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ONE) - MEPs ANGERED BY PROPOSED CHANGES IN SCHENGEN TREATY

Les chefs des principales formations politiques du Parlement européen ont critiqué avec virulence mardi les projets de réforme de l'espace Schengen, en particulier le mécanisme pour rétablir temporairement des contrôles aux frontières nationales. Le chef du groupe socialiste au Parlement européen, l'Allemand Martin Schulz, s'est dit "choqué" par la possibilité de rétablir les contrôles aux frontières nationales qui doit être discutée jeudi par les ministres de l'Intérieur européens. "Nous sommes dans une crise existentielle (de l'UE) dès qu'un réfugié arrive en Méditerranée", a-t-il remarqué lors d'un point presse. Actuellement, un rétablissement des contrôles aux frontières entre deux pays membres de l'espace Schengen n'est possible que dans certains cas, comme une menace grave à l'ordre public posée par des déplacements de hooligans ou de manifestants violents. Prévoir de nouvelles possibilités "relève de la politique spectacle", a dénoncé M. Schulz. Si les solutions sur la table des ministres de l'Intérieur "conduisent à créer des possibilités supplémentaires de réintroduire les contrôles aux frontières, alors nous sommes contre", a indiqué de son côté le chef du groupe libéral-démocrate, le Belge Guy Verhofstadt en dénonçant "le jeu politique joué par l'Italie et la France" sur ce dossier. Selon M. Schulz, de telles mesures seraient extrêmement impopulaires quand elles se traduiront par des "heures d'attentes" pour les touristes allemands voulant passer en Italie, ou quand "les migrants seront à nouveau contrôlés à sur le pont de l'Europe", la frontière franco-allemande à Strasbourg aujourd'hui quotidiennement traversée par les travailleurs frontaliers. La solution aux problèmes d'immigration en Europe "n'est pas le retour au chacun pour soi ou à une forteresse Europe, mais c'est plus de solutions européennes", a estimé de son côté le conservateur français Joseph Daul, chef du Parti Populaire européen. La commissaire européenne en charge des questions d'immigration Cecilia Malmström doit soumettre jeudi aux 27 une "stratégie" pour faire face aux carences constatées dans le contrôle des frontières extérieures du sud de l'UE, soumises à des arrivées massives de migrants fuyant la misère économique, corollaire inattendue des révolutions dans le monde arabe. Ces mesures devraient inclure de nouvelles possibilités de réintroduction temporaire des contrôles aux frontières nationales au sein de la zone Schengen. (AFP)

TWO) – EU MINISTERS TO STUDY COMMISSION PROPOSALS

Les ministres de l'Intérieur de l'Union européenne sont appelés jeudi à se prononcer sur un ensemble de mesures destinées à "empêcher le franchissement irrégulier des frontières extérieures" et à "consolider une tradition d'asile et de protection". La lutte contre l'immigration illégale a mis en évidence des "défaillances" dans le contrôle de certains tronçons de frontières extérieures de l'UE, notamment entre la Grèce et la Turquie. - PROTECTION DES FRONTIERES: La Commission européenne suggère "d'instaurer un mécanisme permettant de décider, au niveau européen, quels Etats réintroduiraient exceptionnellement des contrôles aux frontières nationales et pendant combien de temps". Ce mécanisme serait "utilisé en dernier recours, dans des situations réellement critiques, jusqu'à l'adoption d'autres mesures visant à stabiliser la situation au tronçon concerné". Bruxelles préconise également "d'envisager la faisabilité de créer un système européen de garde-frontières" et de "renforcer la capacité opérationnelles de Frontex" (l'agence chargée des frontières extérieures de l'UE, ndr). - RESTRICTION DE VISA: La Commission a constaté des "abus" dans les pays bénéficiaires d'une exemption de visa pour leurs ressortissants, notamment dans les pays des Balkans occidentaux (Serbie, ancienne république yougoslave de Macédoine, Bosnie-Herzégovine, Monténégro et Albanie). Elle propose en conséquence une "modification du règlement prévoyant une clause de sauvegarde qui permettrait sous certaines conditions la réinstauration temporaire de l'obligation de visas pour les citoyens d'un pays tiers pour lutter contre les abus". - LUTTE CONTRE LE TRAVAIL AU NOIR: La lutte contre l'immigration illégale impose de "lutter contre marché du travail informel" dans les Etats de l'UE. - READMISSIONS ET CONDITIONNALITE: Le pendant de ces mesures sécuritaires est une politique plus incitative vis-à-vis des pays partenaires dont les ressortissants migrent illégalement dans l'UE. La Commission insiste sur la nécessité de "renforcer la politique de réadmission" des migrants en situation irrégulière par les pays d'origine. "Il est clair que les négociations sont difficiles avec plusieurs pays dont les plus importants pays d'origine et de transit de la migration irrégulière" en raison de "l'absence d'incitants donnés par l'UE tels que des mesures en matière de visas ou d'assistance financière". Il faut "envisager les accords de réadmission dans la perspective des relations globales de l'UE avec le pays partenaire concerné". La collaboration avec ces pays "devrait aussi se fonder sur une conditionnalité appliquée aux questions de migrations". ASILE ET PROTECTION INTERNATIONALE: La Commission préconise "d'aboutir à un accord équilibré sur la révision du règlement de Dublin" qui impose le traitement des demandes d'asile par le pays de l'UE où est arrivé le demandeur. Elle recommande en outre de faire de "la réinstallation (des réfugiés dans les

