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Geo-strategic Issues

Argentina said that Falkland Island's dispute is not like past but it is eternal dispute now. She said Argentina will not take that Island by force now but by putting a cultural, political and diplomatic fight for our heritage. She was delivering a speech regarding Falkland Island dispute before the mothers of the Argentineans who were killed during 1982 war.

Argentina has officially protested with China on the issue of soy oil by calling his ambassador. China is the largest importer of soy oil and Argentina is the largest exporter of this oil but last week the oil importer of China have told that they won't import soy oil from Argentina which annoyed Argentina. Argentina is the third largest economy of Latin America and the export of soy oil is the big factor of its economy. Now it is hoped that US will take place of Argentina in exporting oil to China as the oil importers are turning towards US market.

Report Summary/Brazil

Political Issues

Ten Brazilian ministers have resigns from their posts to take part in the upcoming presidential elections in October. Also the governor of Sao Paulo state Mr. Serra has

resigned to contest presidential elections. Soon after the resignation of ten ministers the president Lula called a meeting of cabinet and told them to not to disturb the continuity of the government. He told them the importance of Growth Acceleration Program (PAC) which is the largest social program of Lula's administration. PAC program focuses on investment in urban infrastructure, sanitation, energy, security, housing, distribution and transportation.

Serra is considered a man of obsession; he accepted it and told he is always in obsession of state and its public. According to polls Serra is second favorite candidate after Ms. Dilma Rousseff who she is a handpicked candidate of President Lula and most favorite for Brazilian elections. Mr. Serra is very favorite in Sao Paulo state where he has created a million jobs for the residents of the state and provided many other opportunities for the local people.

Geo-strategic Issues

The president of Russia Mr. Medvedev is going to pay an official foray to Argentina and Brazil next week. In Brazil he will meet the leaders of Brazil, China and India and all these four countries will hold the BRIC's conference there. This is his second visit to Latin America since he is elected as president. He will visit Venezuela as well as he is favoring Venezuela's nuclear program. After that Medvedev will go to USA to attend a conference on limitation of nuclear technology with US leader president Obama.

The president of Brazil has also plan to visit Russia in May told by the ambassador of Brazil to Moscow. President Lula is expanding its relations in global sphere but particularly with BRIC countries. The purpose of his visit to Moscow is to increase the relationships with Russia in political, economic, technology and technology field.

Report Summary/Mexico

Geo-strategic Issues

The US government has taken the killing of US diplomatic officials in Mexico as a serious issue. Because the US government says that drug cartels are killing US citizens to disturb US government which is struggling along with the government of Mexico to crackdown the drug cartels. The government said the killing of US citizens in 2007 were two but in 2009 is 43 which is the highest number since the war has started. And almost 5,000 people have been killed by the cartels since January 2008 and total number has crossed the figure of 17,000 since 2005. President Obama has taken it very serious that the drug cartels are increasing their circle against the US citizens and with the citizens of Mexico as well. Even the secretary of state had to visit Mexico last week.

Social/Drug Issues

It is said that the drug cartels are behaving as an animal in a cage so that have been more violent since the government has narrowed down its circle against them. Few days ago a drug cartel killed some citizens of Juarez state and hanged them under a bridge by leaving a message on a banner with them. Just due to this fear the people of Mexico are asking for political asylum in United States and the government of US says that they are rejecting the appeals now because they fear that more immigration would burden on US now. People of the border states of Mexico have been much frightened as their children are also not safe now in their school. The school which are providing security to the children they re getting extra 5,000 pesos including their fee.

The drug cartels are not only involved in killing of people but also in robbery like cars and other stuff. The drug cartels are hiring people in their gangs and paying them money for their work. Barrio Azteca is such kind of drug cartel which is hiring people for killing people which are creating hurdles in their way. The government blames to this drug cartel involved in slaying of two US citizens recently. The mayor of Ciudad Juarez said that the city has become a honeycomb for the drug cartels and no one feels safe in the city. The mayor himself got a message to kill him which was sent by tying it in a pig's neck.

The president Felipe Calderon said that the last month March was the bloodiest since 2006 as the ratio of the killing was at top. Drug cartels killed 958 people in last month which is the highest number since the president militarized the war against drug cartels in 2006. The president also said that the trouble is not as much as the local media is exaggerating before the people.

Economic Issues

The finance ministry said that the economy of Mexico will grow in this month till 4.1 percent and the sales abroad will increase till 10 percent in this year. US is the biggest importer of Mexican goods as 80 percent of Mexican goods are sold in US markets. So the government is hopeful that as the US is recovering in its economy which will boost Mexico's economy as the economy of Mexico is also attached with US.

