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## **INDIA AND THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (CARICOM): TOWARDS A GREATER UNDERSTANDING AND COOPERATION**

\*Dr. Raghunath Mahabir<sup>1</sup>, Mr. Keron Ganpat<sup>2</sup>

<sup>\*1</sup> University of the Southern Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago

<sup>2</sup> University of Trinidad and Tobago, Trinidad and Tobago

**Abstract.** This article explores the evolving relationship between India and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), emphasizing the need for greater understanding and cooperation in a rapidly changing global landscape. As both regions navigate challenges such as economic diversification, climate change, security issues and cultural exchange, the paper adopts a constructivist approach and highlights the historical ties and shared values that form the foundation of their partnership. It examines key areas of potential collaboration, including trade, technology, education, security and sustainable development, while also addressing obstacles that hinder deeper engagement. Through a comprehensive analysis of diplomatic initiatives, bilateral agreements, and grassroots exchanges, this study aims to provide actionable recommendations for enhancing India-CARICOM relations. Ultimately, the article advocates for a strategic partnership that leverages the unique strengths of both regions to foster mutual growth and resilience in an interconnected world.

**Key words:** CARICOM, trade, cooperation, global challenges, strategic partnership, diplomatic initiatives, security, sustainable development

### **Introduction**

#### **The Historical Connection Between India and the Caribbean**

The historical connection between India and the Caribbean is rooted in the migration of Indian laborers to the region during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Following the abolition of slavery in the British Empire, Caribbean plantations faced labor shortages. To address this, colonial governments sought workers from India, leading to the first significant wave of Indian migration to the Caribbean, primarily between 1838 and 1917. As is known, there has been a long relationship between India and CARICOM countries dating to the colonial period. Both the territories of the British West Indies (BWI) and India were part of the British Empire. Actually, from 1757 to 1858, through the East India Company, Britain controlled much of India. However, India did not formally come directly under British rule until 1858. From 1838 to 1917, Indian contractual indentured workers were sent to the BWI, to other British colonies, and to foreign colonial territories. For the duration of the indenture system, about 450,000 Indians were brought to the BWI with 36,000 to Jamaica, 144,000 to Trinidad and Tobago, 239,000 to Guyana, and the rest to the other islands. Under the Dutch, about 35,000 Indian indentured labourers were recruited to work in Suriname between 1868-1916. Today, possibly over a million people of Indian descent are in the CARICOM region with most being in Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, and Jamaica (Morgan 2024). Some of the main features arising from this connection include the following:

- **Indentured Labor System:** The British introduced the indentured labor system, which allowed Indian workers, known as "coolies," to sign contracts to work on sugar plantations in exchange for wages, housing, and the promise of land after a period of service. This migration significantly altered the demographic landscape of the Caribbean, particularly in countries like Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, and Suriname, where large Indian communities were established (1).

- **Cultural Exchange:** Indian migrants brought their rich cultural heritage, including languages, religions, festivals, and culinary traditions, which have significantly influenced Caribbean culture. Festivals such as Diwali and Holi are celebrated alongside local traditions, creating a unique blend of cultural practices that reflect the region's diversity.

- **Political and Social Impact:** Over time, the descendants of Indian indentured laborers became active participants in the political and social life of the Caribbean (2). They have made substantial contributions to the region's development, advocating for rights and representation, and influencing local governance and policies.

- **Economic Ties:** Beyond cultural connections, India and the Caribbean have developed economic ties, especially in the areas of trade and investment. India has increasingly engaged with Caribbean nations through trade agreements, technology transfer, and investment in sectors such as information technology and pharmaceuticals.

- **Diplomatic Relations:** In recent years, there has been a concerted effort to strengthen diplomatic relations between India and CARICOM. High-level visits and partnerships have focused on areas such as education, health care, and sustainable development, reflecting a mutual interest in enhancing cooperation.

All in all, the historical connection between India and the Caribbean is characterized by migration, cultural exchange, and evolving diplomatic and economic ties. This shared history provides a foundation for ongoing collaboration and understanding, as both regions navigate contemporary global challenges.

### **Description of materials and methods**

For this paper which would explore the evolving relationship between India and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Constructivist Theory of International Relations would be used. The rationale for using the Constructivist theory is as follows:

- **Focus on Identity and Culture:** Constructivism emphasizes the importance of identity, culture, and social constructs in shaping international relations. Given the historical ties between India and the Caribbean, particularly through migration and cultural exchange, this theory would allow for an in-depth exploration of how shared identities and cultural connections influence diplomatic relations.

- **Mutual Understanding and Cooperation:** Constructivism highlights the role of collective norms and values. The evolving relationship between India and CARICOM can be analyzed through the lens of how both regions seek mutual understanding and cooperation, recognizing their shared challenges and aspirations.

- **Dynamic and Evolving Relationships:** This theory acknowledges that international relationships are not fixed but can evolve over time based on interactions, perceptions, and social contexts. It can provide a framework to examine how changing geopolitical dynamics, economic needs, and cultural exchanges are shaping the India-CARICOM relationship.

- **Influence of Non-State Actors:** Constructivism allows for the consideration of non-state actors, such as diaspora communities and cultural organizations, which play a significant role in bridging India and the Caribbean. This perspective can enrich the analysis of how grassroots movements and social networks contribute to the diplomatic landscape.

