

MALAYSIA SEEKS BROADER ECONOMIC COOPERATION WITH IRAN

Malaysia and Iran signed three agreements on cooperation in technology, anti-drug campaign and car manufacturing during the two-day visit of Malaysian Prime Minister H.E. Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to Tehran on 21-22 December 2008. Addressing a press conference, Mr. Abdullah urged the Malaysia-Iran Joint Trade Committee to play a pivotal role not only to increase the volume of trade but also identify new products that could be exchanged between the two countries. Malaysia's exports to Iran are now confined to primary commodities like palm oil, natural rubber and transportation parts. About 83 per cent of Malaysia's imports from Iran consist of crude petroleum and petroleum products. Mr. Abdullah said he was also encouraged by the increasing number of tourist arrivals from Iran to Malaysia, with 27,215 Iranians having visited the tropical country in 2007, compared to 9,419 in 2002. "I view tourism as one of the areas we can focus for purposes of enhancing interaction between Malaysia and Iran," he said.

The Prime Minister added that Malaysia and Iran, as leading countries in the developing world, should collaborate to strengthen the role of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, Non-Aligned Movement and the Group 77 at the United Nations and other international organisations.

Source: IRNA and BERNANA, 24 December 2008

INDIA, INDONESIA BOOST MUTUAL RELATIONSHIP

Bilateral ties between India and Indonesia received a boost during the visit of the President of India, H.E. Smt. Pratibha Patil to Indonesia in December 2008. Arriving in Jakarta after a visit to Vietnam, the Indian President held bilateral talks with President Sushilo Yudhoyono covering bilateral and other subjects of regional and international importance. She later also had separate meetings with the Chairmen of the three Houses of Parliament of Indonesia during which she reiterated the willingness of India to receive more parliamentary delegations from Indonesia.

The two G-15 countries also signed an MOU on agriculture and allied sectors as well as an MOU on exchange in youth affairs and sports on 1 December 2008, after the bilateral discussions between the two Presidents.

Source: Press release, Presidentofindia.com, 1 Dec 2008

SEVERAL G-15 COUNTRIES STRENGTHEN TIES WITH SRI LANKA

Several initiatives undertaken in December 2008 have bolstered economic ties between Sri Lanka and several G-15 countries. In the first week of December, Egypt's Minister of Tourism, Zoheir Garranah, declared the commitment of Egyptian Tourism to follow the initiative of Sri Lanka and join the Tourism EarthLung Community. This declaration was made at the opening of the UN World Tourism Organisation-supported Conference for the Middle East and Mediterranean Region held at Sharm El Sheikh. Sri Lanka Tourism has undertaken a ten-year agenda to becoming a carbon neutral tourism destination. Sri Lanka, a country with nearly 50% green cover and 29% forest cover, proposes to involve all

stakeholders to work together for stopping deforestation, promoting reforestation, increasing the use of renewable energy and minimising pollution.

On 13 December 2008, under a UNDP sponsored initiative, the Governor of Sri Lanka's Southern Province, Kumari Balasooriya, led a delegation of Sri Lankan officials to Indonesia for a 7-day visit to discuss development cooperation with senior government officials there – including Home Affairs Minister of Gorontalo Province H. Mardiyanto. The trip followed the Gorontalo Governor's visit to Sri Lanka's Southern Province in August 2008 as part of the same South-South exchange programme. Discussions between the Sri Lankan and Indonesian officials focused on the impact of decentralization on public service delivery, providing high-quality health and education for the people and Agriculture.

Finally, on 17 December 2008, an 18-member delegation of the Associate Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Malaysia (ACCCIM) met officials of the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce and the Sri Lanka – Malaysia Business Council in Colombo. Tan Sri Dato' Soong Siew Hoong, Secretary General of ACCCIM, stated that the objective of the visit to Sri Lanka was to focus on sourcing products and services, offer Malaysian products and services, explore joint venture proposals and investment opportunities in Sri Lanka. The delegates met over 30 local companies at the one-to-one-business sessions.