pays de l'UE) un geste fort de partage des responsabilités à l'égard des pays de premier asile, le plus souvent des pays en développement". (AFP)

THREE) – LIBYA IMMIGRANTS TO STAY IN EUROPE

The latest waves of immigrants arriving on the Italian island of Lampedusa are from Libya and cannot be sent back as they are fleeing a conflict zone. The European Commission has called on EU countries to help Italy share the burden. Last February, [Italy declared a humanitarian emergency](#) on the Mediterranean island of Lampedusa after 4,000 people had arrived there by boat from Tunisia following a popular revolt that ousted the president.

Since then, civil war in Libya has added to the immigration pressure on Lampedusa, where an estimated 25,000 immigrants have arrived since the beginning of the 'Arab Spring'.

Last month, France reintroduced internal border checks with Italy in an effort to block North African immigrants, mainly from Tunisia, who hold temporary residence permits issued by Italy. France's move caused a diplomatic row between the two countries, as well as reactions by other EU member states and at EU level

Some 500 boat people from Libya were rescued yesterday (8 May) after their frail vessel hit rocks off the Italian island of Lampedusa.

In a separate development, sixty-one immigrants died of hunger and thirst before their vessel finally reached shore on 10 April, back in Libya where they had started from.

Only 11 passengers survived the trip, and two of them died soon afterwards. According to the Guardian newspaper, Western military ships in the area ignored the boat in distress. Naval spokespeople declined to comment.

The two incidents highlight a new trend in immigration flows. Over the last few days, several overloaded small boats have started arriving at Lampedusa from Libya, carrying hundreds of mostly black African immigrants.

Italian Interior Minister Roberto Maroni said the immigrants were refugees fleeing Libya due to the war and would not therefore be repatriated. Cecilia Malmström, the EU's commissioner for home affairs, said she was "continuously concerned" by the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Libya, and called for "urgent action". "The reports of men, women and children from sub-Saharan Africa being forced out of the country by the Gaddafi regime are particularly worrying," she said in a written statement. Malmström urged the EU to show solidarity towards its most exposed member states as well as towards North African countries that were bearing the highest burden of the conflict in Libya. "We cannot forget that Tunisia and Egypt have received most of the 650,000 people who have fled the violence in Libya in recent months," she said.

[Malmström has advocated](#) greater solidarity from other EU countries in sharing the burden of housing African refugees fleeing Libya, but has so far received little response. This time, she insisted that the Union stood ready to provide financial support to countries that decide to take up refugees.

According to Sasha Chanoff, executive director of Mapendo International, a humanitarian agency, approximately 10,000 refugees from Darfur, Somalia, Eritrea, Iraq and other war-torn countries were residing in Tripoli and other cities in Libya before the civil war broke out.

The commissioner also said that the EU executive was organising a ministerial conference on 12 May, with the participation of EU interior ministers and representatives of UN refugee office UNHCR, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) and the International Organisation for Migrations (IOM).

The conference will specifically call for relocation and resettlement, and discuss and review commitments and pledges made by EU members, she explained.

FOUR) - SOUTH AFRICA: DO MORE WOMEN POLITICIANS MEAN BETTER POLITICS?