- **Policy Implications:** By applying Constructivist Theory, the paper can explore how perceptions and narratives surrounding the India-CARICOM relationship influence policy decisions on both sides, providing insights into how to foster deeper cooperation.

In summary, Constructivist Theory is well-suited for examining the evolving relationship between India and CARICOM as it accounts for the importance of identity, culture, and the dynamic nature of international interactions.

## **Results**

### **Recent initiatives**

The Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, paid an official visit to Guyana from November 19-21, 2024 (3). It was the second time an Indian Prime Minister had visited that country since Prime Minister Indira Gandhi visited in October 1968. Besides his bilateral meetings/events in Guyana, Prime Minister Modi participated in the second CARICOM/India Summit on November 20 (4). The first summit was held in New York on the margins of the UN General Assembly in September 2019. There have been several visits to the CARICOM region by Indian government officials since 2022. These visits have focused on strengthening diplomatic relations, fostering economic cooperation, and promoting cultural exchange [1]. Some notable aspects of these visits include the following:

- **High-Level Delegations:** Indian officials, including ministers and diplomats, have made high-profile visits to CARICOM countries to engage in discussions on bilateral relations, trade, and investment opportunities. These visits often include meetings with CARICOM leaders to reinforce partnerships and explore areas of mutual interest.

- **Bilateral Agreements:** During these visits, Indian officials have sought to sign and renew various bilateral agreements that facilitate cooperation in sectors such as agriculture, health care, education, and technology. These agreements aim to enhance trade relations and provide frameworks for collaboration on development projects.

- **Trade and Investment Promotion:** Indian government officials have actively promoted Indian investments in the Caribbean, focusing on sectors like renewable energy, pharmaceuticals, and information technology. By engaging with local businesses and governments, they aim to identify opportunities for joint ventures and partnerships.

- Cultural Diplomacy Initiatives: Cultural exchange has been a key focus during these visits. Indian officials have participated in events celebrating Indian festivals and traditions, fostering a deeper understanding of Indian culture among Caribbean communities. Initiatives such as the International Day of Yoga have also been promoted to strengthen people-to-people ties.

- Support for Development Projects: Indian officials have discussed collaboration on various development projects, including infrastructure development and capacity building. India has offered technical assistance and training programs to help Caribbean nations address their specific developmental needs.

- Addressing Global Challenges: The discussions have also included strategies to tackle common challenges such as climate change, food security, and economic resilience. Indian officials have emphasized the importance of working together to find sustainable solutions to these pressing issues.

- Strengthening Multilateral Relations: Indian visits have often coincided with participation in regional and international forums, where officials have advocated for Caribbean interests on global platforms. This engagement reflects India's commitment to support CARICOM nations in their pursuit of development goals.

Undoubtedly, these visits by Indian government officials to the CARICOM region since 2022 have significantly contributed to strengthening diplomatic and economic ties, promoting cultural exchange, and addressing common challenges. These engagements highlight India's proactive approach to building partnerships with Caribbean nations and fostering mutual growth [2]. (Morgan 2024).

On the flip side, CARICOM leaders have visited India, such as Prime Minister of St Vincent and the Grenadines, Dr Ralph Gonsalves, in September 2019; President of Guyana, Dr Mohamed Irfaan Ali, and President of Suriname, Mr Chandrikapersad Santokhi, in January 2023; Prime Minister Keith Rowley of Trinidad and Tobago in May 2024, and Prime Minister of Jamaica, Dr Andrew Holness, in September/October 2024. There is mutual interest in strengthening relations between India and CARICOM countries and specifically between India and Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, and Suriname. On the face of it, the interest seems to be particularly between these three major CARICOM states, namely Guyana, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago and India. The driving force behind the strengthening of this relationship more than likely stems from three main areas, namely the availability of fossil fuels, the relevance of the Indian diaspora and the increasing influence of India on the global stage.

**Fossil fuels (oil).** India is a major consumer of energy. It has been pointed out that India has keen interest in the oil resources in Guyana, as well as in Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago. Suriname could have resources of 2.4 billion barrels. Trinidad and Tobago's resources are now at 241 million barrels. Guyana has 11 billion barrels of removable oil resources and explorations are continuing. US-based oil company, ExxonMobil, is invested in Guyana's exploration and production. It is reported that India wants to import up to two million barrels of oil from Guyana, seeing it as key to its energy security. Guyana and India signed a memorandum of understanding to strengthen cooperation in hydrocarbon trade and petroleum

products. Talks between the two will continue, with Indian investors continuing to show interest in Guyana.

**Indian diaspora.** In its foreign policy, it appears that India is increasingly seeing its diaspora as having strategic importance. The Indian High Commission in Jamaica hosted a diaspora event on January 9, 2023. This event aimed to strengthen ties with the Indian diaspora in Jamaica and foster community engagement. Other CARICOM countries have been developing their diaspora policies and many diaspora events are expected in 2025, especially in Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago and Suriname. It is not clear how significant the Caribbean diaspora presence in India actually is, although there are people with Caribbean ancestry living in India.