Report Summary/Venezuela

Geo-strategic Issues

President of Russia is going to pay an official visit to Latin America and first he will attend the BRIC conference in Brazil. After the meeting he plans to meet with the president of Venezuela in Caracas to make some agreements. Russia is the largest supporter of Venezuela and he is the best ally of it in the region and Venezuela also

avored Russia in Georgian war and on some other occasions. President Putin is planning to make agreements to make a deal in Venezuela's Orinoco oil belt. Both of the countries are exploring oil from Venezuela's Orinoco belt by putting an oil pump there and this deal enhances \$20 billion. Venezuela is a big importer of Russian arms in the region.

The government of Venezuela said that it is going to make a deal of energy and some industrial sectors as well. Since Venezuela is facing energy crisis in the country, it asked for help from Cuba and Russia. Venezuelan president claimed that Russia is supporting Venezuela's nuclear power plant. He also said that Russia and Venezuela are forming an alliance to establish a new world order. The new world order would be based on multilateralism as Simon Bolivar has given the idea of it. It is also said that Russia is taking its place in Latin America once again.

President of Bolivia is also coming to Venezuela to meet with the president of Russia and Venezuela. He is coming to increase Bolivia's trade relations with Venezuela. Already Bolivia has signed some agreements with Venezuela in eight different fields as energy, agriculture-livestock, rural development, higher education, social development, education, sports, health and security cooperation.

Last week the president of Uruguay also visited Venezuela and met his Venezuelan counterpart there. Both of the leaders made diplomatic and trade agreements in different fields. They were agreeing to increase the export of agriculture by increasing their production of agricultural products. President Hu Jintao of China is also visiting Venezuela next week with some other countries of Latin America. He will attend BRIC conference in Brazil and then go to Washington to attend a summit on nuclear safety.

Social Issues

Venezuela's government told that the thermoelectric units were shut down due to failure of its energy generating units but before in the early stage the government did not expose this reality or cause of disturbance. Stratfor reported that the actual problem was when the water came in the unit's electrical switch. One unit which was producing electricity 2,000 megawatt now it is producing 170 megawatt.

Detailed Report/Argentina

Argentina will never succeed in claiming the Falkland Islands by military force, President Cristina Kirchner admitted yesterday.

But she pledged an "eternal fight" for the South Atlantic islands in the hope that diplomatic and political pressure would wrest them away from Britain.

She said Argentina would never give up its claim to the Falklands despite reports which emerged this week that an exploratory British drilling operation had found poor-quality oil reserves there.

Tensions between Argentina and the UK have soared amid speculation that the equivalent of up to 60 billion barrels of crude oil lie under the seabed off the disputed islands.

President Kirchner yesterday addressed mothers of Argentines killed in the 1982 war when Britain retook the islands after an invasion by the military junta in power in Buenos Aires. She said: "The battle is going to be eternal but it is not going to be like in the past, with force. We're going to put up a cultural, political and diplomatic fight in defense of our heritage."

Europe Minister Chris Bryant insisted this week that Britain would never discuss the sovereignty of the Falklands. The rig which has been test drilling for oil

Buenos Aires (Reuters) - Argentina is expected on Monday to formally protest a possible move by China to block imports of Argentine soybean oil in a trade row that threatens a key hard currency earner for the South American country.

Argentine Foreign Minister Jorge Taiana has summoned China's ambassador in Buenos Aires to discuss the potential Chinese measure.

Last year, Argentina, the world's leading soyoil seller, exported to China 1.84 million tonnes of soyoil worth \$1.4 billion and a prolonged conflict could end up benefiting U.S. or Brazilian soyoil exports, analysts said.

The Argentine response came after Chinese companies were called to an emergency meeting last week in Beijing and urged not to buy Argentine soy oil in retaliation for the country's decision to restrict imports of Chinese products, including shoes and steel pipes.

As the global economic crisis grew in late 2008 and early 2009, Argentina restricted Chinese imports to shield its industries from import competition.

A trade body under China's Ministry of Commerce told traders to cancel soy oil cargoes from Argentina because Chinese authorities planned to raise standards on the imports to levels which Argentina currently does not meet.

No one could be reached to comment at the Chinese Embassy in Buenos Aires.

"Need Each Other"

In Chicago, U.S. soy oil futures were up in afternoon trade, getting support from the trade spat although several U.S. traders said they did not expect the row to drag on.

"They need each other, the biggest exporter and the biggest importer," said a U.S. soy oil trader.

