

Caribbean Community (CARICOM)

In 1972, Commonwealth Caribbean leaders at the 7th Heads of Government Conference decided to transform the Caribbean Free Trade Association (CARIFTA) into a Common Market and establish the Caribbean Community, of which the Common Market would be an integral part. On 4 July 1973, they signed the Treaty of Chaguaramas establishing the Caribbean Community in Trinidad & Tobago.

CARICOM 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. Of the 15, all except Montserrat are nation States. Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands and Turks & Caicos Islands are Associate Members of the Community. The Chairmanship of the Community is rotated every six months among the member countries Heads.

Between 1993 and 2000, the Inter-Governmental Task Force (IGTF) which was composed of representatives of all Member States, produced nine Protocols, for the purpose of amending the Treaty. These nine Protocols were later combined to create a new version of the Treaty, called formally, ‘The Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas’ heralding the establishment of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy.

The CARICOM Single Market and Economy is intended to benefit the people of the Region by providing more and better opportunities to produce and sell goods and services and to attract investment. It will create one large market among the participating member States.

The objectives of the Community, identified in Article 6 of the Revised Treaty, are: to improve standards of living and work; full employment of labour and other factors of production; accelerated, coordinated and sustained economic development and convergence; expansion of trade and economic relations with third States; enhanced levels of international competitiveness; organization for increased production and productivity; achievement of a greater measure of economic leverage and effectiveness of Member States in dealing with third States, groups of States and entities of any description and the enhanced co-ordination of Member States’ foreign economic policies and enhanced functional co-operation.

New issues such as e-commerce, government procurement, trade in goods from free zones, free circulation of goods, and the rights contingent on the free movement of persons have been added to CARICOM agenda.

The CARICOM Secretariat in Georgetown, Guyana is the principal administrative organ of the Community and is headed by a Secretary General who is the Chief Executive Officer of the Community. The current Secretary General is Dr. Carla Natalia Barnett of Belize. Most of the resident and non-resident Ambassadors and High Commissioners accredited to Guyana are also accredited to CARICOM.

The international profile of the CARICOM Secretariat has been increasing with its interaction with other countries and international organizations including UN. Approximately

18.9 million inhabitants in 15 member states with a GDP of US \$ 82 billion have an annual food import bill of more than US\$ 4 billion.

The joint Cariforum-EU Council under the Economic Partnership Agreement was signed in October 2008. In addition to trade in goods it also includes commitments on trade in services, investment, trade-related issues such as competition policy, government procurement, intellectual property rights, as well as sustainable development aspects. The Joint Council has held five meetings so far. The fifth meeting was held at the EU Headquarters in Brussels in November 2019.

The Conference of Heads of Government is the Supreme Organ of the Community and consists of Heads of States/Governments of all Member States (Chief Minister in case of Montserrat). The Conference determines and provides policy direction for the Community. It is the final authority for conclusion of treaties and entering into relationships with International Organizations and States. The 43rd Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community was held from 3-5 July 2022 in Paramaribo, Suriname, which also holds the pro-tempore chair till December 2022. The Principal Organs of the Community are:

- (i) Conference of Heads of Government and its Bureau
- (ii) Community Council of Ministers

The Community has five organs and three bodies, viz.

- (i) Council for Finance and Planning(COFAP)
- (ii) Council for Foreign and Community Relations(COFCOR)
- (iii) Council for Human and Social Development(COHSOD)
- (iv) Council for Trade and Economic Development(COTED)
- (v) Council of Ministers responsible for National Security & Law Enforcement and
 - (i) Legal Affairs Committee
 - (ii) Budget Committee
 - (iii) Committee of the Central Bank Governors

India - CARICOM

India's political engagement with CARICOM as a group started with the visit of a CARICOM delegation led by K.D. Knight, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Jamaica and the then Chairman of the Community Council, to India in November 2003, during which an agreement was signed for establishing a Standing Joint Commission on Consultation, Cooperation and Coordination. Later in February 2005, India was invited as special guest to the CARICOM Summit in Paramaribo. Subsequently, India-CARICOM Economic Forum was held in August 2005 in Port of Spain led by the then Minister of State for Commerce and Industry. On the occasion, a project for computerization of CARICOM Secretariat valued at US\$ 1.3 million, funded by India, was completed and handed over to the CARICOM Secretariat. Upgradation of ICT system of CARICOM Secretariat with GOI grant of US\$ 2.4 million was completed thereafter. India has since been extending capacity building and developmental assistance to CARICOM countries in several areas.

India's historic and warm relations with the countries of the Caribbean witnessed a new momentum with the meeting of PM Modi with 14 leaders of the CARICOM countries on the UNGA sidelines on 25 September 2019 in New York, during which PM Modi announced USD

14 million Grant for Community Development Projects (CDP) in the CARICOM (1 million for each country) and another 150 million Line of Credit for projects related to Solar, Renewable Energy and Climate Change. PM reiterated India's firm commitment to strengthen its political, economic and cultural engagement with CARICOM. He recalled the presence of more than a million-strong Indian diaspora as a vibrant and enduring link of friendship with Caribbean. He also announced the setting up of a Regional Centre for Excellence in Information Technology in Guyana, Georgetown and a Regional Vocational Training Centre in Belize by upgrading the existing India-funded Centres in these countries.

In order to assist in their fight against COVID19, India had sent medical assistance worth INR 16 Crores to 27 LAC countries including to all CARICOM members. EAM also telephonically reached out to his counterparts in CARICOM countries during the COVID19 pandemic, expressing India's solidarity with them and discussed post-COVID cooperation. India has also been providing higher education facilities for students from Caribbean countries through the Indian Technical and Economic Co-operation Programme (ITEC), as well as the Annual Special Courses for CARICOM diplomats at the Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service (SSIFS). The High Commissioner of India in Georgetown is accredited as Ambassador to CARICOM headquartered at Georgetown.

CARICOM has shown understanding and support for India's point of view on various issues. India and CARICOM share common position on many global issues and coordinate closely in multilateral fora. CARICOM countries also generally provide support for India's candidatures for various posts. The presence of large Indian diaspora in the region and traditionally close relations of most member countries of CARICOM with India is an important factor.

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