The Democratic Alliance (DA) election posters, which feature party leader Helen Zille, Cape Town mayoral candidate Patricia de Lille and party spokeswoman Lindiwe Mazibuko, do not necessarily mean that a vote for the party is a vote for women, analysts say.

Amanda Gouws, a political analyst from Stellenbosch University, says a vote for the DA, the country's official opposition, would not be a feminist vote or victory for women.

"The DA is not a feminist party and many of their women members in government are not either. De Lille and Zille do not have a feminist rhetoric – and let's not forget that she appointed 10 men to her cabinet," she said. Zille appointed a 10 member all-male cabinet in 2009.

Does a poster of three women mean anything for women in South Africa? Are their policies and plans going to benefit women at all? But what does this actually mean for women? These questions were posed recently by Jennifer Thorpe, editor of feminist blog Feminists SA.

"To even have a poster of three women is a positive start because it is making it clear that women have a place in the political arena. However, a poster of three women means nothing, unless it is backed up by policies and political action that benefits women.

"What it means for women is that there is room to manoeuvre, that politics is an arena where women can succeed and that it's time for the ordinary women of South Africa to make demands on the government," Thorpe said.

South African Communist Party secretary general Blade Nzimande labelled the three DA leaders the "two stooges and a madam". Thorpe said the comments were unfortunate. "I think that Nzimande's comments show a great insecurity about female leadership. This insecurity led him to cast the three DA leaders in the least threatening way possible for himself. It is clearly attempting to heighten racial fears of the DA that has a white woman as the leader."

Thorpe said she doubted whether Nzimande would have felt confident to make the same comments if the poster showed three male candidates of similar racial groups. Thorpe said there is currently no political party that has framed itself as pursuing the specific interests of women.

"I don't think that this absence is only specific to the DA, but found their election poster with three women interesting, given the all-male cabinet elected by Helen Zille in the previous national elections," she said. Zille raised the ire of feminists and gender activist organisations when she appointed an all-male cabinet following her election as the Western Cape premier in 2009. Zille's all-male cabinet was seen as a move that confirmed the chronic minority status of women in politics. It further confirmed the long-standing notion that better representation of women in politics does not necessarily mean better representation of women's interests.

Thorpe points out that the ruling African National Congress (ANC) Youth League's discussion paper prepared for its national elective congress, scheduled to take place in June, acknowledges that historically women's issues have been relegated to a subordinate position in favour of promoting economic or race equality.

Gouws says it was tragic that 17 years into democracy, the voters' views of female candidates have not changed in South Africa. "Voters still have a male bias when it comes to politics. They will rather vote for a man than a woman," she said.

Noluyolo Manyisane, a resident of Dunoon - a poor informal settlement in Cape Town - says Zille and De Lille seem to be doing well in politics, but she does not care because neither one pays her salary at the end of the month. Manyisane is an assistant at a pathology laboratory.

"Heck, bring in women politicians if they have new, creative ideas that might improve the living conditions of the poor. I used to vote for the ANC, but I have lost hope in the political process," she said.

The Institute for Democracy in Africa's political analyst, Justin Sylvester, has pointed out that there is a higher percentage of women in Parliament due to the ANC's progressive gender policy. He said he was "not too sure" whether one should attribute progressiveness on the role of women political leaders to only the DA.

Since the first democratic elections in 1994, women representation in Parliament has soared, owing partly to the ruling party's 50/50 principle at national and provincial spheres of government. After the 2009

elections, women's representation in cabinet increased from 34 percent to 43 percent, a nine percent increase, and the country saw the accession of five women to the positions of premier in the country's nine provinces.

However, women continue to struggle to make headway in political circles since many are still buried far down in the political hierarchy of most political parties due to the daunting conservatism of the South African political culture and its political institutions.

However, Thorpe says that it was promising that parties that had female leadership, like the DA and Independent Democrats, received a high number of votes in the previous election. "But I'm not sure whether this can be boiled down to the candidates, or has other explanations," she said.

Although the participation of women in the political heartlands is a symptom of an even graver failure of progressive politics, feminists such as Thorpe have not lost hope.

"I think the response to our former (female) deputy president Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka was quite promising," she said. Gender Links, a gender lobby organisation, had hailed the appointment of Mlambo-Ngcuka as deputy president in 2005 as a breakthrough for gender equality and a victory for democracy.