U.S. soybean oil prices were also uncompetitive high, the trader said. U.S. soy oil exports to China have been virtually nonexistent over the past year as phytosanitary restrictions have discouraged shipments from the United States.

However, some analysts said the conflict might mean export business shifted to other leading producers such as Brazil and the United States.

"If it went on long enough, it probably would (benefit U.S. soy oil exports) because Argentina is by far the largest exporter of soybean oil in the world and China is by far the largest importer. But that combination tells me that this situation might not last very long," said Anne Frick, oilseeds analyst with Prudential Bache Commodities.

"If it were to continue, it would probably benefit U.S. soybean oil exports and possibly Brazilian exports as well," she said.

Soybean and soy derivative exports are a pillar of Argentina's economy and the government could lose some \$600 million in tax revenue this year if Chinese soy oil exports are suspended, according to analysts.

Argentina, Latin America's No. 3 economy, is facing a financing crunch this year to meet debt obligations of up to \$15 billion.

Detailed Report/Brazil

Rio de Janeiro. Ten Brazilian ministers on Wednesday quit their posts to join this year's general elections, Xinhua informs.

Under Brazil's electoral law, the deadline for departure from government positions is April 3, six months before the elections.

The most notable departing minister is Dilma Rousseff, who was handpicked by President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva as his successor.

Rousseff's executive secretary Erenice Alves Guerra took over the presidency chief-of-staff post. Six other ministerial portfolios were also taken by executive secretaries in an effort to maintain continuity of the Lula administration.

These six ministries were transport, mines and energy, racial equality, environment, national integration and social security.

The ministers of agriculture, social development, and communications were taken over by outsiders.

Henrique Meirelles, governor of Brazil's central bank, was asked by the president to remain and had one day to decide whether to resign to join the election campaign. To be contested in this year's elections are the presidency of the republic, all chamber of deputies seats, 54 of the federal senate seats, all the 26 state governorships and state legislatures.

Sao Paulo State Governor Jose Serra resigned on Wednesday to run in October's presidential elections.

In a farewell ceremony, Serra avoided mentioning his candidacy, but said he was ready for a new stage.

Serra, who is being replaced by his deputy, Alberto Goldman, said he considered his government to be "popular," citing social programs and the generation of 1 million jobs in Sao Paulo.

"I am considered very obsessive, but my big obsession was to serve the interests of my state and my country," he said.

Serra, who runs for the Social Democrats, is leading pre-election polls, followed closely by the ruling Workers' Party's Dilma Rousseff, who also left her post on Wednesday as President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's chief of staff to devote to the election campaign.

Brazilians will go to the polls in October to elect a new president, governors and senators as well as federal, state and district deputies.

The first round of the presidential vote is scheduled for Oct. 3. If no candidate can get an outright victory, a run-off will be held on Oct. 31 between the two leading candidates.

Rio De Janeiro, Apr 05, 2010 (Xinhua via COMTEX) -- Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva on Monday called for continuity of government policies and plans in the first cabinet meeting after a cabinet reshuffle involving 10 ministers.

At the first cabinet meeting since a change of ministers, Lula stressed the importance of implementing the government's projects, especially those with the Growth Acceleration Program (PAC).

The PAC, which is now in its second phase, is Brazil's largest social program that focuses on the investments in urban infrastructure, sanitation, energy, security, housing, water distribution and transportation.

The PAC is considered one of the greatest achievements in Lula's administration.

Ten ministers left the government on March 31 to run for positions in the country's upcoming elections slated for October.

According to Brazil's electoral law, the deadline for departure from government posts is six months before the elections.

The most notable departure was that of Chief of Staff Dilma Rousseff, who was handpicked by Lula as his successor.

The ministers of agriculture, social development, communications, transport, national integration, mining and energy, social security, the environment and racial equality also quit their posts.

Rousseff's executive secretary Erenice Alves Guerra took over her post, and six other ministerial portfolios were also taken by executive secretaries so as to maintain continuity.

Moscow: President Dmitry Medvedev will travel to Argentina and Brazil next week, the Kremlin said Monday, as Russia strengthens relationships in a region long influenced heavily by the United States.

On April 14-15, Medvedev will travel to Argentina on an official visit, followed by a trip to Brazil on April 15-16, the Kremlin said in a statement. The Argentine foreign ministry said last month Medvedev's trip, which will include a meeting with President Cristina Kirchner, would be the first official visit by a Russian head of state in 125 years of bilateral relations.

In Brazil, Medvedev will join leaders of Brazil, India and China in a second summit of the world's major emerging economies known collectively as the BRIC countries. Russia hosted the first BRIC summit last June.

