

CHILE, INDIA BOOST TIES

Bilateral ties between Chile and India received a major boost with the 5-day visit of Chile's President, H. E. Michelle Bachelet to India on 16-21 March 2009. A number of agreements, including those in hi-tech sectors like Space Exploration and Information Technology were signed between the two G-15 countries during the visit. The agreement on space is for exploration and utilization of outer space for peaceful purposes. Both sides agreed to pursue cooperation in Antarctica as well. A memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the field of new and renewable energy was signed between Chile's National Energy Commission and India's Ministry of Non-Conventional Energy Sources. Another pact on cooperation in the field of geology and mineral resources was also inked between the two sides.

The Chilean President was accompanied by a high-level delegation, including the Minister of Agriculture and Women Empowerment as well as a business delegation. Highlights of the visit included bilateral discussions with the Indian Prime Minister, Shri Manmohan Singh and the President of India, H. E. Pratibha Patil. Mrs. Bachelet also attended a conference between the Indian National Association of Software Services and Computer Industries (NASSCOM) and the Chilean Association of IT Companies (ACTI) held in Chennai on 20 March 2009.

Source: Thaindiannews, 17 March 2009 & IANS, 20 March 2009.

IRAN, BRAZIL DISCUSS ENERGY COOPERATION

Iran's Foreign Minister Mr. Manouchehr Mottaki has proposed the drawing up of a "roadmap" for energy cooperation between Iran and Brazil, especially in the oil sector and for producing electricity. Mr Mottaki said this in a meeting with Brazilian Energy Minister Mr. Edison Lobao in Brasilia on 25 March 2009. He also offered Iran's cooperation in the agricultural and science and technology sectors. Mr. Edison Lobao responded by stating that his country supports economic ties with Tehran. The Brazilian Energy Minister said that Iran and Brazil, as two important countries with valuable experiences and potential, "complement" each other and therefore "we can have good cooperation in all areas especially in energy sector." He also welcomed cooperation between Iranian and Brazilian companies in implementing joint ventures.

The Iranian Foreign Minister arrived in Brazil on 25 March 2009 with a large political and business delegation.

Source: ecasb.com, 28 March 2009

INDONESIA, MALAYSIA VOW TO INCREASE BILATERAL TRADE

Indonesia and Malaysia have agreed to step up bilateral trade and investment despite the weakening of global economic activities. The statement was made in a joint press conference by Indonesian President H. E. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and the Malaysian Prime Minister H. E. Ahmad Badawi after their meeting in Jakarta during the third annual consultation of the two G-15 countries held on 17 March 2009. The Indonesian President also said that the present global economic crisis required that developing countries step up cooperation in agriculture to achieve food security and energy security.

Bilateral trade rose to 14.6 billion U.S. dollars in 2008 from 11.5 billion U.S. dollars in 2007. Malaysia's investment in Indonesia also increased to 353 million U.S. dollars in 2008 from 217 million U.S. dollars in 2007.

Source: Xinhua, 17 March 2009.

SRI LANKA, INDONESIA AGREE ON VISA-FREE TRAVEL

Sri Lankan and Indonesian passport holders can now travel between their countries without prior visa arrangements. An agreement allowing bilateral free port status was signed by Indonesian Foreign Minister, Hassan Wirajuda and Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Rohitha Bogollagama in Colombo on 30 March 2009 in the presence of Sri Lankan President H. E. Mahinda Rajapaksa. The agreement is likely to give a fillip to the cross border movement of workers, businessmen and tourists between the two G-15 countries.

Source: Colombo Times, 31 March 2009.

INDIA BEGINS MEDICAL EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN AFRICA

India has launched a hi-tech project it says will provide medical education and better health care in Africa. Launched by Indian Foreign Minister, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee in New Delhi, the project will at first connect 11 African countries with India. The services will include virtual classes for medical staff and online medical consultations. Mr Mukherjee described the project as bridging the digital divide between India and Africa.

Patients in parts of rural Africa will soon be able to seek medical advice from Indian doctors via satellite and fibre-optic link-ups. Nurses will get training and virtual classrooms will help around 10,000 African students annually get specialized degrees from universities. Online medical consultations will be provided every day for one hour to isolated hospitals. To start with, 11 African countries, including two G-15 countries

Senegal and Nigeria will be connected with India. By June 2009 eight more countries and eventually, all 53 African countries are to be covered under the programme.

Source: BBC news, 27 February 2009.

MALAYSIA TO ESTABLISH PALM OIL PLANTATIONS IN BRAZIL

Malaysia's Land Development Authority FELDA will soon begin a joint venture with a Brazilian firm to establish 30,000-100,000 hectares of palm oil plantations in the heart of the Amazon rainforest. Brazil's Ambassador to Malaysia, Sergio Arruda, said the venture would start with 30,000 hectares cultivated near Tefe and Manuas. FELDA has a 70 percent stake in the venture, called Felda Global Ventures Brazil Sdn Bhd, while Braspalma of Brazil holds the balance. The project between the two G-15 countries would include the establishment of a production plant, which would lead to the development of a "state-of-the-art" palm oil biodiesel facility.

Malaysia is the world's second largest producer of palm oil after Indonesia. A recent study estimated that 2.3 million square kilometers of the Brazilian Amazon are suitable for growing oil palm.

Source: Malaysia Star, 25 March 2009

ARGENTINA, VENEZUELA, BRAZIL TO BE MAJOR CONTRIBUTORS FOR BANK OF THE SOUTH

Venezuela, Argentina and Brazil will contribute \$2 billion each to the \$10 billion in initial capital that the Bank of the South will have. This announcement was made on 23 March 2009 in Caracas by Alí Rodríguez Araque, Venezuela's Minister of People's Power for Economics and Finances, following a meeting of ministers from member countries of the Bank. The minister also indicated that Bolivia, Ecuador, Uruguay and Paraguay would contribute scaled-down amounts of around \$100 million per country.

The Bank of the South was originally proposed in the Caracas Summit of the Group of Fifteen in 2003 by the Venezuelan President, H. E. Hugo Chavez. The Act founding the Bank was signed in late 2007 by Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela.

Source: Bolivarian News Agency (ABN), 23 March 2009.