South Africa and Lesotho to Strengthen Ties

South Africa and Lesotho are to strengthen their bilateral ties as President Thabo Mbeki meets Lesotho Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili in Cape Town.

Mr Mbeki and Prime Minister Mosisili are scheduled to hold discussions at Tuynhuys in Cape Town, the Department of Foreign Affairs said.

Issues on the agenda include:

- the status of bilateral political and economic relations between both countries and the Southern African Development Community (SADC);
- a briefing by President Mbeki on the recently concluded G-8 + 5 and G-8 African outreach meetings in Heiligendamm, Germany;
- preparations for the forthcoming AU and SADC Summits; and
- other issues of mutual global interest including the comprehensive reform of the United Nations.

The two will sign a Memorandum of Understanding in the fields of agriculture, correctional services, managing wild fires and other forest management issues and an agreement on facilitating cross-border movement of citizens.

Prime Minister Mosisili is also scheduled to co-chair the South Africa – Lesotho Business Forum together with Deputy President Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the department said.

South Africa and Lesotho enjoy healthy relations and have already established the South Africa-Lesotho Joint Bilateral Commission for Cooperation (JBCC), which was signed in April 2001 during an Official Visit by President Mbeki to Lesotho.

The JBCC constitutes an important basis for strengthening relations between the two countries.

Areas for possible cooperation under which the desired results can be achieved are listed in the JBCC Agreement as:

- mutual economic integration,
- political, social, cultural, humanitarian cooperation,
- science and technology,
- good governance, peace and security, and
- facilitating the movement of persons, goods and services.

Currently two projects have been identified for promoting tourism and sustaining water resources. These are the Sani Top-Mokhotlong Road and the Metolong Dam.
South Africa has also made a commitment of ensuring that both projects are funded through the African Renaissance Fund (ARF), the department explained.

The Lesotho Railway Project had been recommended to be adopted by the SADC as part of the Transport Master Plan because of its strategic importance for the region.

The inter-country project is aimed at linking Lesotho with countries of the SADC region through a solid railway infrastructure. – BuaNews