FIVE) – SOUTH AFRICA TO REOPEN LAND CLAIMS PROCESS

The South African government will reopen a claims process that compensates black families who were removed from their land under white rule to offer redress to those who failed to meet earlier deadlines. The programme has compensated people or families, usually with a cash sum, who were forcibly driven from their land under the 1913 Natives' Land Act, which set aside the vast majority of arable land for whites. Most of the 80,000 claims that were made for restitution have been settled but a government spokesman said on Tuesday new ones would now be considered, including for people whose ancestors were uprooted before 1913. "This was unfair because a lot of land was dispossessed even before 1913," said Mtobeli Mxotwa, spokesman for the ministry of rural development and land reform. The restitution issue is separate from the government drive to redistribute farm land to blacks but both policies are aimed at redressing historic wrongs and racial imbalances. But claimants can be given a choice between land or cash and so a new wave could further unnerve investors in the agricultural sector, which only accounts for about two percent of Africa's biggest economy but is a major employer. Julius Malema, the influential leader of the youth wing of the ruling African National Congress, has called for a mass seizure of land, rattling investor sentiment. "While land restitution and land reform are not the same thing, they should come very close somewhere down the line," said Gary van Staden, a political analyst at NKC Independent Economists. The government now maintains that too many people were left out of the initial claims process. "While thousands have benefitted and are still benefitting from land restitution, people have complained that they were not in the country to submit their claims or were not made aware of the claims process," said Mxotwa. The initial claims period was from 1995 until December 1998. A total of 74,808 out of 79,696 claims were settled and a 2005 deadline to resolve outstanding claims was extended to 2011. "The new period should last longer than three years so that all claims can be dealt with," said Mxotwa. He said the next step is to take the issue to cabinet so it can then go to parliament, where a new law will be created or an amendment made to the Land Restitution Act. (Reuters)

SIX) – EGYPT PROSECUTOR EXTENDS MUBARAK DETENTION

Egypt's public prosecutor has extended the detention of former president Hosni Mubarak by 15 days, a judicial source said on Tuesday. Mubarak, ousted from power on Feb. 11 after three decades in office, is being questioned as part of investigations into the killing of protesters and embezzlement of public funds. He has denied wrongdoing. He was first detained on April 13 but has not left a hospital in the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh where he was taken after suffering health problems under questioning. (Reuters)

SEVEN) – EGYPTIAN ACTIVISTS GEAR UP FOR THIRD INTIFADAH

Following the February ouster of Egypt's longstanding President Hosni Mubarak, calls have been circulating in Egypt and throughout the region for a 'Third Intifadah' to begin May 15. "Unlike the first two

Palestinian uprisings, the proposed Third Intifadah is meant to involve the entire Arab world," said Egyptian journalist and political analyst Abdelhalim Kandil.

It began with the appearance of a Facebook.com page in early March calling for a 'Third Intifadah' against the ongoing Israeli occupation of Palestinian land. The page, reportedly founded by Arab pro-Palestinian groups, set the launch date for May 15 - the day on which hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were driven from their homes in 1948 to make way for the nascent state of Israel.

The page attracted some 230,000 members within two weeks, prompting Israeli officials to lodge a complaint with the popular California-based social-networking website. On Mar. 29, Facebook.com removed the page - which had at that point surpassed the 500,000-member mark - claiming that its contents were found to "promote violence".

The page was almost immediately replaced with several copycat pages, however, which reiterated calls for "the liberation of Palestine from the [Mediterranean] Sea to the [Jordan] River" and "the return of Palestinian refugees to their homes in historical Palestine" in accordance with U.N. Security Council Resolution 194 of 1948.

An Arabic-language website called the 'Third Palestinian Intifadah' (www.3rdintifada.com) appeared soon afterward, providing a general plan of action. The site calls for peaceful protests on Friday and Saturday (May 13 and 14) at Israeli embassies and consulates worldwide, including those in western capitals, "to express our rage about the ongoing occupation of Palestine and the expulsion of millions of Palestinians from their rightful homes".

On May 15, dubbed the "Sunday of Liberation", the site had initially called for multiple million-man marches to advance on "historical Palestine" - in reference to Israel - from starting points in Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. This was later scaled down, however, to the staging of demonstrations outside Israeli embassies in Jordan and Egypt (the two Arab states that have diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv), along with simultaneous marches near Israel's borders in Syria, Lebanon and the occupied Palestinian territories.

