

IFCC XII in Côte d'Ivoire

G77 to Explore Strengthening Cooperation

UNITED NATIONS (IPS)

A high-level meeting of the Group of 77 and China, scheduled to take place in Côte d'Ivoire Jun. 10-13, is expected to review the progress made towards implementing the Doha Plan of Action in the area of South-South cooperation. The Doha Plan was adopted by world leaders at the Second South Summit in Qatar in June 2005.

The review will include the status of the Development Platform for the South; the operationalisation of the South Fund for Development and Humanitarian Assistance; and bilateral and plurilateral projects for South-South cooperation, as spelled out in the Doha Plan of Action.

The four-day meeting of the G77's Intergovernmental Follow-up and Coordination Committee (IFCC) is being hosted by the government of Côte d'Ivoire.

This will be the 12th session of the IFCC (IFCC XII), with the other 11 sessions taking place in Manila (1982 and 1996), Tunis (1983), Cartagena (1984), Jakarta (1985), Cairo (1986), Havana (1987 and 2005), Kuala Lumpur (1989), Panama City (1993) and Tehran (2001).

A primary focus of IFCC XII will be the upcoming high level U.N. conference on South-South cooperation which is expected to take place in early 2009. The conference, which will be held at "the highest level possible", will include the participation of heads of state and heads of government.

The issues to be discussed at IFCC XII will include the recommendations made at a meeting of the G77 Panel of Eminent Personalities on a Development Platform for the South. This



President Laurent Koudou Gbagbo of Côte d'Ivoire, host country of the IFCC XII sessions, addresses the press during a visit to UN Headquarters in New York.

UN Photo/Evan Schneider

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Africa-Asia-Mideast Economic & Trade Links Surge

UNITED NATIONS (IPS)

A joint report by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the African Union (AU) says one of the "important developments" in the world economy that is of "high relevance" for Africa is the rapid increase in South-South trade and capital flows.

Citing a staggering array of statistics, the latest 'Economic Report on Africa 2008' points out that African exports to China alone have more than quadrupled between 2000 and 2005, to 19.5 billion dollars.

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from the South increased from just 5.0 percent of world outward flows in 1990 to a hefty 17 percent in 2005. China's outflows of FDI amounted to 16.1 billion dollars in 2006: up by 32 percent over the previous year.

FDI to Africa is increasingly coming from Asia, especially China, India and the Gulf States. At the same time, FDI flows within Africa increased substantially in 2006, mainly originating in South and North Africa. These flows are concentrated in the natural resource and services sector.

"The links between Asia and Africa have deepened significantly over the past decade in the areas of trade, investment and aid," says the 183-page study. China has stepped up its aid mostly in the form of technical assistance, including training of Africans in Chinese institutions. As of 2006, existing loans and credit lines from China were estimated at about 19 billion dollars.

However, says the study, this aid is concentrated in a small number of oil and mineral exporters, namely Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Republic of Congo and Nigeria. In addition, China cancelled an

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South-South Cooperation: The Asian Experience

By Biswajit Nag

NEW DELHI (IPS/South Centre)

Over the years South-South Cooperation (SSC) has evolved from merely sharing technical know-how to cooperation toward a comprehensive socio-economic transformation in which economic growth is accompanied by enhanced human development, social security, and self-reliance.

In the new millennium, SSC seeks to harness the intellectual capital and technological advances accumulated by developing countries to find the southern solutions embedded in people, technology, alliances, and the forces of globalisation.

Regional cooperation in the broader sense provides most developing countries with a platform to seek regional solutions for the challenges of globalisation.

Though trade and investment are at the core of any regional cooperation, other areas - such as the environment, health, and education - have also drawn attention during the discussions among several development groups.

The process of economic integration in Asia is taking a very different route from that of the European Union. Europe's successful economic and monetary integration has been achieved because of gradual and pragmatic sequencing that involved modest initial steps within a long-term vision. Asian integration, in contrast, moved fast in the midst of globalisation. The EU made a priority of building supranational institutions like the European Court of Justice, European Central Bank, etc. The Asian process advanced with small secretariats of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), and others, and was driven mostly by individual governmental ministries, which made the entire exercise less expensive than for the EU.

The EU integration process is carried out mainly through regulations, most of which are binding and backed by a system of sanctions. In contrast, the Asian regional frameworks issue non-binding "declarations" and "plans of action" which are more appropriate to Asian countries' wide variation in economic and political structures.

Moreover, Asian blocs always have granted "special and differential" treatment for least

developed country (LDC) members, which helps them to integrate with the process at a slower pace. For many developing countries the Asian model could be a learning experience.