Medvedev was set to travel to Latin America from Washington where he was scheduled to attend a nuclear summit hosted by US President Barack Obama. Medvedev's visits will be his second foray into Latin America since he became president in 2008. In November of that year, he travelled on a major four-nation tour to Peru, Brazil, Venezuela and Cuba.

Over the weekend, Medvedev's predecessor in the Kremlin and Russia's current prime minister, Vladimir Putin, travelled to Venezuela. Putin promised Venezuela's fiercely anti-American leader Hugo Chavez Russia's assistance in the development of the country's nuclear and space programs.

Moscow, April 6 (Itar-Tass) -- President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva will pay an official visit to Russia on May 13-14, ambassador of Brazil to Russia Carlos Antonio da Rocha Paranhos said on Tuesday.

"Within the framework of the visit, the sides plan to sign a plan of action to strengthen strategic partnership in the political, trade and economic fields," the diplomat said.

"Brazil strives to develop relations with Russia first of all in the field of industry, military and technical cooperation and in the sphere of high technologies," the ambassador

stressed. "We are interested in making Russian-Brazilian cooperation more saturated and substantial."

Detailed Report/Mexico

The killings last month in the Mexican border town of Ciudad Juarez of two U.S. citizens, including an employee at the city's U.S. Consulate, along with the slaying of an Arizona rancher, have fueled concerns among U.S. officials that Americans are becoming fair game for Mexican drug gangs seeking control of smuggling routes into the United States.

For more than two years, U.S. intelligence and law enforcement officials have been warning that the dramatic rise in violence along the southwestern border could eventually target U.S. citizens and spread into this country. The violence posed what the officials called a "serious threat" to law enforcement officers, first responders and residents along the 1,951-mile border.

The numbers bear out those concerns, according to the State Department: 79 U.S. citizens were killed last year in Mexico, up from 35 in 2007. In Juarez, just across the Rio Grande from El Paso, Texas, 23 Americans were killed in 2009, compared with two in 2007.

In response, Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer and Sen. John McCain, both Republicans, have called on the Department of Homeland Security to deploy the National Guard along the Arizona border. Mrs. Brewer said the rising violence showed the "abject failure of the U.S. Congress and President Obama to adequately provide public safety along our national border with Mexico."

Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, Arizona Democrat, whose district includes the area where rancher Robert Krentz was killed, said if the slaying was connected to smugglers or drug cartels, the federal government should consider all options, including sending more Border Patrol agents to the area and deploying the National Guard.

Former Rep. Tom Tancredo, Colorado Republican, and former Rep. J.D. Hayworth, a Republican who is seeking Mr. McCain's senatorial seat, joined in the call for National Guard troops to be stationed along the border.

Mr. Hayworth said the federal government should "act now and step up its efforts to secure our borders."

Texas Gov. Rick Perry also has put into play a "spillover violence contingency plan" to address attacks on American citizens in Mexico. The plan increases border surveillance; intelligence sharing; and ground, air and maritime patrols.

A day before the March 13 Juarez killings, Mr. Perry unsuccessfully sought help from Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano to use unmanned Predator drone aircraft and 1,000 additional soldiers for missions on the Mexican border. He said there was a disparity in the amount of federal resources allotted to Texas for border security.

The White House said Mr. Obama was "deeply saddened and outraged" by the killings and had pledged to "continue to work with Mexican President Felipe Calderon and his government to break the power of the drug-trafficking organizations that operate in Mexico and far too often target and kill the innocent."

The latest victims were Lesley Enriquez, 25, who worked at the U.S. Consulate in Juarez, and her husband, Arthur Redelf, 30, both U.S. citizens. They were killed March 13 when Mexican drug gang members fired shots at their sport utility vehicle as they left a birthday party.

Mr. Redelf was a 10-year veteran of the El Paso County Sheriff's Office. Ms. Enriquez was four months pregnant with their second child. The couple's 7-month-old daughter was found unharmed in the back seat.

That same day, Jorge Alberto Salcido, 37, a Mexican citizen whose wife also was an employee at the U.S. Consulate in Juarez, was killed when cartel members shot at his car at a separate location, also wounding his two young children. They had attended the same birthday party.

Mr. Krentz, 58, a longtime Douglas, Ariz., rancher, was killed Saturday. He was found by a Cochise County Sheriff's Department helicopter, slumped over his Polaris all-terrain vehicle on his 34,000-acre ranch. His dog also was shot and was critically wounded. The animal was euthanized on Sunday.

Arizona authorities said they think Mr. Krentz was shot by an illegal immigrant. Police dogs followed the tracks of the suspected killer back into Mexico, about 20 miles south. Authorities think the shooter was either a drug cartel scout or a member of a known gang of border thieves that has terrorized the area's remote ranches.

