

MALAYSIA, INDIA BOOST ECONOMIC TIES

Economic relations between Malaysia and India received a significant boost during the five-day official visit of the Malaysian Prime Minister H. E. Najib Razak to India from 19-23 January 2010, where he held discussions with Indian Prime Minister H. E. Manmohan Singh. The two G-15 countries signed an extradition treaty and several other pacts covering trade, capital markets and education in an effort to scale up their relations. The agreements included a memorandum of understanding on higher education and a pact between the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) and the Securities Commission of Malaysia to strengthen ties and identify cross-border opportunities through the capital market. Malaysia and India also agreed to conclude a free trade agreement (FTA) by the end of 2010

At a meeting with business leaders organized by the Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry in New Delhi, Mr. Najib said the FTA would spur economic growth in both countries. Bilateral trade between India and Malaysia stood at 10.5 billion U.S. dollars in 2008. The Malaysian Prime Minister also visit Chennai, capital of India's southern state of Tamil Nadu, where his engagements included a keynote address to a gathering of business leaders and interaction with Malaysian students in India. Tamil Nadu accounts for the majority of about 1.8 million people of Indian origin living in Malaysia.

Source: Earth Times (Malaysia) 20 January 2010

SEVERAL G-15 COUNTRIES PLAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS AMONG THEMSELVES

The governments of Indonesia and Egypt have agreed to start talks on a possible free trade agreement (FTA), according to Indonesian Trade Minister Mari Pangestu, who announced on 13 January 2010 that the two countries had launched a joint feasibility study on the subject. Such an FTA with Egypt would facilitate Indonesia's entry into the markets in the Arab, African and Mediterranean regions because Egypt has already concluded free trade deals with countries there, she added.

Two other G-15 countries, Mexico and India also have decided to hold talks leading to an FTA in the future. Announcing this on 25 January 2010, the Mexican Ambassador to India, Mr. Jaime Nualart, said that a high-level committee on economic and trade relations from Mexico would meet with its Indian counterparts in May 2010. Bilateral trade between India and Mexico crossed \$2.95 billion in 2008 and is expected to touch \$5 billion by 2010.

Source: www.bilaterals.org , 13 January 2010 and IANS, 25 January 2010.

IRAN, ZIMBABWE STRENGTHEN RELATIONS

Relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Zimbabwe were strengthened on 1 January 2010 at a ceremony where a number of medical items including 80 wheelchairs, 25 boxes of vitamin supplementary tablets and maternity kits and food hampers meant for disabled people, were distributed on behalf of the Iranian Embassy in Harare. Speaking on the occasion, Iran's deputy ambassador to Zimbabwe, Mr Javad Dehghan, said that Zimbabwe and Iran enjoy a healthy diplomatic and economic relationship, which has seen the Islamic country donating more than 93 times towards humanitarian assistance in Zimbabwe. He added that Iran has also helped Zimbabwe in the mechanization of its agricultural sector and in equipping the national broadcaster, the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Holdings.

According to press reports, the Iranian President was expected to visit Zimbabwe in April 2010 to inaugurate a trade fair in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second largest city.

Source: The Herald (Zimbabwe), 1 January 2010

EGYPT-MALAYSIA BUSINESS COUNCIL INAUGURATED

Malaysia and Egypt bilateral trade and investment relations are set to move on a new growth trajectory with the inaugural joint meeting of the Malaysia-Egypt Business Council that took place in Kuala Lumpur on 12 January 2010. The meeting was co-chaired by Sri Mustapa Mohamad, Malaysian Minister of International Trade and Industry, and his Egyptian counterpart Mr. Rachid Mohamed Rachid. Sri Mustapa Mohamed emphasized the need for the Malaysian and Egyptian business communities to take advantage of opportunities arising from each other's membership of regional trade arrangements.

The Egyptian delegates were also invited to participate in three key economic and trade events that would be taking place in Malaysia, namely the Sixth World Islamic Economic Forum (WIEF) which is to be held from 18-20 May 2010, the Malaysian International Halal Showcase (MIHAS) in June 2010 and the International Trade or INTRADE in November 2010.

Source: Web page of the Malaysian Ministry of International Trade and Industry, 12 January 2010

INDIA TO DEVELOP TWO OIL BLOCKS IN NIGERIA

As a major step towards its entry into Africa's energy fields, India expressed its desire to develop refineries, natural gas and LNG projects in oil-rich Nigeria. India's Petroleum Minister Murli Deora during his visit to the G-15 African country in January 2010 said that India has committed to invest more than \$360 million in developing two oil blocks in Nigeria. The two oil blocks are Nigerian Oil Prospecting Licenses (OPLs) 279 and 285. Drilling had begun in one them.

Following a meeting with his Nigerian counterpart Henry Odein Ajumogobia in Abuja, Mr.

Deora said India was also looking for partnering with the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) through the Indian oil and gas conglomerate--ONGC-Mittal Energy Ltd.--to set up a greenfield petroleum refining plant to boost Nigeria's production of petroleum products. He added that India was buying more than 400,000 barrels of oil per day from Nigeria --with an annual value of \$10 billion, accounting for around 10 per cent of its crude oil requirements.

Source: Commodity Online, Abuja, 28 January 2010