To face the challenges of globalisation, and to facilitate cooperation in trade and investment, regional cooperation in transport and information technology and communications (ITC) is essential through a proper, well-integrated policy that takes into account the socio-economic and environmental impacts.

Since the early 1990s, there has been a notable increase in cooperation amongst nations in Asia and the Pacific. Most regional groups, such as ASEAN, SAARC, the Pacific Islands Forum, and the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) have action plans to improve transport in their respective subregions.

SSC is visible in the transport sector among countries to improve transport infrastructure and facilities, develop logistical capabilities, remove non-physical barriers, reform transport services by formulating clear policy guidelines, and develop human and institutional capacities.

On the other hand SAARC has given due importance to telecommunications and has joint programmes with Asia Pacific Telecommunity (APT) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) for development in this sector.

To face challenges in socio-economic areas, Asian countries have developed a number of regional projects in the SSC mode. Covering one of the poorest sub-regions in the world, SAARC has developed SAARC Development Goals (SDGs) in the areas of livelihood, health, education, and environment, which were endorsed in 2005.

Through an SSC mode, SAARC has prepared a regional poverty profile, collecting different poverty-eradication and employment-generation strategies involving independent institutions, universities, intellectuals, government agencies, etc, in different SAARC member countries. People's participation in preparing this has generated confidence in seeking practical strategies to address the issue.

The environment is a priority area for SSC

in the region. All groups have elaborate environmental programmes. Understanding that the environment is a public good, regional cooperation has been identified as a major mode for managing wide-ranging issues regarding the environment and sustainable development and is more efficient than countries acting individually. SAARC has endeavoured to adopt a common position on World Summit on Sustainable Development issues which called for the preparation of national state-of-the-environment reports, circulation of the latest national action plan on environment, provision of a list of national forestry institutions, holding a workshop on climate change, and consideration of a regional treaty on the environment, etc.

SAARC countries are also involved in working out a common approach for access to genetic resources and establishing a cooperative framework for biosafety. Countries would also like to focus on the protection of traditional knowledge in the context of the WTO and safeguard the interests of the region's bio-diversity. SAARC and ASEAN have proposed to join hands on energy issues.

SSC through regional cooperation has one advantage: it may adopt the bottom-up rather than the top-down approach in order to best understand the needs of different countries. The possibility of agreeing a common approach in a regional forum is relatively high. This reduces implementation problems and can address the duplication issues to some extent. Issues that cut across many borders can be addressed more easily as countries have fairly good idea about each other's problems, such as, environmental impact, socio-economic impact, analysis of transport sector development, the use of ITC in trade facilitation, and the impact of tourism in poverty eradication.

The Asian experience of regional cooperation is useful because most of the programmes attempt to convince national governments to include the regional agenda in order to benefit both the country and the region. Regular meetings of high-level officials make the process more inclusive in Asia. Thus, streamlining a regional agenda through national policies has become easier. People's participation in project development has also helped significantly.

Is a Global News Agency of the South Viable?

Interview with Ernest Corea, expert on communications and development

UNITED NATIONS (IPS)

When the tart-tongued prime minister of a Southeast Asian nation was once asked what the leading newspapers were in his country, he remarked rather cynically: "We don't have any leading newspapers because all our newspapers are misleading."

They were "misleading", he explained, because the local newspapers were forced to depend on Western news agencies for their coverage of global events, mostly lacking a Third World perspective.

Moreover, he said, the mainstream Western media rarely focused on issues relevant to developing nations, including poverty, hunger, population, health care, children, gender empowerment and the environment.

As a result, there has been a longstanding demand for strengthening national news services and regional news agencies in developing nations -- leading perhaps to the creation of a global network of news agencies of the South. But how far is this viable?

At the 2005 World Summit on the Information Society, held in Tunisia, the 130-member Group of 77 (G-77), the largest single coalition of developing nations, expressed strong support for a Plan of Action to strengthen information and communications technologies (ICTs) in developing nations, and to promote the use of information and knowledge for the achievement of internationally agreed development goals.

A G-77 expert group meeting took place in Antigua and Barbuda in April to discuss ways to strengthen South-South cooperation, including in the fields of media and communications.

Ernest Corea, a former chair of the Commonwealth Select Committee on Communications and Development in London and principal author of the committee's two reports, admitted that several attempts were made in the 1960s to set up news and feature services reflecting mostly the views of developing nations, and responding to their people's needs.

"A number of national and regional news agencies still survive in Africa, Asia, and Latin America," said Corea, formerly Sri Lanka's ambassador to the United States and a

one-time foreign affairs columnist, editorial writer, and foreign news editor of the Straits Times in Singapore.