**Increasing India's influence.** India, with a population of 1.4 billion, is now the world's fifth largest economy after the United States, China, Japan, and Germany (EU). Its gross domestic product (GDP) growth in 2024 is projected to be about seven per cent. India has the potential to be an economic and military superpower [3]. It wants to increase its influence in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). The LAC is the traditional sphere of influence of the USA, and China has also been making inroads in this region.

### **Areas of Cooperation between Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and India**

The small states of the CARICOM given their size and location have a very unique set of problems compared to the rest of the Latin American countries—be it economic, environmental or energy related. Their limited domestic market makes these economies reliant on export revenues and their openness to trade makes them vulnerable to fluctuations of the international markets. Natural disasters and climate change given their location add a new dimension to their security concerns. These states have thus learnt to be innovative in order to survive [4].

The Caribbean region has a long history of regional cooperation and efforts towards the integration of their economies along with attempts to increase their combined voting power in multilateral organizations. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) often claimed as the most viable alternative for substantial regional progress, came into being by the Treaty of Chaguaramas in Trinidad and Tobago in July 1973 after attempts at a Caribbean Free Trade Agreement in the 1960s (CARIFTA). CARICOM comprises 15 members which include Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago, the Bahamas, Haiti and Suriname [5]. It was the result of efforts made to formally resolve the economic difficulties of the CARICOM member states within the region and is considered to be one of the most advanced regional institutions in the developing world. The Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas in 2001 principally gave rise to an initiative or strategy known as the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME), which if successful, would eventually integrate all member countries into a single economic space and allow free movement of goods and services.

India's relations with the Caribbean countries may be traced back to the early nineteenth century. From this period till the early part of the twentieth century many indentured agricultural labourers from different parts of India were transported there

to work in the plantations. With the introduction of sugarcane culture, the economic prospects of most of the Caribbean countries completely changed. Thus, ethnic Indians comprise between thirty to forty percent of the population in Guyana, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago. Other countries in the Caribbean such as Jamaica and the Bahamas also have smaller percentages of the Indian population.

This means that there already exist strong emotional and cultural links between India and these Caribbean countries. A nascent market to cater to the demands of the Indians seeking to preserve their ethnic life-style associated with cuisine and other cultural artifacts had been created in the Caribbean. The demand for these products led to a commercial relationship with India even during the inter-war period of the 1920s and 1930s. Indian cinema too became much sought after. With independence and the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and the newly independent countries of the Caribbean in the 1960s, bilateral relations grew more in academics and sports, more importantly, cricket. Trade links were not very substantial at the time. One of the initial examples of bilateral relations was the establishment of the Indian Studies “Chair” at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine campus in the mid-1960s in Trinidad, a result of the informal dialogue between Trinidad’s first Prime Minister Eric Williams and India’s Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru [5].

While cultural links were already strong with India, it was only in November 2003 that it was agreed to set up an India-CARICOM Joint Commission during a CARICOM delegation visit to India. In 2005 the first meeting of India-CARICOM Foreign Ministers was held at Paramaribo, Suriname while the CARICOM Summit was on. The First India-CARICOM Economic Forum was held in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago in August 2005, followed by the first India-Caribbean Conclave in June 2009. Several areas of cooperation were identified between CARICOM and India which ranged from socio-economic bilateral issues including trade, tourism and the fight against AIDS to political ones such as combating terrorism, the UN development millennium goals and its reform. Some of the main areas of concern/cooperation may be listed as:

#### **Promotion of trade in goods and services**

While the socio-cultural historical links of the Caribbean countries with India are very important, recent trends have shown that there is a greater potential for economic links through trade. There is no doubt that China already plays a major economic role in the Caribbean, but with its growing middle-class India’s population is likely to surpass that of China by 2030 and it can provide a large market (ECLAC 2011). India’s total trade with Latin America and the Caribbean has averaged 117 million dollars between 2008-2010 while its trade with the CARICOM countries rose from 85.5 million US dollars in 2003-4 to 1195 million US dollars in 2009-10.

The major export destinations of India and import from the region to India are the Bahamas, Trinidad and Tobago, Haiti, Jamaica, Suriname, Guyana, and Barbados. India exports mostly pharmaceutical products, iron and steel, machinery and instruments to CARICOM. Crude petroleum, gold, metalliferous ores and scrap are major items that India imports from CARICOM.

One of the discussion points for services has been the rich possibilities in travel and tourism. For India, acquiring and renovation of hotels in the CARICOM region, which is a very popular tourist destination is bound to be fruitful. Investments in popular Indian style Ayurveda/ Yoga / Wellness centers in these hotels could really cater to the rising demand for such services. Instructors can train local practitioners, which will, in turn, make these centers acceptable.

### **Investments**

India's foreign direct investment to the Caribbean is also generally on the rise though it has seen a moderate decline between 2011 and 2017. However, that is mostly due to the fall in FDI to British Virgin and Cayman Islands, associate members of CARICOM. Of the total investments to Latin America and the Caribbean, 70 percent had gone to the British Virgin Islands and the Cayman Islands alone in 2011, (ECLAC 2011). From April 2011 to November 2017, 46% of the Indian investments went to British Virgin Islands accounting for the largest share among the LAC countries. The total investments between April 2011 to November 2017 in the Bahamas mostly in the construction sector was about US\$ 163 million. In the same period, India invested a total amount of about US\$ 17.6 million mostly in agriculture and mining in Guyana. Thus, there is also a change in the sectoral composition of these investments which have shifted towards agriculture and mining. For India, the Caribbean is strategically located for entry into the Latin American market. That is an added advantage that India should not forego.

