

Agreement creates research partnership with France

Academics hope to benefit through joint projects, student exchanges

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Canadian mathematicians hope that linking their research projects to French expertise will equal answers on everything from computer network security to cancer research.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper signed a declaration with his French counterpart, François Filion, during a Parliament Hill ceremony last week, linking MITACS, a national network of mathematicians, to INRIA (L'Institut national de recherche en informatique et en automatique), the French national institute for research in computer science and control.

MITACS (Mathematics of Information Technology and Complex Systems) and INRIA will hold joint workshops and research projects and organize graduate student exchanges between Canada and France and longer research visits by senior mathematicians.

Officials hope the relationship can improve the use of mathematical models in health care and network security, two sectors being emphasized in the agreement.

"One of the things people are worried about with terrorism is bringing down information systems that could stop airlines from flying or emergency response systems from operating," said Arvind Gupta, the chief executive officer and scientific director of MITACS.

"If we work together, we can get research happening much faster. Our initial focus was to get scientists connected to each other."

MITACS was founded in 1999 after three institutes merged. It is based at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, B.C. Funding for MITACS comes from government, industry and university sources.

Its 32 joint projects with industry involve more than 300 scientists, 600 students, and 160 partner organizations at universities across Canada, focused on five economic sectors: biomedicine and health; environment and natural resources; information processing, networks and security; risk and finance; and communication.

With INRIA being a larger, older and more sophisticated network, collaboration was an easy decision, Mr. Gupta said in a telephone interview.

The French agency has ventures with 20 francophone universities and businesses in Canada and a smaller agreement with the province of Quebec.