

New role for diplomacy worth examining

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THE issue of an expanded role for diplomats, as highlighted by Sir Ronald Sanders in his column in this week's Agenda, makes interesting reading.

Sir Ronald, himself a former Caribbean diplomat of high regard, brings to this discussion years of experience in the field and a great understanding of the benefits derived by the region's foreign service over many decades.

He would also have an acute sense of the requirements of the foreign service in today's world which has changed significantly over the past decade.

As Sir Ronald quite rightly pointed out in his article on Sunday, these changes — the spread of HIV/AIDS, the fallout from the global financial crisis, the rise of the ideology of trade liberalisation, and heavy constraints on financial services imposed by wealthy nations in the name of the prevention of money laundering and financing of terrorism — have proven detrimental to the survival of small countries.

"Small states," Sir Ronald argued, "have no arsenal of foreign policy tools such as economic clout or military capacity with which to advance their interests or counter the constraints that are imposed on them by more powerful countries and institutions. They rely entirely on the capacity and forcefulness of their diplomacy."

He is, of course, correct, and his view that small countries would do well to adopt Britain's approach of requiring foreign service officials to source and expand markets for Britain's goods and services, and to also help attract investment from overseas makes eminent sense.

For there is much more that can be gained from the network of contacts that diplomats -- especially those who take their jobs seriously -- develop over the course of

their careers.

Take for instance Ambassador Derick Heaven who excelled as Jamaica's High Commissioner in London. Someone with his negotiating skills, business savvy and political experience would no doubt prove an invaluable asset to Jamaica in the role being advanced by Sir Ronald.

In fact, we would not be surprised if we were to find out that Ambassador Heaven — during his tour of duty in England — collaborated with Jampro to generate interest in Jamaica and Jamaican goods and services. Such is his devotion to Jamaica.

We acknowledge, though, that we do not have an overabundance of people of the ilk of Ambassador Heaven. However, we feel that there exists enough bright, talented and devoted Jamaicans who could fill the "gaping hole in commercial diplomacy" to which Sir Ronald referred in his article.

Some people, we suspect, may bristle at Sir Ronald's suggestion that Caribbean countries revamp their foreign ministries and diplomatic missions to place them at the forefront of promoting trade and investment. However, we submit that it is an idea worthy of examination if we are serious about keeping pace with global trends.