

BRAZIL, MEXICO PLAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

Presidents Felipe Calderon of Mexico and Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva of Brazil have announced an MoU to move forward towards a free trade agreement between the two largest economies in Latin America. The announcement was made on the sidelines of the Summit of Latin American and Caribbean nations held in Mexico's Quintana Roo state on 23-25 February 2010. Trade between the two G-15 countries was estimated to be US \$6 billion in 2009, and an FTA could boost that total considerably in the long term. President Calderon said that Brazil and Mexico see the accord as a vehicle to promote growth and economic development, not only through trade but also through investments. Mexico's foreign direct investment stock in Brazil is currently estimated at about US\$17 billion, while Brazilian investment in Mexico stands at about US\$450 million. In his remarks, the Brazilian president urged Mexico to "look toward South America" when formulating its trade policies.

In addition to announcing the plan for a trade accord, the two Presidents took the opportunity to announce that Mexico's state-run oil company PEMEX, Mexican engineering company Grupo Idesa, and private Brazilian petrochemical consortium Braskem have reached an agreement to construct a plant to produce ethylene in Mexico's coastal Veracruz state.

Source: www.allbusiness.com, 3 March 2010

INDIA, MALAYSIA STRENGTHEN CULTURAL LINKS

Cultural ties between India and Malaysia received a boost with the inauguration of a full-fledged Indian Cultural Centre, complete with a dance studio, music and yoga rooms, in Kuala Lumpur in February 2010. Inaugurated by the President of the Indian Council for Cultural Research, Dr. Karan Singh and Malaysia's Human Resource Minister S. Subramaniam, the Centre also has a library-cum-resource centre with over 5,000 books on Indian art, culture, politics, economics and fiction. The announcement to set up an Indian Cultural Centre in Kuala Lumpur was first made in February 2003 by the then Prime Minister of India, Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, during his visit to Malaysia.

A memorandum of understanding was also signed between ICCR and the University of Malaya on 10 February 2010 to set up a Chair in Social Sciences at the University, which will be staffed by a visiting professor from India.

Source: IANS, 12 February 2010

SRI LANKA, INDONESIA EXCHANGE AGRICULTURAL TECHNOLOGY

In an example of South-South cooperation among G-15 countries, a technical delegation from the Gorontalo province of Indonesia visited the Southern and Uva province of Sri Lanka in February 2010. The delegation, comprising agricultural experts, carried out numerous field visits and exchange of experience sessions with their counterparts from Sri Lanka, relating to the use of different varieties of maize seeds imported from Indonesia with the aim of enhancing productivity in corn cultivation.

In the exchange of experience sessions, the discussions focused on the agricultural practices at the farmer level, the status of maize industry in Gorontalo and the experience of the policy environment in Gorontalo with reference to incentives, subsidies, marketing facilities and extension services; the present scenario of corn cultivation in Sri Lanka, the existing government policies with regard to maize production, testing facilities, crop performance as well as information sharing on gene plasma and extension approaches in Sri Lanka.

Source: UNDP, Sri Lanka, February 2010

KENYA, MEXICO STRENGTHEN BILATERAL ECONOMIC RELATIONS

A delegation from Mexico, led by the Director-General for Africa in the Foreign Ministry, Sara Valdés, visited Kenya in February 2010 where she met with her counterpart, Ambassador James Binsai Chepsongol, the Kenyan Foreign Ministry's Director General for America. During the meeting, it was agreed to promote the advantages offered by markets of both countries in areas such as pharmaceuticals, the automotive industry, construction and textiles.

Mexico and Kenya established diplomatic relations in 1977 and Mexico opened an embassy in Kenya in 1981. According to the press release of the Foreign Ministry of Mexico, this was the first regular meeting between the two G-15 countries to discuss issues of common interest.

Source: Web page of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mexico, <http://portal3.sre.gob.mx>

INDIAN, MALAYSIAN FIRMS GET SHARE IN VENEZUELA'S OIL EXTRACTION LICENSE

A consortium led by Spanish oil company Repsol has been awarded the license for Venezuela's Caribobo-I oil extraction project in February 2010. Repsol and its partners, Oil & Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) of India and Malaysia's Petronas, have each been awarded an 11% stake in the project, while the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) and Oil India Ltd (OIL) will hold 7%. Venezuela's state-owned oil firm PdVSA will hold the remaining majority of 60% stake. Venezuela has the world's 6th largest proven oil reserves and the second largest among G-15 countries, after Iran.

Source: www.oilvoice.com, 15 February 2010