According to Mounib Mohamed, 26-year-old activist from Cairo and administrator for the website's Egypt branch, the initial plan was scrapped "because of the difficulties associated with implementing it, and in order to avoid friction with local authorities in the countries involved".

"As for Egypt, we're calling for million-man gatherings to be held in cities countrywide on May 13," Mohamed explained. "Participants will then head to Cairo's Tahrir Square, where prominent political figures are scheduled to speak about the Palestinian cause."

"From Tahrir, we will march to the Zionist embassy, U.N. offices, and certain multinational store chains known to have Zionist sympathies," Mohamed, who is also the administrator of the Facebook.com page 'Egyptians for the Intifadah', told IPS. He went on to stress that all planned activities would be "peaceful in nature" and "carried out in coordination with Egypt's Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF)", which has run the country's affairs since Mubarak's ouster.

"Our ultimate objective is the liberation of Palestine via peaceful, political means in light of Egypt's post-Mubarak political circumstances," Mohamed added.

Several prominent revolutionary youth groups also plan to take part, including the 6 April youth movement, which played a leading role in Egypt's 25 January Revolution.

"The Palestinian situation is a source of pain for the entire Arab nation across the political spectrum," said 6 April media spokesperson Injie Hamdi. "Therefore, in coordination with other like-minded youth groups, we're endorsing calls to demonstrate from May 13 to 15 in Tahrir Square and at the Israeli embassy."

In the three months since Mubarak's departure, Egypt has witnessed a spate of marches and protests in front of both Israel's embassy in Cairo and its consulate in Alexandria, where demonstrators could be seen distributing flyers about the planned event.

The 'Third Intifadah' had initially included plans for a protest march to Egypt's Rafah border crossing with the Gaza Strip, which has been sealed for the most part since 2007. This plan was abandoned, however, following a promise by Egypt's SCAF-appointed foreign minister late last month that the crossing would soon be reopened on a permanent basis.

Nevertheless, the Arab Doctors Union plans to dispatch a convoy of Gaza-bound humanitarian aid through the Rafah crossing - scheduled to set out from Tahrir Square on May 15. The closure of Rafah, in tandem with Israel's five-year-old blockade of the Gaza Strip, has effectively cut the coastal enclave off from the rest of the world - subjecting its roughly 1.8 million inhabitants to excessive poverty and privation.

Notably, Palestinian faction Hamas, which governs the strip and espouses a policy of armed resistance to Israel, has not publicly endorsed calls for a 'Third Intifadah'. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, meanwhile, who heads rival Palestinian faction Fatah and supports a discredited 'peace process' with Israel, has voiced downright opposition to the idea.

Last week, the two factions agreed in Cairo to form a national unity government, ending four years of bitter

animosity. Just how the new Palestinian government plans to deal with Israel - whether by resistance or by negotiations - remains uncertain, however.

According to Kandil, the greatest benefit of Hamas-Fatah reconciliation is that the two factions "will now be able to coordinate the kind of peaceful revolutions seen recently in the Arab world". He expressed hope that the planned 'Third Intifadah' would apply the lessons learned from successful Arab uprisings, especially those seen in Tunisia and Egypt.

"If the Palestinians stage peaceful protests en masse and persevere despite Israel's inevitably violent response - and are supported by simultaneous demonstrations in Arab and western capitals - the Israeli occupation's days may very well be numbered," said Kandil.

The first Palestinian Intifadah lasted from 1987 until the signing of the 1993 Oslo peace accords. A second, more violent Palestinian uprising erupted in 2000 and ended with Israel's 2005 withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

EIGHT) – MALAWI LAYS OUT ITS AGENDA AT U.N. DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE

Escalating fuel prices, climate change and the impact of the global financial crisis are the challenges currently compromising development in Malawi. The Southern African country wants to see a bold plan of action addressing these problems agreed upon at the Fourth U.N. Conference on Least Developed Countries (LDC-IV) currently taking place in Istanbul, Turkey.

In recent months, Malawi has been experiencing a fuel crisis so severe fuel has been rationed at the pump. People have taken to parking their vehicles at service stations overnight to get a place near the head of the queue. The country is facing severe shortages of foreign exchange, leading to strict controls on the export of hard currency and causing problems for businesses that need forex to pay for imports.