Financial and technical assistance: India signed a contribution agreement with the CARICOM Development Fund (CDF) in January 2019, about ten years after its creation in 2008. India has agreed to grant US\$ one million to the CDF's capital fund. This makes India a development partner of CARICOM. CDF's directive is to give financial and technical assistance to countries or sectors within the Caribbean Community in areas such as the development of renewable energy or increasing energy efficiency; providing physical infrastructure to encourage investments and trade; encouraging small and medium enterprises and developing human resources. India had put in a donation of US \$ five million to help Haiti reconstruct itself after the disastrous earthquake of 2010 [5].

In software and information technology, the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Program (ITEC) is one of the prongs of the Development Partnership Administration established in 2012 in the Ministry of External Affairs, India. The government of India put in US\$ 1.166 million worth of information technology and communication infrastructure and computer software at the CARICOM Secretariat in 2005-2006. A few slots for ITEC courses are reserved annually for the CARICOM members. India can also assist in increasing offshore medical centres, pharmaceutical manufacturing, including the supply of anti-retroviral drugs for fighting HIV/AIDS.

Having the advantage of a sizeable Indian diasporic community in the region along with the natural complementarities of products for trade with the region, this is the right time for closer cooperation and exploring further avenues for interaction for India—both bilateral and multilateral - based on multiple areas of mutual interests and concerns with the CARICOM countries.

## **Technology**

Cooperation in technology between India and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) has grown significantly in recent years, reflecting a mutual interest in leveraging technological advancements for development, economic growth, and innovation. India is recognized as a global leader in information technology and digital services. CARICOM countries have sought to benefit from India's expertise in this field, particularly in areas like software development, IT services, and digital infrastructure. Collaborative initiatives aim to enhance the digital capabilities of Caribbean nations, fostering economic growth and improving public services.

India has also been actively involved in capacity-building programs aimed at enhancing the skills of the Caribbean workforce in technology-related fields. Initiatives such as training workshops, seminars, and online courses have been organized to equip professionals in CARICOM countries with the necessary skills to thrive in the digital economy. In relation to telecommunications, the Indian government and private sector companies have shown interest in collaborating with Caribbean nations to improve telecommunications infrastructure. This includes enhancing broadband connectivity and mobile services, which are crucial for economic development and access to information.

There have also been sound E-Governance initiatives between the two regions. India's experience in e-governance has been valuable for CARICOM nations seeking to digitize their public services. Collaborative projects focus on implementing e-governance solutions that streamline administrative processes, improve service delivery, and enhance transparency in governance. In the areas of startups and innovation there is a growing interest in fostering startup ecosystems in the Caribbean, with India's vibrant startup culture serving as a model. Initiatives to promote innovation and entrepreneurship include knowledge-sharing platforms, mentorship programs, and potential investment opportunities from Indian venture capitalists.

Collaborative research initiatives in technology and innovation have been encouraged, particularly in areas such as renewable energy, biotechnology, and health technology. Joint research projects aim to address specific challenges faced by Caribbean nations while benefiting from India's technological expertise.

Technology cooperation has also extended to disaster management, an area of critical importance for Caribbean nations prone to natural disasters. India has shared its technological advancements in early warning systems, data analytics, and remote sensing to help CARICOM countries improve their disaster preparedness and response capabilities. Various bilateral agreements have been signed to formalize cooperation in technology, including participation in forums that facilitate dialogue between Indian and CARICOM officials. These platforms allow for the exchange of best practices and identification of new areas for collaboration. Cooperation in technology between India and CARICOM is multifaceted, encompassing IT services, capacity building, telecommunications, e-governance, and innovation. This partnership not only aims to enhance the technological capabilities of Caribbean nations but also seeks to foster sustainable development and economic growth in the region.



## **Security**

India and CARICOM (Caribbean Community) have been strengthening their cooperation in various areas, including security. While the primary focus has been on economic cooperation, agriculture, health, and technology, there have been efforts to enhance security collaboration as well. The CARICOM-India Joint Commission, established in 2003, has been instrumental in identifying and promoting areas of cooperation (5). This includes disaster management, which is a key component of security. Additionally, both parties have engaged in multilateral forums such as the United Nations and the Commonwealth to address broader security concerns. In relation to terrorism, India and CARICOM have been working together to address terrorism and other security threats.

During the 4th India-CARICOM ministerial meeting, they discussed counterterrorism measures and ways to enhance cooperation in this area. Both sides recognize the importance of tackling terrorism to ensure regional and global security. India has also been involved in various bilateral meetings with CARICOM member states, where counterterrorism has been a key topic. This collaboration is part of a broader effort to strengthen security ties and address common challenges. In relation to the cooperation between India and CARICOM in counterterrorism there have been:

**Joint Meetings and Summits:** India and CARICOM have held several high-level meetings to discuss counterterrorism efforts. For instance, the 4th India-CARICOM ministerial meeting, co-chaired by India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and his Jamaican counterpart, focused on counterterrorism among other issues<sup>1</sup>.