"But most efforts at building up transnational news/features services reflecting the perspectives of the global South -- such as DEPTHNEWS, Gemini News Service, and the Non-Aligned News Agency Pool -- failed," he said.

In an interview with IPS U.N. Bureau Chief Thalif Deen, Corea also said the reasons for failure included governmental intrusion, inadequate resources and constraints on news reporting, including censorship and intimidation in several developing countries, and lack of support from editors and managers in the South.

"It is too early to assess the newly-created Non-Aligned News Network (based in Malaysia). The great success story of the South, of course, is your own Inter Press Service (IPS) which has 'stayed the course'," he added.

Excerpts from the interview follow.

IPS: Why should an alternate news service succeed now when it failed earlier? Would the explosion of new technology, including the Internet and online websites, which did not exist in the 1960s and '70s, help in the creation of any news/feature services now?

Corea: Conceptually, yes, using the Internet should give a professional news/feature service a broad spread. In practice, however, the imbalance in access to the Internet challenges the concept. For example, "World Development Indicators 2007" shows that Internet users per 1,000 people in the following countries are: Afghanistan 1, Argentina 83, Bangladesh 81, Belgium 458, Botswana 34, Brazil 195, Central African Republic 3, Germany 455, U.S. 630.

IPS: Since some countries, particularly in Africa, are lagging far behind other developing nations, particularly in Asia, don't you think it would be imperative to improve information and communications technologies, including access to the Internet, before launching alternate news services?

Corea: Yes, modern information technologies should be used as poor people's tools for empowerment, and not only as a preserve of the affluent.

IPS: Do you think the creation of a global

news agency of the South or a network of news agencies of the South is viable? Or is it more practical that, for starters, there should be a concerted effort to build up South-South cooperation, including training and capacity building, among news agencies and newspapers in the developing world?

Corea: This is another version of the "chicken and egg" question. Capacity building and institution building are both important. Let me ask myself: Is a transnational news-features agency of the South necessary? Yes. The best North-based transnational news and features outlets write or broadcast with understanding and skill.

They are, however, conflict-oriented -- "if it bleeds, it leads", as former U.N. Under-Secretary General for Communications and Public Information Shashi Tharoor once said -- and they neglect coverage that is of specific significance to Southern readers/listeners/viewers. They also neglect trends in developing countries, as opposed to "breaking news", and they are not committed to enabling Southern countries to understand each other better and learn from each other's experiences.

Would such a service be viable? Yes, if it is adequately funded to maintain professional staff in all departments, if governments do not attempt to control it, and if media establishments in the South are committed to using it. An alternate source of information is always an asset. Does such a source already exist? Yes, at the risk of embarrassing you, let me say it's your own IPS. Helping to develop IPS further as a global, South-oriented service should be a great South-South project.

IPS: As you know, the Group of 77 which emerged from the U.N. Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has been strongly identified with development issues. Do you think it should also focus strongly on communications?

Corea: To begin with, communications are an essential component of development. Moreover, the G-77 was long convinced that the South was, by and large, shoddily treated by the international news services and Northern media in general. In May 1974, a G-77 initiative resulted in the U.N. General Assembly adopting a "Declaration of the Establishment of a New International Information Order" (NIIO).

Subsequently, at the General Conference of

the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in October 1980, the G77 tabled a "Declaration on a New International Information Order" which called for the elimination of imbalances and inequalities in the dissemination of news and the removal of internal and external obstacles to a free flow of news. The Doha Plan of Action endorsed at the Second South Summit held in Doha, Qatar in June 2005, emphasised the importance of increasing human and institutional capacity in developing countries for information

communications technologies.

IPS: What was the result of the UNESCO Declaration?

Corea: The initial outcome was a riposte from U.S. media. Time carried a full-page commentary under the headline "The Global First Amendment War". Of the 88 percent of U.S. newspapers that commented editorially on the UNESCO conference, 87 percent opposed the Declaration, and 27 newspapers suggested that the U.S. should leave UNESCO if it attempted to

implement the Declaration.

Subsequently, a group of 100 media representatives from 21 Northern nations, including the U.S., adopted the "Declaration of Talloires" (France) which urged UNESCO to "abandon attempts" to follow through on the Declaration. Finally, UNESCO, which was the Declaration's "implementing agency", gave up the task which it was not suited to undertake in the first place. International bureaucrats have no place in newsrooms.