Adil Chilungo, the executive director of the African Muslim Schools Association, a Malawian non-governmental organisation, is at LDC-IV to press delegates to look at ways of ensuring enough financial resources flow to LDCs.

"The new plan of action should have solutions for mitigating the effects of the financial problems being faced by the LDCs. A country like Malawi, with low levels of income, needs support measures from donors and the developed nations to be able to rise from poverty," told Chilungo.

He said the conference should ensure the plan of action incorporates issues of social and economic justice in order to improve the lives of the 60 percent of Malawi's population of 13 million that lives below the poverty line.

"We want to see standards that take into account equity for the people of the world. Come 2021, the people of Malawi and the LDCs in general should be able to enjoy better lives with better health and financial stability," said Chilungo.

The Malawi government's head of delegation to the conference, Peter Mutharika, is also worried about Malawi's financial standing.

Addressing the full conference, he said LDCs, including Malawi, are appealing to developed countries to fulfil their financial pledges to poor countries.

"The Istanbul programme of action should include concrete policies and actions directed towards tackling poverty and generating employment," said Mutharika, who is Malawi's minister of education.

In 2005, G8 countries reaffirmed a decades-old pledge to provide overseas development aid equivalent to at least 0.7 percent of their GDP - interestingly, this target was first set in 1970, a year before the classification of least developed countries was created. Thirty years later, the world's most powerful economies are being accused of failing to meet this commitment.

Urgent financing is needed if the world's poorest countries are to build resilience to climate change into food security plans and to help the most vulnerable populations adapt to the effects of global warming, Mutharika said.

Malawi has experienced extreme weather events, ranging from severe droughts in the 1991/92 growing season to heavy floods in the 1996/97 season and flash floods in 2000/01.

This year was no exception, with an unsettling range of flooding and drought in different parts of the country. Malawi's economy is vastly dependent on rain-fed agriculture; up to 85 percent of the country's 13.1 million citizens relying on the land for a livelihood.

Civil society groups at the conference are calling for an action plan to emerge from LDC-IV that will see northern countries transfer finances and technology to help protect vulnerable communities.

On their part, governments of LDCs are pledging to take ownership of the Istanbul action plan and do their best to see results. "Malawi has gone far with the development of our own national strategy which we call the

Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS)," said Mutharika.

He said through the MGDS, the country will implement a national programme of action and that this will ensure full ownership of the development agenda and graduation from LDC status sooner rather than later.

"You can be assured that Malawi will be in the forefront in the implantation of the Istanbul plan of action," said Mutharika.

NINE) – MALAWIANS KEEN TO BUILD TRADE TIES WITH INDIA

Building on historical relationships, Malawians have set their sights on strengthening trade and investment relations with India in sectors as diverse as agriculture, telecommunications and pharmaceuticals.

Malawi's interest in investment from India comes at a time when Africa's regional economic giant, South Africa, is also strengthening its relations with the Asian country through the India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) dialogue forum. IBSA is a trilateral development initiative aimed at promoting South-South cooperation and exchange.

At the end of Mar. 2011, Malawian trade minister Eunice Kazembe attended the seventh India-Africa Business Conclave in New Delhi, India, where she approached Indian investors to explore trade opportunities in Malawi's mining, tourism and energy industries.

The India-Africa Business Conclave is a yearly trade and investment event organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and Exim Bank, which is India's premier export finance institution, together with the country's ministries of external affairs and commerce.

"There are so many untapped business opportunities in Malawi which India should explore," Kazembe told investors gathered at the conclave. "The opportunities that exist in Malawi include that the country has enjoyed peace and tranquillity and a business environment that will open markets for your products across the region."

According to a proposal from Malawi's ministry of trade, the southern African country is seeking Indian investment in a pharmaceutical plant, especially for AIDS drugs. The plant's estimated cost would be 800 million dollars.

Malawi is also looking for investment in automation machinery for the country's tax collecting authority, the Malawi Revenue Authority, and is seeking markets for agricultural produce. Agriculture is the mainstay of the country's economy and up to 85 percent of Malawians depend on the land for their livelihoods.

Kazembe's trip followed a visit by Malawi's President Bingu wa Mutharika to India in Nov. 2010 aimed at raising investment.