**Bilateral Meetings:** During these summits, India's External Affairs Minister also held separate bilateral meetings with counterparts from various CARICOM member states, including Trinidad and Tobago, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and Grenadines, Grenada, and Barbados. These meetings discussed expanding cooperation in counterterrorism, trade, climate change, digital transformation, health, and agriculture.

**Multilateral Forums:** Both India and CARICOM engage in multilateral forums such as the United Nations, the Commonwealth, the Group of 77, and the Non-Aligned Movement to address broader security concerns, including terrorism.

**Development Partnerships:** India has been involved in various development partnerships with CARICOM countries, focusing on areas like digital transformation and health domains, which indirectly contribute to enhancing security infrastructure.

**Training and Capacity Building:** India and CARICOM have discussed cooperation in training and capacity building to strengthen counterterrorism measures.

These efforts highlight the commitment of both India and CARICOM to work together in addressing terrorism and enhancing regional security.

## **Latest Developments and Possibilities for the Future**

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi concluded a visit to the Caribbean nations he has also reinforced a crucial relationship for tactical, strategic, political and economic reasons. PM Modi has made extensive efforts to reach out to the Caribbean

Community (Caricom) and, in the larger context, the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region (6). On November 20, the heads of fourteen Caricom countries met Modi in Georgetown, Guyana. It was historic, the first stand-alone meeting between the heads of government of the two sides convened by a Caricom Member-State. The engagement is expected to strengthen the relationship in areas such as economic cooperation, agriculture and food security, health and pharmaceuticals, and science and innovations. The CARICOM nations last met PM Modi in 2019 on the sidelines of the 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly where they discussed cooperation in renewable energy and climate change through a US\$150 million credit line from India. Modi's recent visit underlines an important development, as to date, India's relations with the community have largely been bilateral with the individual member states.

The Modi led BJP has a different outlook, they seem to consider the relationship with the CARICOM nations an important part of their foreign policy. Foreign minister S Jaishankar has led the initiatives by visiting many of the CARICOM nations himself. While India has a healthy trade with CARICOM, when coupled with the Latin American bloc, the trading volume is massive. As a bloc it would be India's fifth largest trading partner. Before the American sanctions on Venezuela, the latter was among the biggest suppliers of oil to India.

Prime Minister Modi during his visit laid the foundation for a strong tie-up with CARICOM. The second step would be to expand the alliance to the LAC. For the time being, he laid out seven proposals, collectively forming the acronym C-A-R-I-C-O-M [6]. They are:

C, for Capacity Building: India will offer 1,000 slots in the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) program for skill development and technical training. Additionally, a forensic center will be built to support CARICOM nations.

A, for Agriculture and Food Security: With this proposal, India intends to enhance cooperation in agricultural development and food security for the Caribbean region.

R, for Renewable Energy and Climate Change: India has launched initiatives like the Solar Alliance, Mission LiFe, and the Biofuels Alliance, and has invited CARICOM nations to join these efforts. PM Modi also proposed to make a government building solar-powered.

I, for Innovation, Technology and Trade: With India's UPI payment system implemented in countries like Singapore, France, and Sri Lanka, Modi proposes that this initiative could be extended to CARICOM.

C, for Cricket and Culture: Highlighting the cultural bond over cricket between India and the Caribbean, PM Modi announced plans to train women cricketers from CARICOM countries in India. Additionally, a film festival showcasing Caribbean cinema will also be organized.

O, for Ocean Economy: As many CARICOM nations are oceanic, PM Modi proposed enhancing cooperation in the ocean economy, offering India's support in providing passenger and cargo facility.

M, for Medicine and Healthcare: Modi noted India aims to improve healthcare in CARICOM countries by opening Jan Aushadhi Kendras (affordable medicine

centres), establishing diagnostic centres, providing mobile hospitals, and setting up food camps for differently-abled individuals. Additionally, sea ambulances will be made available to support the region's healthcare needs.

These proposals, while greatly welcomed, must be followed up rigorously by the CARICOM states. His "seven pillars for co-operation" plan for the four million people of CARICOM signals a new awakening for the 15 members of the regional group, which has been functioning for some 51 years [7].

Is it a replacement of the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) initiated by the US and now in the scrapyard of history? Or is it that Modi, fresh from a near defeat in the recent general election, is flexing his muscles to the Indian populace that he remains the all-powerful Indian leader? This is the first time since its independence in August 1947 that India has stepped out to the Caribbean and offered such goodies aimed at development. History would record that during the covid19 pandemic, Modi donated more than 400,000 doses of vaccine to countries in the region, including TT. Modi drew smiles when he mentioned cricket and cinema linking India and the Caribbean, especially T20 cricket, as well as the enhancement of women's cricket. He underlined the effectiveness of yoga and suggested that it become part of the school curriculum and that India would be willing to provide yoga teachers and trainers. He was exceedingly charitable with his gift bag to CARICOM but the central challenge is would the regional organization be able to take up the challenge and get cracking with his offer. This is the first time that India has made such an offer for the development of the region. In years gone by, India was noted for its religious and cultural relations with the Caribbean, but with Modi's "seven pillars for co-operation" plan it has taken on a wider dimension aimed at boosting Caribbean development and strengthening ties.