Brazil Shares Technology With Africa

By Mario Osava

RIO DE JANEIRO (IPS)

The people of Brazil have reason to believe that they are making a real contribution to reducing hunger and environmental threats in the world by developing agricultural technology that has begun to be shared with poorer countries.

One example is the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation's (EMBRAPA) new office in Africa, which was inaugurated Sunday in Accra by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva on an official visit to Ghana.

Brazil has also made progress in following many of the recommendations of the three-year International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD), Paulo Galerani, technical coordinator of EMBRAPA in Africa, told IPS.

The IAASTD is a panel sponsored by the World Bank and five United Nations agencies to examine agriculture from all angles and determine how farming might be done more sustainably in the future.

The panel, which brought together more than 400 scientists and experts from governments, civil society and the private sector, produced five regional assessments and a synthesis report approved by an Apr. 7-12 intergovernmental plenary conference in Johannesburg, South Africa that was attended by representatives of around 60 governments.

The reports include a highly critical assessment of the direction taken by agriculture in the world, which has left in its wake poverty, environmental damages and more than 800 million hungry people. They also outline future scenarios marked by climate change, as well as recommendations on the role of knowledge systems, science and agricultural technologies.

Galerani, who took part in the Johannesburg meeting, said the technology for the production of ethanol fuel from sugar cane represented an advance in the search for more efficient and lower-cost biofuels, which he said help alleviate climate change -- a claim that has been called into question, however, by environmentalists and others.

Brazil, and especially EMBRAPA, a network of 41 research centres, has also made huge strides in biotechnology that have helped reduce the use of pesticides and fertilisers and improve crop resistance to drought and pests, he said.

These are advances in know-how and technology that Brazil plans to "transfer and adapt" to Africa, which will thus benefit from them without having to lose "so much time," said the researcher.

EMBRAPA's Africa office, which began to be set up in July 2006, contributes to development on two fronts: small farms, based on the experience of research centres that are active in Brazil's impoverished semi-arid northeast; and commercial agriculture, the head of the office in Accra, Claudio Bragantini, explained to IPS.

The first case involves less developed countries that have productive potential but on a small scale, similar to the situation in Brazil's northeastern region, where there is a heavy concentration of family farms, which under the Lula administration have benefited from a major expansion of soft loans and technical support.

The second case targets "countries that have vast available grasslands, with good topography and possibilities for large-scale production," similar to Brazil's central Cerrado region, said Bragantini, who mentioned Angola, Congo and Zambia as examples.

The private sector in Africa rapidly expressed

strong interest in taking advantage of the Brazilian technology, to "my pleasure and surprise," said the Brazilian agronomist, who lived in other African countries in previous decades and said he has seen a big difference in the attitude of today's farmers.

The technology transfer began with training provided by means of bilateral technical cooperation and mechanisms involving international bodies. But later the efforts expanded to include large farmers in Africa, who were mainly interested in Brazil's know-how on biofuels, a variety of agribusiness products, and livestock breeding, said Bragantini.

"The green revolution has not yet happened in Africa. It is just now beginning to take shape," which makes support from more developed countries extremely important, he said.

Brazil has put a high priority on the development of agrofuels, with President Lula making frequent tours abroad and signing agreements with a number of countries.

However, the Brazilian government and business community face the challenge of refuting loud criticism of biofuels, which are accused by many of driving up food prices.

Brazil seems to be on the losing end of the information war, having failed to demonstrate to global public opinion the difference between the ethanol it has produced from sugar cane to replace gasoline for more than 30 years, and U.S. biofuels, which are based on corn and have accentuated imbalances in the global food market.

Lula is convinced that biofuels present an opportunity for agricultural development in Africa, where he believes they can reduce

hunger and poverty by generating incomes and improving rural living conditions, while at the same time helping to mitigate climate change by replacing fossil fuels.

All three of the objectives laid out by the IAASTD would thus be met, if production is carried out in a sustainable fashion.

EMBRAPA, which has played a decisive role in the agricultural boom in Brazil, a country that doubled its output in 10 years

while expanding the area under cultivation by a mere 20 percent, is a major instrument for environmentally and socially sustainable development in Brazil and assistance to poorer regions.

The IAASTD, however, does not exempt Brazil and the rest of Latin America from tough criticism, for leaving millions of people steeped in poverty and hunger despite the region's vast extensions of fertile land, much of which is concentrated in the

hands of a relatively few large landowners.

According to Galerani, the assessment was heavily influenced "ideologically" by civil society at the start, tending, for example, towards outright rejection of genetically modified crops and biofuels. But in the end, he said, a certain balance was achieved, with the concerns of governments taken into account, and new technologies accepted as long as they are employed with the necessary safeguards and care.