Malawian businesspeople also visited India in Oct. 2010, led by the country's Malawi Confederation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (MCCCI).

"The relationship should benefit both countries and improve the living standards of citizens," said MCCCI chief executive officer Chancellor Kaferapanjira. MCCCI went to India to promote investment opportunities in mining, general and agro-processing, information technology, manufacturing and healthcare.

Entrepreneurs such as James Kanduna of Mkando in Mulanje district, southern Malawi, have also woken up to the Indian potential. Kanduna is a farmer who grows pigeon peas.

In 2010 he went around talking to Indian traders based in Malawi's commercial capital, Blantyre, asking if they could assist him in identifying a market for the pigeon peas he had been growing for seven years. "I learnt that India is a big consumer of pigeon peas and that there is a huge market for the crop," said Kanduna.

He received a telephone call in Nov. 2010 from an Indian trader who was visiting the country. "I had a meeting with him and four Indian traders based in the country and we agreed on modalities of shipping the produce to India. I have since stepped up my efforts and am expecting to harvest up to 20 tons which I will export to India," said Kanduna. The farmer said he would produce more in the next growing season if he finds the Indian market lucrative.

A number of private companies with Indian connections have made major advances in Malawi. One such company is Rab Processors Ltd, founded in 1983 by the Jakhura family. The company is a leading player in the agro-industry in Malawi and specialises in exports of agricultural produce grown in Malawi, as well as provision of farm inputs.

Chairperson of Rab Processors Gaffar Jakhura told that the company employs 1,500 people in Malawi and has an annual turnover of 80 million dollars. The Asian community in Malawi has made a considerable contribution to the economy of the country, especially those Indians involved in the trading and small-to-medium scale manufacturing sectors, according to Jakhura.

Another Indian company that has made its mark in the Malawi economy is Airtel, the country's largest

mobile network company, boasting 2,5 million subscribers. Close to 3,7 million of the country's total population of 13,1 million use mobile phones.

Airtel founder and chairperson Sunil Bharti Mittal visited Malawi in March 2011 and assured Malawians that the company would be investing more in Malawi in the next year. From 2010 onwards, Airtel has put an initial investment of 100 million dollars into Malawi which will run over three years.

TEN) – NIGER: CARING FOR THE RIVER, REAPING THE BENEFITS

In anticipation of growing sorghum during the coming rainy season, Hamadou Abdou and his son are busy preparing the soil on the family's farm in Bougoum, a village in the west of Niger.

Abdou and his son are building up beds in the form of a crescent moon. "I learnt this technique for upgrading soil that has become unproductive through the land salvaging activities carried out as part of a programme that is combating the silting up of the Niger River bed," Abdou tells IPS.

He adds: "Last year, I harvested nearly two 100-kilogramme bags of sorghum from this piece of land which I hadn't worked for several years, because it was so arid. This year I hope the yield will be even better."

Back in the capital, Niamey, Ichaou Galadima, national coordinator of the programme to reduce siltation in the Niger River basin, explains further: "Subsistence farmers learned the half-moon technique (in 2008) and tried it out on gentle slopes that have been silted up, in our sites of intervention."

The Niger Basin Project Against Siltation

The farmers were trained by technicians from Galadima's project. "This programme, which involves 45 villages located in the river's western catchment area, started in 2005 to expand and strengthen the initiative that had been launched two years earlier by the Nigerien authorities in Bougoum," explains Galadima.

"The five-year programme has been piloted by the Niger basin authority in Niamey and also includes Burkina Faso and Mali, at a total cost of 22.9 billion CFA francs (around 51 million dollars)," Seyni Seydou, regional coordinator of the programme in Niamey, tells IPS.

The Niger River, which runs for 550 kilometres through the southwest part of the country, has for decades been faced with the phenomenon of siltation of its bed, accelerated by the severe desertification of the catchment areas, according to environmental experts.

"As there's practically no more vegetation to reduce the force of the runoff, the water creates ravines through which large amounts of sand and other debris are flushed into the river," says Souley Altiné, an environmental technician at Niamey.

Galadima's programme is focused on slowing this phenomenon, which is seriously compromising socio-economic activity around the river. The measures taken include building berms, stabilising sand dunes, and planting trees. He says they have also allowed agricultural land to recover and reduce the flow of sand that the stream waters carry into the river.

