

SA-FRANCE BUSINESS FORUM

ROOM FOR GROWTH

French firms eye South African prospects in energy, transport and tourism

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TRADE between South Africa and its fourth-largest trading partner, France, amounted to R26-billion in 2006/7, according to Business Unity

South Africa (Busa).

Speaking at the two-day South Africa-France Business Forum, in Cape Town, late last month, Busa president **Patrice Motsepe** said growth in economic relations between the two countries had "huge potential".

The forum, which coincided with French President **Nicolas Sarkozy**'s first State visit to South Africa, was attended by more than 200 South African and French businesspeople.

Motsepe said more than 170 French-owned companies operated in South Africa, employing more than 30 000 people.

Motsepe added that South Africa had a desire to become France's largest trading partner in Africa, which would require the facilitation of many new trade and investment deals between the two countries through events such as the South Africa-France Business Forum.

Leader of the French business delegation and president of nuclear group Areva **Anne Lauvergeon** said she shared this ideal and stated that French business also had an ambition to increase trade and investment between the two countries.

Four key areas were highlighted during the first day of the forum as being of vital importance to the growth in trade and investment between South Africa and France. These included energy, skills, transport and tourism. In this regard, both French and South African business executives addressed delegates, highlighting opportunities for French investment in the four sectors.

In terms of energy, which was emphasised as a key sector, Nuclear Energy Corporation of South Africa CEO **Rob Adams** explained that the country would particularly welcome French investment in local nuclear technology. This investment would assist in easing South Africa's dependence on coal-generated electricity and take advantage of the global nuclear renaissance.

Motsepe elaborated that the discussions,

focusing on energy, skills, tourism and transport, were a prelude to the engagement between South Africa's and France's heads of State, whereby a number of agreements were signed.

The contract between Alstom and Eskom was signed in the presence of President **Thabo Mbeki** and Sarkozy, as were a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Agence Française du Développement and Eskom regarding the financing of a wind farm project, and an MoU between Areva and the joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition regarding skills development.

As well as strengthening economic ties, the purpose of the business forum was to provide executives from both countries with an opportunity to exchange ideas and explore future business deals.