Caribbean Seeks a Green Revolution

By Peter Ischyron

PORT OF SPAIN, Trinidad (IPS)

Late last month, the director of finance and planning at the Barbados-based Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), Dr. Warren Smith, warned regional leaders that overhauling local agriculture was critical to solve mounting problems of food security.

"What is necessary in the Caribbean is what amounts to the need for a green revolution in agriculture," he argued, referring to the new technologies to boost crop yields that were successfully introduced in many developing countries between the 1940s and 1960s.

In the past year, global fuel prices have doubled, in turn pushing up the cost of key commodities like wheat, corn and barley. Food prices have also been squeezed by the expanding use of grains for biofuels.

"Commodity prices provide the basis and impetus for us to take up that challenge seriously," Smith told a one-day roundtable discussion on "Global Imbalances and Caribbean Development", organised by the CDB and the U.S.-based Institutional Investor Magazine.

Caribbean countries -- many of which are captive to mono-crop economies -- are now brainstorming new long-term strategies to expand local farming, build up transportation webs for regional trade, and create new partnerships among governments, the private sector and civil society.

According to a recently released report by the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD), while agricultural productivity has grown in the last 50 years in Latin America and the Caribbean, it has not translated into better lives for most people at the bottom of the economic pyramid.

"Increased yield from agricultural production has not led to a significant decrease in poverty, which still affects 37 percent of the population. Importing food has created dependence and disrupted local production,"

said the IAASTD's report, which was based on three years of research and involved more than 400 scientists around the world.

At the Port of Spain meeting in March, the head of the CDB, Compton Bourne, argued for the introduction of new technologies as well as improved transportation to bring basic goods all the way along the value chain.

"It is not sufficient to invest in agricultural commodities, you have to have a means to move that commodity from the farm to the hotels, etc," Bourne said.

Other experts noted that while regional blocs like the Caribbean Community (Caricom) have devoted a lot of time and resources to the question of migration, the movement of agricultural products had been largely neglected.

Caribbean governments are hoping that a Regional Agriculture Investment Forum, to be held in June, will provide such a platform.

The forum grew out of the first-ever regional agriculture donor conference held in Trinidad and Tobago last June and organised jointly by the Rome-based Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the Guyana-based Caricom Secretariat. FAO Director General Jacques Diouf said then that at least 200 million dollars would be needed from external sources, including donors and investors, to kick-start the initiative.

Speaking at an event to launch the Jun. 6-7 forum last week, Guyana's President Bharrat Jagdeo, who has lead responsibility for agriculture within the 15-member Caricom, said it should not be viewed as a "knee-jerk reaction" to rising food prices as there has been talk for years about boosting agriculture -- but with few concrete results.

"For a very long time across the region, little funding was put into the agricultural sector, and very few requests that went to the multilateral financial institutions were for agriculture," Jagdeo said.

He added that many countries have preferred to focus on tourism, as it contributes more

directly to their Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

"Tourism may contribute a lot to employment, but if this region does not have food security or a competitive agricultural sector, our exporting agricultural sector will die because we can't compete with the rest of the world and our domestic production will be displaced by imports, as has already happened in many of the countries," he noted.

Caricom Secretary General Edwin Carrington stressed that the region's 3.0-billion-dollar food import bill is becoming increasingly untenable. "We have a virtual crisis situation on our hands," he said. "All hands must now come on deck, governments, private sector and civil society in partnership."

Regional governments have already agreed on the novel idea of using Guyana's vast unsettled tracts of land to increase food production for the wider Caribbean. Trinidad also plans to create a fast ferry service to bring in farm products from the countries of the southern Caribbean.

In addition, Port of Spain has announced a project to convert former sugar estates for large-scale production of food for both the local and export markets. There are also plans by an ammonia-producing company to establish a large greenhouse demonstration farm on 75 acres of land provided by the state.

"This will be a model farm utilising the latest technology and which will inspire the replication of similar operations by farmers throughout the country," said Trinidad's Prime Minister Patrick Manning.

But the head of the 34-year-old Food Crop Farmers Association, Norris Deonarine, is sceptical. He said farmers have been treated as "squatters" by successive governments, with some waiting "as much as 35 to 40 years for security of tenure".

"We can't go along gambling, taking risks because the people who should be recognising our farmers are not doing so. To them, food

security is the importation of food," he said during a radio programme.

Meanwhile, several Caribbean nations have announced new initiatives to help their citizens cope with the rising cost of food.

Barbados hopes to create new trade relationships with other developing countries, while the Bruce Golding administration in

Jamaica said it was providing 13.8 million dollars in loan packages to help farmers.