The Krentz ranch sits in an area that has become a lucrative smuggling route for Mexican drug cartels.

"It's a big deal. It's something that could be a turning point here," said Cochise County Sheriff's Office spokeswoman Carol Capas. "People in the area are on heightened alert. They're grief-stricken, saddened, and they're extremely angry."

Two years ago, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security, said in a report that border gangs were becoming

increasingly ruthless and had begun targeting rivals and federal, state and local police. ICE said the violence had risen dramatically as part of "an unprecedented surge."

Last year, the Justice Department identified more than 200 U.S. cities in which Mexican drug cartels "maintain drug distribution networks or supply drugs to distributors" - up from 100 three years earlier.

The department's National Drug Intelligence Center, in its 2010 drug threat assessment report, described the cartels as "the single greatest drug trafficking threat to the United States." It said Mexican gangs had established operations in every area of the United States and were expanding into more rural and suburban areas.

The report noted that adding to the violence were assaults against U.S. law enforcement officers assigned to posts along the southwestern border. It said assaults against Border Patrol agents increased 46 percent from 752 incidents in fiscal 2007 to 1,097 incidents in fiscal 2008 - including the January 2008 killing of an agent by the automobile of a fleeing drug suspect and the fatal shooting of another agent in July 2009.

Although no arrests have been made in the Krentz killing, there has been an arrest in the Ciudad Juarez killings. The Mexican military detained a member of the Barrio Azteca gang, which works for the infamous Gulf drug cartel on both sides of the border. The suspect was identified as Ricardo Valles de la Rosa, 42, a resident of both Ciudad Juarez and El Paso.

Barrio Azteca is a U.S. prison gang that later found its roots in El Paso and Ciudad Juarez.

The Justice Department declined to comment on the Ciudad Juarez killings; the Department of Homeland Security did not return messages seeking comment.

The Mexican Embassy in Washington condemned the killings but did not respond to a follow-up request for comment about whether the Americans had been targeted intentionally. In a statement, it said the Mexican government would "work closely" with its U.S. counterparts "to track down those responsible for these killings so justice can be served."

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration would not comment specifically on the case but said "the violence we have been seeing is a signpost of the success that our very courageous Mexican counterparts have had in attacking those drug-trafficking organizations."

The drug rings "are acting like caged animals because they are caged," said DEA spokesman Rusty Payne. "They have lost roots, and they have lost control. The Mexican

government has gone after them, and this is the reaction from drug organizations that are in disarray."

On March 14, the State Department issued its strongest travel warning to date for U.S. citizens planning on traveling to Mexico. The department also approved the departure of the dependents of U.S. personnel from consulates in the northern Mexican border cities of Tijuana, Nogales, Ciudad Juarez, Nuevo Laredo, Monterey and Matamoros.

It warned that the cartels are using automatic weapons and grenades that "large firefights" have taken place in towns and cities across Mexico and that public shootouts have taken place during daylight hours in shopping centers and other public venues.

The department said drug criminals have followed and harassed U.S. citizens traveling in their vehicles, that travelers on major highways have been targeted for robbery and violence and that others have been caught in incidents of gunfire between criminals and Mexican law enforcement.

"While most crime victims are Mexican citizens, the uncertain security situation poses serious risks for U.S. citizens as well," it said.

Since January 2008, nearly 5,000 homicides have been committed in Ciudad Juarez alone, making it one of the most violent cities in the world. The bodies of some of those killed have been dumped in schoolyards and other public venues. Many of the victims were ambushed. Others were killed with grenades and AK-47 assault rifles.

Still others have been decapitated, their bodies hung from bridges - along with banners with warning messages from the cartels.

Mr. Calderon declared war against the Mexican cartels in 2006 and has committed more than 40,000 Mexican soldiers to the fight, although the violence continues to escalate. To date, the cartels in Mexico have killed more than 17,000 people.

At the core of the drug fight are the Sinaloa and Gulf drug cartels, along with Los Zetas, a group led by former Mexican military officers. They seek to control long-established smuggling corridors into this country, over which billions of dollars in illicit narcotics travel annually.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton traveled to Mexico City this month as part of a delegation to underscore concern over Mexico's drug violence.

"These appalling assaults on members of our own State Department family are, sadly, part of a growing tragedy besetting many communities in Mexico," Mrs. Clinton said.

The spreading violence of the drug wars along the Mexican border may have one unintended consequence. It could upend efforts to curb illegal immigrants by giving Mexican border-crossers a tool they never had before: a valid claim for political asylum.