Source: Press release of the Egyptian Tourism department , 10 December 2008; UNDP Sri Lanka Bulletin; and the Information Division, The Ceylon Chamber of Commerce, 27 December 2008.

KENYA, INDONESIA TO ENHANCE BILATERAL COOPERATION

A Kenyan delegation led by Foreign Affairs Minister Mr. Moses Wetang'ula arrived in Jakarta on 3 December 2008 and held discussions with Indonesia's Foreign Minister Mr. Hassan Wirajuda on the occasion of the First Meeting of the Joint Commission between Indonesia and Kenya. The meeting covered a number of topics with potential for bilateral mutual cooperation, including security, conduct of elections, trade and industry, finance and investment, agriculture and fisheries, energy and mineral resources, transportation and communications as well as tourism. Both countries also agreed to institute training and exchange programs for diplomats, sportsmen, and anti-terrorism officers.

The Kenyan delegation also visited Indonesia's state-owned aircraft maker, PT Dirgantara Indonesia, state arms maker, PT PINDAD, and the Asia-Afrika museum in Bandung, West Java. The visit was part of the agenda to strengthen bilateral cooperation between the two G-15 countries.

Source: ANTARA News, 4 December 2008

IRAN DEEPENS ECONOMIC LINKS WITH SENEGAL, ALGERIA

The Islamic Republic of Iran deepened economic links with several G-15 countries in December 2008, beginning with the inauguration of a car manufacturing plant in Senegal on 4 December 2008. The factory is to assemble units of the Samand sedan, a car produced by Iran's state-owned Khodro company. The plant was opened in the presence of Iranian Minister of Industries and Mines Ali Akbar Mehrabian in Dakar, Senegal's second

largest city. The plant was built at a cost of \$60 million, of which 60 percent will be paid by Iran Khodro, 20 percent by the Senegalese government and the rest by Senegal's private sector. In a bid to equip the country's taxi fleet, some 2,000 units of Samand have initially been exported by Iran to Senegal.

Later in the month, Iran and Algeria reached an agreement to cooperate in car, rail, steel and related components industries. The two sides made the decision in the first meeting of Industry and Mine Joint Committee headed by Iranian and Algerian industry ministers in Abhar, a town in western Iran. The committee's session was held in the presence of Iran's Minister of Industries and Mines Ali-Akbar Mehrabian, Algerian Minister of Industry and Promotion of Investments Abdelhamid Temmar, and senior industrial managers of the two countries, after the opening ceremony of Iran Khodro wagon manufacturing plant in Abhar on December 21 2008.

Source: Iran Daily, 6 December 2008 & news.ikco.com, 21 December 2008.

KENYA, NIGERIA IN TRADE, TECHNICAL TIE-UPS WITH INDIA

Kenya signed a new bilateral agreement with India on 17 December 2008 geared towards advancing trade, investment and technical cooperation. The agreement was signed during the Fifth India-Kenya Joint Trade Committee meeting held in New Delhi. Dr. Cyrus Njiru, Permanent Secretary, Office of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Trade led the Kenyan delegation, while Mr. Jairam Ramesh, Minister of State for Commerce and Power, led the Indian delegation.

Under the terms of the agreement, the Indian National Research and Development Corporation would assist Kenya in value addition, packaging and technological interventions to enhance agricultural output. Areas of agreement were also reached in several other sectors, including cooperation in trade and investment in the Export Processing Zones, joint venture investment in the textile sector, co-operation in the tea and coffee sectors and research and development.

Meanwhile, a Nigerian engineering firm, Kenol Nigeria Limited, announced that it had sealed a partnership deed with Nucon Switchgears Limited of India to foster transformer distribution and manufacturing in Nigeria. The partnership is expected to boost access to quality transformers and solar power, thus bringing about the desired improvement in the nation's power sector.

Source: African Manager, 22 December 2008 & the Vanguard, Lagos, 2 December 2008.