**Abe seeks votes from Caribbean nations to join U.N. Security Council**

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PORT OF SPAIN, Trinidad and Tobago--Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on July 28 met with leaders of 14 Caribbean nations here for the first time to strengthen ties and improve Japan’s chances of being voted into the United Nations Security Council.

Abe also held separate talks with representatives of each nation after his joint meeting with the Caribbean Community.

“The time to bloom new possibilities through firm relations has finally come,” Abe said in a dinner held July 27 with Kamla Persad-Bissessar, the prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago.

Japan has weak cultural and economic ties with the Caribbean nations. Japanese official development assistance to the region from 2010 to 2012 totaled about 10 billion yen ($98 million).

Abe’s calls for tighter ties came amid his ongoing tour of Latin America.

But when asked about the main purpose of Abe’s trip to the West Indies, an official of his administration gave a clear answer: “It’s for the election.”

Japan expects to be elected as one of the 10 nonpermanent members of the United Nations Security Council for the 11th time in October 2015. As part of the Security Council, Japan would have a significant voice in imposing economic sanctions or forming multinational forces for the purpose of military action through the United Nations.

Nonpermanent membership is also important for Japan to attain its long-held goal of becoming a permanent member of the Security Council.

At the United Nations General Assembly in 2013, Abe criticized the static state of the council’s basic structure that was established in 1945, saying, “We find it regrettable that the Security Council remains frozen for 70 years.”

Abe will have a meeting with Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff on Aug. 1 as part of his tour around Latin America. Brazil also aims to become a permanent member of the Security Council.

In reality, however, gaining permanent membership--and the veto power that goes with it--is a long shot for any nation. Among the five current permanent members, China is particularly opposed to the idea while the United States is lukewarm to accepting new members.

(This article was written by Takashi Funakoshi and Kotaro Ono in Port of Spain.)

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