For decades, immigrants coming from Mexico were denied asylum because Mexico was a stable and relatively peaceful democracy. But that is changing now.

Last week, at least 30 Mexicans from the town of El Porvenir walked to the border crossing post at Fort Hancock, Texas, and asked for political asylum. Ordinarily, their claim would be denied as groundless, and they would be turned back. Instead, they were taken to El Paso, where they expect to have their cases heard.

No one doubts that they have a strong claim. Their town on the Mexican side of the border is under siege by one or more drug cartels battling for control of the key border crossing. According to Mike Doyle, the chief deputy sheriff of Hudspeth County, Texas, one of the cartels has ordered all residents of the town of 10,000 to abandon the city within the next month.

"They came in and put up a sign in the plaza telling everyone to leave or pay with their own blood," Doyle said. Since then there has been a steady stream of El Porvenir residents seeking safety on the American side of the border, both legally and illegally. Among them are the 30 who are seeking political asylum.

In recent days the situation in the impoverished, dusty border town has grown worse. According to Jose Franco, the superintendent of schools in Fort Hancock, the cartels have threatened to execute children in school unless parents pay 5000 pesos in protection money.

And on Wednesday night, according to Doyle, several houses in El Porvenir were set on fire, and there were reports of cars loaded with furniture leaving the town.

Authorities fear that an incident might spark a mass exodus by the residents of El Porvenir that might cause them all to surge across the border at once.

Doyle says there are no plans yet to set up camps for an influx of refugees. "There is just no way to plan for that," he said. "We are waiting to see what happens. We will use the standard natural disaster procedures if it happens -- the Red Cross and housing at the schools, and if it gets worse, the state and the federal government will have to step in."

If political asylum is granted and made available to a large section of the Mexican population, immigration experts say, it could have implications far beyond El Porvenir. They say it could open the floodgates for a new wave of immigration from Mexico, much

as allowing Chinese to seek political asylum because of China's one-child policy created a huge migration when it happened. After that ruling, tens of thousands of Chinese boarded boats and planes and told immigration officials they were seeking asylum because they were allowed to have only one child. Most were granted immigration papers and allowed to stay. Even those who made spurious claims were granted a hearing and often simply disappeared.

According to Will Matthews, an American Civil Liberties Union spokesman, the wall that has kept Mexicans from requesting political asylum has already cracked. He says that a decision by Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) to send an police informant, Guillermo Eduardo Ramirez-Peyro, back to Mexico was overturned by the federal Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals, which found that asylum could be granted to him and others based on the Convention Against Torture.

"The court said that under the convention, 'acquiescence by government officials that could lead to a petitioner's harm' was grounds to grant political asylum," he said. The court, however, did not grant asylum; it ordered the BIA to rehear the case. Last week, after five years, the BIA reversed course and granted Ramirez-Peyro political asylum.

According to Shuya Ohno of Reform Immigration for America, even if hundreds or thousands of Mexicans sought asylum because of the drug wars, it is not likely that many would get it. "It is a hard case to make and very few succeed," he said. "Often it requires that those committing repression or threatening harm admit to it."

However, he said, it is likely if that if thousands of Mexicans made the claim, "it would stress the system incredibly" as well as delay their deportations. He said that the immigration court system is already overloaded and often staffed by volunteers just to keep it moving, and that if it was flooded with asylum claims it would be in danger of failing.

Ira Mehlman of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) said the situation was troubling. "The entire system of political asylum claims was set up for a different era," he said. "It was to protect people from repressive governments but now is being used when there is just a general breakdown of order."

He said that making a political asylum claim available to Mexicans along the border could result in a swamping of the already overloaded system and bring it to a grinding halt. "Once an avenue of appeal is opened, then it will become used" he said. And not just by those who qualify, but by thousands who don't.

Ciudad Juarez, Mexico -- A cross-border drug gang born in the prison cells of Texas has evolved into a sophisticated paramilitary killing machine that U.S. and Mexican officials suspect is responsible for thousands of assassinations here, including the recent ambush and slaying of three people linked to the U.S. consulate.

The heavily tattooed Barrio Azteca gang members have long operated across the border in El Paso, dealing drugs and stealing cars. But in Ciudad Juarez, the organization now specializes in contract killing for the Juarez drug cartel. According to U.S. law enforcement officers, it may have been involved in as many as half of the 2,660 killings in the city in the past year.

Officials on both sides of the border have watched as the Aztecas honed their ability to locate targets, stalk them and finally strike in brazen ambushes involving multiple chase cars, coded radio communications, coordinated blocking maneuvers and disciplined firepower by masked gunmen in body armor. Afterward, the assassins vanish, back to safe houses in the Juarez barrios or across the bridge to El Paso.