President Ramnath Kovind's visits to Jamaica and Saint Vincent & the Grenadines in May 2022, was the first visit to the Caribbean island nations by an Indian Head of State. The visit was important as the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region for the first time emerged as a significant geopolitical pole of the world. For India, it is attempting to look beyond the traditional trade routes to North America and Europe. Many economic experts believe that, for the CARICOM nations, relations with India and other emerging economies in the "Global South" are extremely important as it could support regional integration and bring sustainable development solutions. The CARICOM countries are looking at a more diverse set of relations with new partners to help it achieve its goals of building economic diversity, strengthen political ties and work with countries on issues of concern such as climate change and environmental protection, disaster relief, sustainable energy and energy security among other areas. Prime Minister Modi has emphasized on partnering with CARICOM countries in capacity building, development assistance and cooperation in disaster management and resilience [6].

Both sides can also cooperate to build solutions to energy transmission challenges that may be unique to their respective regions such as transmission of power over difficult terrain for India and across islands divided by oceans for the Caribbean countries. A critical problem facing most CARICOM countries is their dependence on imported fossil fuels for power generation. Adoption of renewable

energy has been limited for reasons including: high initial costs, grid stability issues and an insufficient understanding of clean energy resources. Another aspect of cooperation is developing and deployment of smart grid technology. The CARICOM countries are exploring smart grid technology to enhance their existing power networks; India also has a Smart Grid Vision and has been taking steps to implement it through developments in software, technology, and know-how that can be leveraged to provide power to all its citizens. Additionally, another sector of collaboration between India and CARICOM countries could be in the smart mobility. The government of India has set itself an ambitious target to make India a 100% electric vehicle nation by 2030 through more investments in public transport systems and work towards adopting new mobility solutions. India aims to make a transport sector that is well connected, energy efficient and less polluting. As the Caribbean nations work towards building smart cities, smart mobility technology innovation and research & development provide an opportune area for partnerships. Given similarities in the challenges that India and the CARICOM countries face and India's growing knowledge base, working with each other to build capacity and find build cost effective solutions to common concerns will further strengthen the relations [8].

### **Discussion**

Potential obstacles to deeper engagement between India and CARICOM.

1. Deeper engagement between India and CARICOM could face several obstacles stemming from historical, geopolitical, economic, and logistical factors. Here are some potential challenges:

Geographical Distance India and CARICOM nations are separated by vast geographical distances, which can increase the cost and complexity of trade, transportation, and travel. This could limit frequent physical interactions, cultural exchange, and business ties.

#### **2. Limited Economic Complementarity**

CARICOM economies are relatively small and heavily reliant on sectors like tourism, agriculture, and natural resources, while India's economic focus includes manufacturing, services, and technology. The scope for substantial trade and investment might be constrained by limited mutual economic complementarities.

#### **3. Institutional and Policy Differences**

India's economic and political systems are vastly different from those in CARICOM countries, where small economies and differing regulations might make harmonization difficult. Divergent policy frameworks could complicate bilateral or multilateral agreements, such as trade pacts or investment treaties.

#### **4. Lack of Awareness and Connectivity**

There is limited awareness in India about CARICOM nations, and vice versa. Direct flights, efficient shipping routes, and digital connectivity are sparse. This lack of connectivity hampers people-to-people ties, cultural exchange, and tourism.

#### **5. Competition from Other Global Powers**

The CARICOM region has strong historical and contemporary ties with countries like the United States, China, and the European Union, which already have

significant economic and political footprints in the region. India may find it challenging to carve a niche or compete for influence and trade opportunities.

#### 6. Climate Vulnerability and Economic Fragility

Many CARICOM nations face challenges like hurricanes, rising sea levels, and economic vulnerability due to their dependence on tourism. This could limit their capacity to engage in long-term initiatives or investments with India.

#### 7. Diaspora-Driven Engagement

While the Indian diaspora in CARICOM is significant, their influence is largely cultural and limited in economic and political terms. Over-reliance on diaspora ties may restrict broader bilateral engagement in other critical areas.

#### 8. Bureaucratic and Diplomatic Capacity

Many CARICOM nations have small bureaucracies, which may not be equipped to engage deeply with a large and complex partner like India. This could slow negotiations and the implementation of agreements.

#### 9. Divergent Strategic Priorities

India's strategic priorities often focus on regions closer to home (e.g., South Asia, Indo-Pacific), while CARICOM nations prioritize relations with their immediate neighbors and dominant powers in the Americas. This divergence might limit sustained high-level engagement.

#### 10. Trade and Investment Barriers

High tariffs, non-tariff barriers, and limited trade agreements between India and CARICOM hinder robust economic partnerships. The absence of structured trade facilitation mechanisms reduces the ease of doing business.

Addressing these obstacles would require concerted efforts from both India and CARICOM to enhance diplomatic dialogue, build infrastructure, and identify specific areas of mutual benefit for collaboration [8].

### **Conclusion**

The future of India-CARICOM relations looks promising, with several key areas of cooperation being identified for further development. In relation to economic cooperation, both parties are focusing on enhancing economic ties, with a particular emphasis on agriculture, food security, and infrastructure. India has proposed expanding agri-business and agri-processing, as well as strengthening transport and logistics support systems. Similarly, for technology and innovation, there is a strong emphasis on leveraging technology and innovation, including climate-smart agriculture and digital transformation. India has proposed expanding the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Program (ITEC) to accommodate more participants from CARICOM member states [7].

