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Antigua looking to Cuban market

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Antigua and Barbuda is sending a trade mission to Cuba that Trade, Commerce and Industry Minister, Paul Chet Greene, has described as a strategic move given the imminent lifting of the decades-old United States trade embargo.

“We need to get in on the ground in Cuba as early as possible as the potential for business opportunities is significant” he said of the June 20 to July 1 mission.

Greene said that new shipping lanes will soon open into Cuba making the island of 11 million people accessible to products from Antigua and Barbuda and other countries.

He said on a weekly basis, a number of containers leave here empty for the United States and “we could arrange for these containers to take goods destined for Cuban back to Miami, then it’s a quick trans-shipment to Havana.

“I see much prospects from jumping in early with this mission to Cuba as the old saying goes: Early bird catches the worms,” he said, expressing confidence in the quality of the products that will be on display when the mission visits Cuba.

Greene also announced that the mission will be exploring the possibility of assisting Cuba develop a cricketing programme.

“We are looking to export our human capital as the mission will include a cricket coach. Some time ago Cuba had expressed an interest in developing a cricket programme just as Cuba over the years has exported its medical personnel to Antigua and Barbuda; we are thinking of doing the reverse; that of exporting coaches from our cadre of coaches.”

Greene said that the Ministry of Tourism will also play an important role in the mission to Cuba with the hope of establishing critical links with that country and that he expects discussions with Cuban government representatives will include air-links noting that Cuba already has its national airline, Cubana, which may be used to service the route.

According to Greene, last year’s trade mission to Guadeloupe and Martinique has paid dividends although it has created some challenges that are yet to be overcome.

“It’s quite a challenge getting our goods into those two French departments. We have orders that we can fill, but getting the goods into those territories create quite a problem even though we now have a regular ferry service between Antigua and Guadeloupe. There is still no cargo service” explained.

In contrast, the Minister feels that Cuba will be different once the embargo is fully lifted. He said similarly, existing direct links to the Dominican Republic are already in place.

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