In addition, the government is finalising a 2.5-million-dollar grant from China, while negotiations are taking place with the CDB on an 8.0-million-dollar loan to finance technology-driven programmes in the sector.

Last December, regional leaders agreed to

waive the Common External Tariff (CET) on a basket of food items.

"Member states will also intensify social interventions targeting the most vulnerable groups, including children, as a feasible short-term measure to mitigate the negative impact of high food prices," the leaders added.

Transport: Major Hurdle for IBSA Initiative

By Paranjoy Guha Thakurta

NEW DELHI (IPS)

As the foreign ministers of India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA) met in Cape Town in May to take forward a unique initiative in South-South economic cooperation, a gathering of hard-nosed corporate captains from the three countries discussed the absence of adequate transportation facilities among the 'IBSA' members.

Brazil's foreign minister Celso Amorim, who doubles up as his country's trade minister, had told IPS in an earlier interview that what makes the IBSA grouping unique is that India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA) are not merely diverse, multi-cultural developing countries but the three countries are all strategically located and important in their respective geographical regions.

However, what the group of businesspersons pointed out was that although there is considerable scope for economic and technical cooperation among the three countries in areas such as energy, mining and aerospace, logistical drawbacks were hampering expansion of trade.

They urged their respective governments to improve air connectivity, maritime transport facilities and ease visa restrictions before the forthcoming IBSA Business Summit that would be held in New Delhi later in the year.

Speaking at a session on tourism organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), R. Jaishankar, managing director and chief executive officer, UB Group, South Africa -- a large Bangalore-based Indian multinational with interests in liquor and aviation -- pointed out that of the nine million tourists who visited South Africa in 2007 (of which 4 million flew into the country), barely 50,000 tourists came from India.

Over and above high fares, poor air connectivity between India and South Africa discouraged tourists. There is only one flight by one airline between the two countries because of landing rights. Shortage of aircraft, high fuel costs and intense competition on indirect flights

compounded the problem.

The session organised by the CII suggested that representatives of the national airlines in the three countries to discuss the issue of limited landing rights given the likely growth in the demand for air travel among the countries.

Specific destinations in the three countries should be marketed more effectively and promoted by the media since tourism has a huge potential to create jobs in all the countries, participants in the session argued, adding that growth in tourism would lead to growth in trade and investment.

It was also recommended by the session that a special IBSA business travel pass be created along the lines of the APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation) pass to ease issuance of visas, including transit visas.

Not just businesspersons, representatives of civil society organisations also hold similar views. "Economic cooperation between and among countries cannot be successful unless there is a better people-to-people interaction and this can happen only through increased investment and tourism," says Bipul Chatterjee, deputy executive director of CUTS International, a Jaipur (India) based non-governmental think-tank on economic issues.

"IBSA countries should have a policy to issue long-term business visas to investors and to encourage tourism," Chatterjee told IPS in an interview. CUTS (acronym for Consumer Unity and Trust Society) was recently associated with research organisations in South Africa and Brazil to prepare an advocacy document on the IBSA initiative.

Leven Moodley, a representative of Reatle Resources PTY Limited, a South African energy company, said huge opportunities existed among the three countries for cooperation in energy development. Brazil had considerable expertise in production of biofuels while India and South Africa had knowledge in generating electricity using coal, wind and water, he said.

All three countries are currently working on technologies for generation and transmission of renewable energy (using the rays of the sun,

wind and water) and should be exchanging information that would be of great mutual benefit to all, given the sharp increase in world oil prices in recent months.

Sreenivas Kondepudi, vice president, Maytas Infra, part of the India's Satyam group, said that despite possessing substantial mineral resources, India needs more minerals to cope with the growth in internal demand. While India can invest in iron ore mines in Brazil, it can import coal from South Africa for thermal power projects. He said logistics was the biggest hurdle to be crossed. India could assist Brazil in linking its iron ore mines to ports through railways.

The business delegation presented a memorandum to the Foreign Ministers of the three countries -- Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma of South Africa, Pranab Mukherjee of India and Celso Amorim of Brazil -- recommending government intervention to improve maritime connectivity by having a fresh look at regulatory restrictions. Detailed studies on shipping routes and freight rates should be conducted, it was argued.

Consignments from India and Brazil to South Africa first travel to Europe before reaching their destination because of low volumes of trade, thereby increasing freight costs. Because of similar considerations, that is, low traffic, it is less expensive to fly from India to the United States than to Brazil -- although Brazil is closer in terms of distance.

