation. Possible areas of cooperation identified at this meeting included India's membership of the Caribbean Development Bank (through which India would be able to co-finance development and integration projects in the region), promotion of trade in goods, services and investments with greater Indian participation in Caribbean infrastructure development and regional investment, supply of retroviral drugs for fighting HIV/AIDS.

The next significant high level interaction between the two sides commenced with the First Meeting of the India-CARICOM Joint Commission held in Georgetown, Guyana on 2nd June 2015. The Indian delegation was led by Shri R. Swaminathan, Secretary (AMS&CPV) and the CARICOM side was led by Ambassador Irwin LaRocque, Secretary General of CARICOM and H.E. Dr. June Soomer, the Ambassador of St. Lucia to CARICOM. Besides the CARICOM Secretariat, all member countries of the CARICOM participated in the meeting including some via video conferencing.

The momentum gained from the First India-CARICOM Joint Commission continued with the Second India-CARICOM Ministerial Meeting held in New York on September 30, 2015 on the margins of the 70th session of the UNGA. EAM Ms. Sushma Swaraj, led the Indian delegation and the Hon. Alva Baptiste, Minister of External Affairs, Trade and Civil Aviation of Saint Lucia, led the CARICOM delegation. The two sides discussed issues relating to on cooperation in capacity building, promotion of bilateral trade, enhancement of people-to-people contact, facilitation of visas, etc. Discussions were also focussed on further strengthening India-CARICOM bilateral relations through cooperation in regional/multilateral issues. The meeting was attended by all CARICOM Member countries.

The Third India-CARICOM Ministerial Meeting was held on the sidelines of UNGA at New York on 19 September 2017. The Indian delegation was led by EAM, Ms. Sushma Swaraj and the CARICOM delegation was led by Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Barbados and also Chairperson of COFCOR Maxine McClean. The meeting was attended

by the other CARICOM member states. In the meeting, EAM offering India's condolences on the loss of precious lives due to the devastating hurricanes, announced the offer of emergency aid of US\$ 200,000/- to the worst affected CARICOM countries (US\$ 100,000 each to Antigua and Barbuda and Dominica) and additional US\$ 2 million from the India-UN Partnership Fund for South-South Cooperation for rehabilitation projects in CARICOM. EAM also expressed solidarity with the CARICOM countries particularly referring to the Indian evacuation efforts from St. Marteen which involved not only Indians but also nationals of nine other countries affected by the hurricanes.

Continuing various measures taken to strengthen India-CARICOM bilateral relations since the last Ministerial Meeting, discussions focused on cooperation in capacity building with particular emphasis on the completion of training of Young Diplomats of CARICOM countries in India and also training in Project Management and Strategic Planning, promotion of business and trade, enhancement of people to people contact, organising training programmes in various sectors particularly in animal and dairy sector, organising workshop for CARICOM drug regulators, sharing of Indian expertise in traditional medicines, holding business events and cultural festivals and facilitation of visas. EAM also called for building a road-map for cooperation in the field of respective organisations of small and medium enterprises and invited member states of CARICOM to participate in the India International Trade Fair, Delhi. Views were also exchanged on regional and multilateral issues such as terrorism, climate change, sustainable development, etc., in addition to inviting CARICOM member countries to join the International Solar Alliance.

The Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Mr. Narendra Modi during his meeting with the CARICOM leaders in the first India-CARICOM Summit held on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2019 on the side-lines of the UNGA in New York, made three offers of assistance to CARICOM countries: (i) US\$ 14 million Grant (US\$ 1million per CARICOM member state) for quick impact community development projects in CARICOM countries; (ii) US\$ 150 million Line of Credit (US\$ 10 million per CARICOM member state) for CARICOM countries for solar energy and climate change related projects; and (iii) Special capacity building courses, training and deputation of experts based on the needs and requirements of the CARICOM countries. During the meeting It was decided to establish an India-CARICOM Task Force to reinvigorate India-CARICOM cooperation. The GOI has suggested to the Secretariat to utilize the existing Joint Commission Meeting to also act as the Joint Task Force. CARICOM Secretariat has accepted this proposal.

Status of CARICOM Secretariat's proposals:

CARICOM Secretariat's request for training of their staff to maintain IT infrastructure in India is being conducted virtually in February 2021.

Upgrading Centre of Excellence in IT (CEIT) – It has been decided to upgrade CEIT in Guyana to a CARICOM CEIT.

Proposal for strengthening fisheries assessment and management in CARICOM and CRFM members states includes deputation of an Expert from India under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme for the project is under consideration of the Ministry.

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