"Within their business of killing, they have surveillance people, intel people and shooters. They have a degree of specialization," said David Cuthbertson, special agent in charge of the FBI's El Paso division. "They work day in and day out, with a list of people to kill, and they get proficient at it."

The special agent in charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) in El Paso, Joseph Arabit, said, "Our intelligence indicates that they kill frequently for a hundred dollars."

The mayor of Juarez, José Reyes Ferriz, said that the city is honeycombed with safe houses, armories and garages with stolen cars for the assassins' use. The mayor received a death threat recently in a note left beside a pig's head in the city.

Arabit said investigators have no evidence to suggest the Barrio Azteca gang includes former military personnel or police. It is, however, working for the Juarez cartel, which includes La Linea, an enforcement element composed in part of former Juarez police officers, according to Mexican officials.

"There has to be some form of training going on," said an anti-gang detective with the El Paso sheriff's department, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the nature of his work. "I don't know who, and I don't know where. But how else would you explain how they operate?"

On March 13, Lesley Enriquez Redelfs, 35, who worked for the U.S. Consulate in Juarez, and her husband, Arthur Redelfs, 34, a deputy in the El Paso sheriff's department and a detention officer at the county jail, were returning home to El Paso from a children's party sponsored by the U.S. consul in Juarez. As their white sport-utility vehicle neared the international bridge that sunny Saturday afternoon, they were attacked by gunmen in at least two chase cars. When police arrived, they found the couple dead in their vehicle

and their infant daughter wailing in her car seat. The intersection was littered with casings from AK-47 assault rifles and 9mm guns.

Ten minutes before the Redelfs were killed, Jorge Alberto Cenicerros Salcido, 37, a supervisor at a Juarez assembly plant whose wife, Hilda Antillon Jimenez, also works for the U.S. Consulate, was attacked and slain in similar style. He had just left the same party and was also driving a white SUV, with his children in the car.

According to intelligence gathered in Juarez and El Paso, U.S. investigators were quick to suspect the Barrio Azteca gang in connection with what President Obama has called the "brutal murders." What was unclear, they said, was the motive. U.S. diplomats and agents have declined to describe the killings as a targeted confrontation with the U.S. government, which had been pushing to place U.S. drug intelligence officers in a Juarez police headquarters to more quickly pass along leads.

Five days after the consulate killings, the DEA unleashed in El Paso a multiagency "gang sweep" called Operation Knockdown to gather intelligence from Barrio Azteca members. Over four days, officers questioned 363 people, including about 200 gang members or their associates, and made 26 felony arrests.

Soon after, the Department of Homeland Security issued a warning that the Barrio Azteca gang had given "a green light" to the retaliatory killing of U.S. law enforcement officers.

Authorities were especially interested in Eduardo Ravelo, a captain of the Barrio Azteca enterprise allegedly responsible for operations in Juarez. In October, the FBI had placed Ravelo and his mug shot on its 10-most-wanted list, though they warned that Ravelo may have had plastic surgery and altered his fingerprints. Ravelo is still at large.

DEA agents say that 27 Barrio Azteca members were detained as they tried to cross from El Paso to Juarez during Operation Knockdown, evidence of gang members' fluid movement between the two countries.

This week, authorities announced that Mexican soldiers, using information from the FBI and other sources, had arrested Ricardo Valles de la Rosa, an Azteca sergeant, in Juarez.

Valles's confession was obtained at a military base where he was allegedly beaten, according to his attorney, a public defender. He has not been charged in the consulate killings, though he is charged with killing rival gang members, including members of an enterprise known as the Artistic Assassins, or "Double A's," who operate as contract killers for the Sinaloa cartel. Sinaloa is vying for control of billion dollar drug-trafficking routes through the Juarez-El Paso corridor.

In his statements, Valles said he was told through a chain of letters and phone calls from Barrio Azteca leaders in the El Paso county jail and their associates that gang leaders wanted Redelfs, the El Paso sheriff's deputy, killed because of his treatment of Azteca members in jail and his alleged threats against them.

Valles said he tracked down Redelfs at the children's party and then handed off the hit to others. He said the killing of the factory supervisor was a mistake because he was driving a white SUV similar to Redelfs's.

El Paso County Sheriff Richard Wiles said in a statement that Valles was a career criminal and denied that Redelfs had mistreated inmates. Wiles stressed that the motives remain unknown.