The other area of cooperation identified by the group of businesspersons was skill development by providing incentives and subsidies to educational institutions in each country. More training programmes could be organized, it was stated.

On the trade and investment front, automobiles and pharmaceuticals were identified as two industries with considerable scope for trilateral cooperation. Despite differing consumer preferences for automobiles in the three countries, there was a case for reduction of tariffs and removal of non-tariff barriers. The corporate executives requested their respective governments to continue to negotiate and

ratify trade agreements that would strengthen the economic relationships between the three countries.

This is a complex multilateral process since the agreements would not just relate to the three IBSA countries but many others in regional groupings, such as SACU or the South African Customs Union comprising South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Namibia and MERCOSUR or Mercado Común del Sur comprising Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay.

(Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru currently have associate member status of MERCOSUR while Venezuela signed a membership agreement on June 17, 2006 -- however, before becoming a full member its entry has to be ratified by the Paraguayan and the Brazilian parliaments.)

It was in June 2003 that the Foreign Ministers of India, Brazil and South Africa first met in Brasilia to set up the IBSA 'dialogue forum'.

This forum became a formal initiative with a high level summit meeting in New Delhi in March 2004, followed up by meetings in Cape Town (March 2005), Brasilia (March 2006), New Delhi (July 2007) and most recently, Cape Town (May 2008). The three heads of state met in September 2006.

Intra-IBSA trade is currently barely 2-3 percent of the total volume of trade among the IBSA countries. No single IBSA country is among the top 10 trading partners of the other two countries. Yet trade among the three countries and regional groupings has gone up considerably in recent years and is expected to continue to expand rapidly.

Despite the fact that the three countries have been acting closely with one another during trade negotiations at the World Trade Organisation, the IBSA nations also compete in international markets to export leather, garments and agricultural commodities like cotton and sugar to developed countries.

Investment relations among the three countries have been ad hoc and erratic: Indian pharmaceuticals producer Ranbaxy has a presence in both South Africa and Brazil and vehicle manufacturers Tata Motors and the Mahindra group have invested in South Africa. India, in turn, has received investments from South Africa's diamonds major De Beers and SAB Miller in alcoholic beverages.

However, there have not been any major investments by Brazilian firms in either India or South Africa. While Brazil is the second largest recipient of foreign direct investment after China, India and South Africa are both conspicuous by their absence in that country. Language and cultural barriers have also to be overcome to enhance economic relations.

Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has said the IBSA initiative has the potential to alter the world's commercial geography. But much needs to be done to remove transportation and logistical bottlenecks before such an ambitious goal is realised.

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meeting was held in Antigua Barbuda in April this year.

The recommendations include:

** Explore the feasibility of the creation of a South-South Development Centre/Academy;

** Request the chair, in response to the South Summit decision, to propose concrete measures to further strengthen the Special Unit on South-South Cooperation, in order

to enable it to better respond to the needs and priorities of the G77 members;

** Explore the creation of a global South multimedia communication system;

** Elaborate a strategic framework for South-South cooperation;

** Develop urgently a long-term response to address the unprecedented global food crisis;

** Strengthen existing multilateral funding mechanisms for South-South cooperation;

** Operationalise G77 research programmes, in accordance with the decision of the First South Summit in Cuba;

** Designate, by the chair, a think tank panel of eminent personalities to advocate a South-South development agenda;

** Urge member states to fulfil their annual contributions to the G77 Secretariat, and to strengthen the institutional capacity of the G77 Secretariat, in accordance with the South Summit decision.

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estimated 260 million dollars in debts owed by the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Mali, Senegal, Togo, Rwanda, Guinea and Uganda.

China has also identified 16 African nations as tourist destinations, and this has resulted in travel to Africa by 110,000 Chinese tourists in 2005, an upsurge of 100 percent from 2004. This inflow of tourism has been further facilitated by the expansion of air transportation between Africa and Asian cities, according to the study.

India has also offered aid to Africa, mostly in the form of technical assistance, primarily in information technology and the health sector. India has set up a 50-million-dollar grant for the establishment of a pan-African satellite/fibre optic network to establish effective communications and connectivity with all African countries. The study also notes that India is making "great strides" in extending

its economic influence to Africa's health sector and in pharmaceuticals by providing low-cost anti-retrovirals, particularly to South Africa.

The downside to this new development is that African manufacturing firms risk losing local markets if they are not able to compete with imports from Asia. The study says that African countries need to improve their business environment and increase investment in skills development to be able to benefit more from relations with Asia. In turn, Asian companies should employ more local people, allowing for more "learning-by-doing" to take place.