Additionally, cooperation in health and pharmaceuticals is expected to grow, with initiatives aimed at improving healthcare infrastructure and access to medicines. Furthermore, India is committed to supporting capacity building in various sectors, including technical training, skill development, and parliamentary training. The establishment of a forensic center for CARICOM is also being considered.

In other areas, both parties are working on renewable energy projects, with India providing support through credit lines and technical assistance and the cultural connection between India and CARICOM, particularly through cricket, is being strengthened. India has proposed training programs for female cricketers from CARICOM nations. India is looking to enhance cooperation in the maritime sector, including the supply of passenger and cargo ferries, which would bolster transportation and trade. Without doubt, these trends highlight the deepening relationship between India and CARICOM, with a focus on sustainable development, innovation, and mutual benefit.

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### Notes

(1) The Indentured Labour System and India India was the largest source of indentured labor. Between 1834 and 1917, over 1.5 million Indians were sent abroad. Indian laborers in the system were often referred to as "Girmitiyas," derived from the term "agreement." Their major destinations included Caribbean nations like Trinidad, Guyana, and Suriname, Fiji and South Africa. This system ended when it was criticized as a form of "new slavery" because of the exploitative conditions. Activists, both in India (e.g., Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa) and abroad, campaigned against it and the practice was officially abolished in British colonies in 1917, although it had already started declining earlier.

(2) The Caribbean and CARICOM (Caribbean Community) are related but distinct concepts:

A. The Caribbean. Definition: A geographic region consisting of the Caribbean Sea, its islands, and the surrounding coasts. It includes a diverse range of countries, territories, and cultures.

Composition: Over 700 islands, islets, reefs, and cays.

Includes independent countries (e.g., Jamaica, Barbados), overseas territories (e.g., Puerto Rico, Martinique), and dependencies (e.g., Bermuda, Cayman Islands).

Diversity: Languages: English, Spanish, French, Dutch, and various Creole dialects.

Cultures influenced by African, European, Indigenous, and Asian heritages.

Economy: Dependent on tourism, agriculture (e.g., sugar, bananas), and natural resources (e.g., oil and minerals in Trinidad and Tobago).

## B. CARICOM (Caribbean Community)

Definition: A political and economic organization that promotes regional integration and cooperation among its member states in the Caribbean.

Established: 1973 by the Treaty of Chaguaramas.

Goals: Economic integration through the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME).

Coordinated foreign policy.

Functional cooperation in health, education, and disaster management.

Membership: 15 full members (e.g., Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana), 5 Associate Members (e.g., British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands).

Members are primarily English-speaking, though Haiti (French/Creole-speaking) and Suriname (Dutch-speaking) are included.

Exclusions: Not all Caribbean nations are members (e.g., Cuba, Puerto Rico).

(3) Before visiting Guyana, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Nigeria and Brazil as part of a three-nation tour.

**Nigeria:** This marked the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister to Nigeria in 17 years. PM Modi engaged in bilateral talks with Nigerian President Bola Ahmed Tinubu and was honored with Nigeria's national award, the Grand Commander of the Order of the Niger. He also interacted with the Indian community and discussed strengthening bilateral ties.

**Brazil:** In Rio de Janeiro, Modi attended the G20 Summit, where he held bilateral meetings with several global leaders, including U.S. President Joe Biden, French President Emmanuel Macron, and UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer. He highlighted India's achievements in combating poverty and emphasized solutions for global challenges like food security and energy transition.

Guyana was the final stop on this trip, where Modi co-chaired the India-CARICOM Summit and engaged in discussions to deepen ties with Caribbean nations.

(4) Significance of the CARICOM/India Summit 2024

First Indian PM Visit in 50 Years: The 2024 summit marks the first visit of an Indian Prime Minister to Guyana in five decades, highlighting its historical importance.

India's Growing Global Role: It underscores India's outreach to the Global South and its commitment to fostering partnerships beyond traditional regions like Asia and Europe.

Strategic Partnerships: CARICOM nations benefit from India's expertise in sustainable development, while India seeks stronger political and economic influence in the Americas.

(5) The **CARICOM-India Joint Commission** was established in **2003** as a mechanism to promote and institutionalize cooperation between the **Caribbean Community (CARICOM)** and **India**. This commission serves as a formal platform for dialogue and collaboration on matters of mutual interest, fostering closer ties in political, economic, and cultural spheres. The establishment of the CARICOM-India Joint Commission highlights India's recognition of the strategic importance of the Caribbean region. It reflects a commitment to South-South cooperation and solidarity, addressing the unique developmental challenges faced by small island developing states (SIDS) in the region.

(6) Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC):

This refers to the geographical and cultural region comprising countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. It includes nations from Mexico in the north to Argentina and Chile in the south, along with the Caribbean islands. The term is frequently used in international relations, economics, and development studies to address regional issues collectively, such as trade, poverty alleviation, climate change, and political dynamics.

