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Meet on economic relations with Africa

By Our Diplomatic Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 24. A day-long conference on India's economic relations with Africa here on Friday is part of a new focus on strengthening ties with the continent, a senior official of the Ministry of External Affairs said today.

Briefing a select group of reporters, Gurjit Singh, Joint Secretary (Africa), said that the conference, "India and NEPAD (New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development): Furthering Africa-India Economic Cooperation", had been well-received by African nations.

Referring to NEPAD itself, Mr. Singh said the initiative was launched in October 2001 to engage Africa's traditional donors in a new way. However, he said, that some changes had been made in the NEPAD document to allow for South-South cooperation as reflected in the India-NEPAD initiative.

"This conference has attracted a lot of attention," Mr. Singh said, pointing out that apart from bank representatives, a number of businesspersons would be present. He said that India was keen to give an African "focus" to its foreign policy and both the External Affairs Minister, Yashwant Sinha, and the

Minister of State for External Affairs, Digvijay Singh, were enthusiastic about promoting the conference.

Currently, he said, \$135 millions was on hand as credit lines extended to African nations by India. Some of the problems faced in extending the credit on offer would come up for discussion at a closed-door session of the conference. There was also a persisting problem of non-payment of debt by some African nations under the Indian credit lines.

The conference is being organised with the support of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and the Exim Bank.