
G-15 COUNTRIES LEAD GLOBAL BIO-DIESEL PRODUCTION POTENTIAL

A recent research study has found that four G-15 countries figure among the top five countries globally in bio-diesel production potential. Seeking to understand which nations are best positioned today to enter the burgeoning bio-diesel market, researchers at the Nelson Institute's Center for Sustainability and the Global Environment in Madison, USA ranked 226 countries according to their potential to make large volumes of bio-diesel at low cost. The study, carried out jointly with the University of Wisconsin, has concluded that the world's top five soybean and palm oil producers - Malaysia, Indonesia, Argentina, the United States and Brazil - accounted for 80 percent of the potential global bio-diesel production. The researchers say the study's true motivation was to identify developing countries that already export significant amounts of vegetable oil for profit, but may not have considered refining it into bio-diesel. By exporting bio-diesel - a higher value commodity - these countries could improve their trade balances or use the fuel to offset their own energy needs.

Source: *ScienceDaily*. Retrieved December 28, from <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/10/071017160535.htm>

BRAZIL, VENEZUELA STRENGTHEN ECONOMIC TIES

President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of Brazil and President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela signed a number of new economic cooperation agreements including energy, agriculture, and industrial treaties, during the former's state visit to the Venezuelan capital on 14 December 2007. The two countries also agreed on the construction of a new oil refinery in Brazil. The refinery in northeastern Brazil will be 40%-owned by Venezuela's state oil firm, PDVSA, while Brazil's national oil firm, Petrobras, will hold the rest. Fuel for the \$4.5bn refinery, scheduled to begin operations from 2010, is to be supplied by Venezuela.

President Lula said he hoped closer links between the two countries would lead to an improved "balance" between the two countries. According to Bolivarian news agency AMN, Brazil's exports to Venezuela rose to \$3.8bn in the first 10 months of 2007, up nearly 30% year-on-year, while Venezuela's exports to Brazil dropped 44% to \$269m in the same period.

Source: El Nuevo Herald, 14 December 2007 and bbnews.com 14 December 2007.

INDIA, MALAYSIA CONSIDERING ECONOMIC COOPERATION AGREEMENT

India and Malaysia are considering negotiations for an India-Malaysia Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement from January 2008, said the Indian Commerce and Industry Minister, Mr Kamal Nath at a seminar in New Delhi, on Malaysia-India Business Opportunities. Mr Nath stated that such an agreement would help raise bilateral trade to \$16 bn. by 2012 from the present \$6.8bn.

Speaking on the occasion, Dato Seri Rafidah Aziz, Malaysia's Minister of International Trade and Industry, said that Indian human resource has assumed a key role in Malaysia's economic development as Indian nationals account for 20 per cent of the total expatriate population in Malaysia. She invited Indian investors to explore opportunities in medical devices, pharmaceuticals, construction services, biotechnology and new economic zones in Malaysia.

Source: Press Information Bureau, 26 November 2007

EGYPTIAN INVESTMENT IN ALGERIA SET TO RISE

Egypt's Investment Minister, Mr. Mahmoud Mohiedine, who visited Algeria in the last week of December 2007, has announced that his country was prepared to substantially increase its investments in Algeria. Mr. Mohiedine, who met the Algerian Prime Minister Mr. Abdelaziz Belkhadem, expressed Egypt's interest in Algeria's infrastructure development, including energy, banking and tourism sectors.

Meanwhile, Egypt's Asec Cement Holding (ACH) is set to almost triple the production capacity of Algeria's state-owned Zahana Cement Company after signing a deal to take control of the company. ACH has agreed a Eur 32.6 million (\$47.5 million) deal to take a 35 per cent stake in Zahana, along with management control of the company. Under the terms of the acquisition, ACH will increase Zahana's production capacity to 1.8 million tonnes a year (t/y) from 675,000 t/y. It will also invest in in-house and overseas training for Zahana's existing workforce.

Another leading Egyptian company, Orascom Construction Industry also announced that it has been awarded a contract worth 1.35 billion euros by the Algerian state-owned electricity company "Sonelgaz" (Societe Nationale de l'Electricite et du Gaz) to construct a new combined-cycle power plant in Algeria. The plant, which is the first of its kind in Algeria, will be located in Terga Wilaya de Ain Temouchent, 600 km west of the capital Algiers and 70 km from Oran City.

Source: Egypt News, 25 December 2007 and Marketwire, 4 December 2007

IRAN SIGNS \$16BN GAS DEAL WITH MALAYSIA

The Islamic Republic of Iran has signed a \$16 billion contract with Malaysia to develop new gas fields in Iran and also for the production of liquefied natural gas (LNG) from existing gas fields. The contract, signed on 26 December 2007 between Iran's Pars Oil and Gas Company and Malaysia's SKS Ventures, includes the \$6 billion development of the Golshan and Ferdows gas fields in the next five-and-a-half years. The second leg of the contract is worth \$10 billion and is aimed at the production of LNG from two offshore fields in the southern province of Bushehr. Iran, which has the world's second largest oil and gas reserves, has been signing up oil and gas contracts with a number of Asian countries, including Malaysia, India and China.

Source: Financial Times, 26 December 2007

NIGERIA, EGYPT TO JOINTLY PROMOTE STANDARDIZATION IN AFRICA

The Standards Organization of Nigeria (SON) has entered into a collaboration agreement with the National Institute of Standards (NIS), Egypt, to strengthen capacity and promote standardization and metrology skills within the African continent. The two organizations signed an MoU in Cairo recently to provide a framework for the exchange of services, scientific and technical knowledge as well as to augment the scientific and technical capabilities of both countries in the fields of scientific and industrial metrology. The specific areas included in the MoU are training of SON staff at NIS Laboratories, conducting joint research to develop measurement standards in areas that have been mutually agreed upon and cooperation for establishing regional metrology organizations for the Western, Central and Northern parts of Africa.

Source: Daily Trust, Abuja, 26 December 2007

JAMAICA, BRAZIL SIGN AIR SERVICES AGREEMENT

The governments of Jamaica and Brazil signed their first air services agreement on 14 December 2007, which will open the doors for direct flights between the two countries. The agreement marks the beginning of better transport communications between the two countries and an increase in tourism and investment opportunities for Jamaica. Jamaica commenced its air services negotiations with Brazil in November 2005, finalizing an agreement text in August 2006. Jamaica's Minister of Transport, Mr. Mike Henry, signed on behalf of the Jamaican government, while Mr. Cezar Amaral, Ambassador of Brazil, signed for that country.

Source: Jamaica Gleaner News, 18 December 2007

NIGERIA, IRAN BOOST PRIVATE SECTOR TIES

The Nigerian Association of Chambers of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (NACCIMA) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Iranian Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Mines (ICCIM) aimed at fostering mutual understanding among business communities of both countries. The agreement will also promote trade, investment, and transfer of technology between the two countries. NACCIMA, in a statement made available to the press, stated that under the joint business council, the parties are to set up a Nigeria-Iran Chamber of Commerce with chapters in both the countries, as well as the Nigeria-Iran Trade and Investment Centre. The agreement was signed during a visit to Tehran from 2-8 December 2007 by a NACCIMA delegation, led by its President.

Source: The Nation, 13 December 2007