## ҮНДИСТАН ЖӘНЕ КАРИБ ҚАУЫМДАСТЫҒЫ (КАРИКОМ): ӨЗАРА ТҮСІНІСТІК ПЕН ЫНТЫМАҚТАСТЫҚТЫ АРТТЫРУ ЖОЛЫНДА

\*Рагунат Махабир<sup>1</sup>, Керон Ганпат<sup>2</sup>

\*<sup>1</sup> Оңтүстік Кариб университеті, Тринидад және Тобаго  
<sup>2</sup> Тринидад және Тобаго университеті, Тринидад және Тобаго

**Аңдатпа.** Бұл мақалада Үндістан мен Кариб Теңізі Қауымдастығы (CARICOM) арасындағы дамып келе жатқан қарым-қатынастар зерттеліп, тез өзгеретін жаһандық ландшафтта көбірек түсіністік пен ынтымақтастық қажет екендігі баса айтылған. Екі аймақта экономиканы әртараптандыру, климаттың өзгеруі, қауіпсіздік мәселелері және мәдени алмасу сияқты мәселелерді шешіп жатқандықтан, құжат конструктивтік көзқарасты ұстанады және олардың серіктестігінің негізін құрайтын тарихи байланыстар мен ортақ құндылықтарды көрсетеді. Ол сауда, технология, білім беру, қауіпсіздік және тұрақты дамуды қоса алғанда, әлеуетті ынтымақтастықтың негізгі бағыттарын, сондай-ақ өзара әрекеттесуді тереңдетуге кедергі келтіретін кедергілерді жоюды қарастырады. Дипломатиялық бастамаларды, екіжақты келісімдерді және бұқаралық алмасуларды жан-жақты талдау арқылы бұл зерттеу Үндістан МЕН КАРИКОМ арасындағы қарым-қатынасты нығайту бойынша тиімді ұсыныстар беруге бағытталған. Сайып келгенде, мақалада өзара байланысты әлемде өзара өсу мен өміршеңдікке ықпал ету үшін екі аймақтың бірегей күшті жақтарын пайдаланатын стратегиялық серіктестік туралы айтылады.

**Тірек сөздер:** КАРИКОМ, сауда, ынтымақтастық, жаһандық сын-қатерлер, стратегиялық әріптестік, дипломатиялық бастамалар, қауіпсіздік, тұрақты даму

## **ИНДИЯ И КАРИБСКОЕ СООБЩЕСТВО (КАРИКОМ): НА ПУТИ К БОЛЬШЕМУ ВЗАИМОПОНИМАНИЮ И СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВУ**

\*Рагхунат Махабир<sup>1</sup>, Керон Ганпат<sup>2</sup>

\*<sup>1</sup> Южно-Карибский университет, Тринидад и Тобаго

<sup>2</sup> Университет Тринидада и Тобаго, Тринидад и Тобаго

**Аннотация.** В этой статье рассматриваются развивающиеся отношения между Индией и Карибским сообществом (КАРИКОМ), подчеркивается необходимость большего взаимопонимания и сотрудничества в условиях быстро меняющегося глобального ландшафта. Поскольку оба региона сталкиваются с такими вызовами, как диверсификация экономики, изменение климата, вопросы безопасности и культурного обмена, в документе используется конструктивистский подход и подчеркиваются исторические связи и общие ценности, которые составляют основу их партнерства. В нем рассматриваются ключевые области потенциального сотрудничества, включая торговлю, технологии, образование, безопасность и устойчивое развитие, а также рассматриваются препятствия, препятствующие более глубокому взаимодействию. Это исследование, основанное на всестороннем анализе дипломатических инициатив, двусторонних соглашений и обменов мнениями на низовом уровне, призвано дать практические рекомендации по укреплению отношений между Индией и КАРИКОМ. В конечном счете, в статье говорится о стратегическом партнерстве, которое использует уникальные преимущества обоих регионов для содействия взаимному росту и устойчивости во взаимосвязанном мире.

**Ключевые слова:** КАРИКОМ, торговля, сотрудничество, глобальные вызовы, стратегическое партнерство, дипломатические инициативы, безопасность, устойчивое развитие

### ***Information about authors:***

*Dr. Raghunath Mahabir – Coordinator of the National Security and Intelligence Program, University of the Southern Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago, e-mail: [mahabir@usc.edu.tt](mailto:mahabir@usc.edu.tt)*

*Mr. Keron Ganpat - Instructor in Criminology, University of Trinidad and Tobago, Trinidad and Tobago*

***Авторлар туралы мәлімет:***



*Рагунат Махабир – PhD докторы, Ұлттық қауіпсіздік және барлау кафедрасының доценті, Оңтүстік Кариб университеті, Тринидад және Тобаго, e-mail: [mahabir@usc.edu.tt](mailto:mahabir@usc.edu.tt)*

*Керон Ганпат – оқытушы, криминалист инструктор, Тринидад және Тобаго университеті, Тринидад және Тобаго, e-mail: [keron.ganpat@utt.edu.tt](mailto:keron.ganpat@utt.edu.tt)*

***Сведения об авторах:***

*Рагхунат Махабир - доктор PhD, доцент кафедры национальной безопасности и разведки, Южно-Карибский университет, Тринидад и Тобаго, e-mail: [mahabir@usc.edu.tt](mailto:mahabir@usc.edu.tt)*

*Керон Ганпат – преподаватель, инструктор криминологии, Университет Тринидада и Тобаго, Тринидад и Тобаго, e-mail: [keron.ganpat@utt.edu.tt](mailto:keron.ganpat@utt.edu.tt)*

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