The West Asian firms, mostly from oil-blessed Gulf States, are investing primarily in the services sector in Africa, especially in telecommunications, construction and port and terminal operations. Investcom from United Arab Emirates (UAE) operates GSM mobile networks in Benin, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Sudan. Investors

from the Gulf States have also signed large agreements with North African countries in real estate development, tourism and telecommunications.

At the same time, FDI flows within Africa have increased substantially, mainly originating from South and Northern Africa. In North Africa, Egypt has the largest outward investment. In 2004, South African firms were among the world's top 100 non-financial transnational companies from developing countries. Their operations range from mining and chemicals to metals and paper to retail, telecoms, media and transportation.

The expansion of South African-owned state enterprises such as Eskom and Transnet reflects the government's efforts to improve infrastructure in Southern Africa in the context of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

South America Forms 12-Nation Bloc

UNITED NATIONS (IPS)

Twelve South American nations formally agreed to form the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) at a summit in Brasilia, Brazil, in May. The regional integration initiative began informally in 2004.

The countries that make up UNASUR are Venezuela, Colombia, Argentina, Bolivia, Brasil, Chile, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Surinam, and Uruguay, comprising a total population of 380 million people.

UNASUR is the culmination of the region's search for unity since South American independence two centuries ago, said

Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez. "Only in unity will we later have, progressively, complete political, economic, cultural, scientific, technological, and military independence," he said.

The new bloc will help the region "contribute to the construction of this new 21st century, where Latin America is capable of having a strong and firm voice because we have been able to initiate a process of effective integration," said the temporary president of UNASUR, Chilean President Michelle Bachelet, highlighting the potential for UNASUR to promote economic and social development in the region.

On UNASUR's agenda is combating poverty,

eradicating illiteracy, and coordinating university programmes, and regional citizenship.

"Our Caribbean neighbours are invited to associate themselves with the union. UNASUR is born in this way, open to the entire region in the spirit of diversity and pluralism," said President Luis Inacio da Silva of Brazil. "We will work to have in the future a single central bank, a single currency," Lula said

"UNASUR is being born with the recognition of the immense contribution of our indigenous peoples, afro-descendants, mestizos, and whites," said President Evo Morales of Bolivia.

100 Million Dollars for New Jobs in the Arab World

By Mirela Xanthaki

UNITED NATIONS (IPS)

The need to address the problem of unemployment in the Arab world has given birth to the Silatech initiative.

Silatech's new youth employment initiative will start in four pilot countries -- Bahrain, Syria, Qatar and Yemen -- and eventually expand to other regions.

The timeline will be different in every country but the eventual goal is to expand the labour market through cooperation across sectors, cooperation between governments and cooperation between the Arab world and the West.

In Arab countries unemployment rates reach up to 25 percent for young people aged 15 to 24 years and joblessness in individual countries soars up to 73 percent.

Silatech was established in 2007 by the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development. It is engaging the public, private and civil society sectors to promote large-scale job creation, entrepreneurship and access to capital and markets for young people.

Silatech's mandate includes: facilitating job

linkages through state-of-the-art contact and counselling centres; promoting market-related training and technologies that will connect young people with potential employers; providing access to business development services and capital to enhance the establishment and growth of small and medium-sized businesses; enabling aspiring young entrepreneurs to start and build new enterprises; creating opportunities for internships and apprenticeships and breaking down cultural barriers to risk taking and entrepreneurship.

At a June Summit in Doha, Qatar, organised under the leadership of Her Highness Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al Missned and co-hosted by the Financial Times and Silatech, His Highness The Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani of Qatar and his wife Her Highness Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al Missned are expected to make a private contribution of 100 million dollars towards the initiative.

The summit aims to determine the barriers that prevent young people from working, and what discourages companies from investing in the region.

At the Doha summit, additional partnerships,

supporting endeavours, ventures and agreements by partner companies, foundations, individuals, commercial banks and governments to improve working opportunities for young people will be announced.

Nike, HSBC and Standard Bank are some of the corporate partners who have pledged their support.

The technology multinational Cisco Systems plans to announce the creation and launch of a new technology platform that will give young people greater access to information and skill-training opportunities.

The World Bank partnership will also create a multi-donor trust fund that will promote entrepreneurship initiatives.

As Shamil Idriss, the acting director of the Alliance of Civilisations, said at a press conference at U.N. Headquarters, the initiative is one of the highest-profile projects overseen by the Alliance.

Although the Alliance of Civilisations is not managing the project directly, it was responsible for initiating the idea, and is playing a facilitator role since the project falls under the Alliance's mandates.