Seydou ticks off the programme's achievements in 2010: 47,338 hectares of protective measures and other measures to combat siltation.

"This includes 15,926 hectares of sand dune stabilisation, 25,629 hectares of rehabilitation of previously-damaged land, and 5,783 hectares of river bank protection."

Success beyond reducing silt

At the Bitinkoji, Yetter Allah, Karey Gorou, and Bougoum sites, which include all the villages on the outskirts of Niamey where the river passes, reporter noted the restoration of vegetation to land that seven years ago was completely bare.

"We have gained a lot, not only in terms of money for this work. We are also now well-organised to promote local development," says Hama Sadou, a smallholder farmer from Bougoum.

"From the construction of the berms, I earned a bit over 3,000 CFA francs a day (about \$6.50). Due to the profitability of this work, in the last few years, many of the youth have not joined the seasonal exodus," told Sadou.

Women have also benefited. "We have used them in the project to stabilise the sand dune, for carrying stones and growing seedlings, which is not as hard as digging for the berms," says Galadima.

Bintou Abdou, a 30 year-old woman from Bitinkoji village, confirms enjoying some measure of financial autonomy thanks to the programme. "With the money that I receive on the site, I got into selling doughnuts, and thanks to this I am able to dress my children and see to some of the school related expenses," she says.

Maïmouna Boubacar, another woman, has taken up raising small livestock. The 40-year-old says she now has 13 goats and seven sheep, as well as poultry, which today form the foundation of her household's finances.

For Daouda Mounkaïla, an inhabitant of the Karey Gorou village, one of the most important gains of this programme has been the creation of village committees for the management of natural resources.

"The hay that we harvest on the restored sites is sold, and the money is deposited into a bank account that will take care of the village's infrastructure needs."

ELEVEN) – LIBERIA SIGNS EU LOGGING PARTNERSHIP

BBC News reports that the EU and Liberia have signed a deal to halt the export of illegal timber and boost the country's forestry industry.

According to the broadcaster, the EU-Liberian voluntary partnership agreement is aimed at producing a sustainable timber export industry in a country which contains 45 per cent of west African rainforests. The agreement is part of a series of deals negotiated between the EU and major timber producing countries, including Ghana, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Congo-Brazzaville, and most recently Indonesia.

European development commissioner Andris Piebalgs said, "I am pleased to see that yet another country has joined our common fight against illegal logging."

TWELVE) – MORE THAN 80 KILLED AS SOUTH SUDAN REBELS ATTACK NOMADS

More than 80 people have been killed in clashes between rebels, civilians and police in southern Sudan in the latest violence in the oil-producing region that will become independent in July, the army said on Tuesday. Southerners overwhelmingly voted to secede in a January referendum, promised in a 2005 peace deal that ended decades of civil war with the north fought over religion, ethnicity, ideology and oil. Analysts warn that the underdeveloped south, roughly the size of France, could become a failed state and destabilise the whole region if security deteriorates further. A rebel militia raided a cattle camp in Warrap state, leading to the death of 82 people including 34 civilians on Sunday, southern army (SPLA) spokesman Philip Aguer told Reuters. "We (SPLA) forced this militia out of Unity state on the 6th and 7th (of May). They crossed into Warrap state and attacked a cattle camp and killed 34 civilians and wounded 45. Later, civilians and police chased the militia into an ambush and killed 48 of them," Aguer said. The casualty figures could not be independently confirmed but a spokesman for a rebel militia said fighting had been going on in the region. He said he could give no casualty figure because a different rebel group had been involved. Clashes between the army and rebels or tribes have broken out in all but one of the south's ten states this year, killing more than 1,000 people, according to the United Nations and official figures. Southern leaders have accused Khartoum of backing the rebels to disrupt the region and keep control of its oil. Khartoum has dismissed the accusation, as have militia leaders who say they are rebelling against what they say is an autocratic government in the south. (Reuters)

THIRTEEN) – MOROCCO ARRESTS MORE SUSPECTS

Les autorités marocaines ont arrêté mardi trois personnes soupçonnées d'être impliquées dans l'attentat qui a eu lieu le 28 avril contre un café de la place Jamâa El-Fna à Marrakech et dans lequel 17 personnes dont 8 Français ont été tuées, a-t-on appris de source sécuritaire. (AFP)

Fernando Matos Rosa

Brussels