Fred Burton, a former State Department special agent and now a security adviser for the Texas government, said he is suspicious of attempts to underplay the killings. "These were targeted hits done by sophisticated operators," he said. "But it is not politically expedient for either side to say that criminal organizations were behind this. That is a nightmare scenario for them."

Mexican officials say that Valles, 45, was born in Juarez but grew up in El Paso, where he lived for 30 years. Nicknamed "Chino," he was a member of the Los Fatherless street gang in El Paso. In 1995, he was convicted of distributing drugs and spent 12 years in eight U.S. federal prisons, where he met an Azteca gang leader. After his release, he was deported to Mexico and began working with the Aztecas in Juarez.

The theory that the carnage in Juarez is being stoked by rival gangs of contract killers -- the Barrio Aztecas and the Artistic Assassins -- each working for rival drug cartels makes sense to many observers.

The gangs are a bi national phenomenon whose members exploit the mistrust between U.S. and Mexican law enforcement, said Howard Campbell, a professor at the University of Texas in El Paso and an expert on the drug trade.

"They use the border to their advantage," Campbell said.

Authorities say Eduardo Ravelo has helped turn the border city into Mexico's homicide capital. Now investigators think he played a role in the U.S. Consulate slayings. Authorities think he had his fingertips altered to disguise his prints and plastic surgery to mask his face. Except for his dark eyes, federal officials doubt he looks anything like his 12-year-old FBI most wanted photo -- round face, trim mustache and a scar along his cheek.

Eduardo Ravelo, known on the street as "Tablas," or "lumber," for his ability to crush, allegedly rules thousands of acolytes in an operation that authorities say specializes in killing, conspiracy, extortion, drug trafficking and money laundering.

Though he is thought to live across the border in Ciudad Juarez and regularly cross into Texas, he has eluded arrest.

"He's a butterfly, a moth," said Samantha Mikeska, an FBI special agent leading the hunt for Ravelo. "He takes care of his people and that keeps him under the radar."

Ravelo, 42, is said by law enforcement to have been a major factor in turning Ciudad Juarez into the homicide capital of Mexico, with nearly 5,000 people slain there since 2008 and more than 600 this year. He is thought to be responsible for dozens of the slayings.

Now he has risen to new prominence as authorities in the U.S. and Mexico investigate whether he was behind the recent drive-by killings of three people associated with the U.S. Consulate in Ciudad Juarez.

Arthur H. Redelfs, a detention officer at the El Paso County Jail, and his wife, Lesley A. Enriquez, a consulate employee, were ambushed and killed March 13 as they drove home from a birthday party. A third person, who was married to a consulate employee, was apparently killed by mistake as he drove from the same party in a vehicle similar to the Redelfs'.

The U.S. is determined to find Ravelo, and his wanted picture is plastered on billboards around El Paso. But in Mexico, he appears to have protection.

Robert Beltran, a former gang member who runs a private protection firm on both sides of the border, said the Mexican government, with scores of army troops stationed at the border, should be able to catch Ravelo.

"Anybody can be found in Juarez," Beltran said. "If the government puts enough pressure, or the right price is put out, someone will give him up."

But Mikeska, the FBI agent, said Ravelo was no easy target. "He is at the highest rank you can get," she said. "He has a lot of pull, a lot of juice. He has done a lot to survive."

The violence is spilling across the Rio Grande, said Jesse Tovar of the El Paso County Sheriff's Office.

He pointed to the killing of Sergio Saucedo, 30, in September because of a Mexican drug deal, allegedly involving Ravelo, that went bad. Saucedo was kidnapped from his home in El Paso in front of his family and a school bus filled with children. His body was dumped on a street in Ciudad Juarez with his arms severed and placed on top of a cardboard sign on his chest.

In El Paso, Ravelo's gang is called Barrio Aztecas. It started small, evolving from the so-called Mexican Mafia of inmates in Texas prisons. Authorities said its initial aim in the late 1990s was street robberies to collect funds for the prisoners' commissary accounts.

Today, authorities say there are 2,000 or more hard-core Barrio Aztecas roaming El Paso, a city of 600,000 beset by drug trafficking and illegal immigrant smuggling. In Ciudad Juarez, Ravelo's gang is known simply as the Aztecas. Its numbers are difficult to count but are probably three times those in El Paso. Maybe more.

Both gangs largely work as one outfit, investigators said, primarily moving drugs from the Mexican side into the U.S. Officials said members from both sides, under Ravelo's eye, serve as hit men for the larger Juarez cartel and its Vicente Carrillo Fuentes drug trafficking operation that claims this part of the border region as its turf.

Authorities said Ravelo, who was born in Mexico but has permanent resident status in the U.S., rules the gangs with a firm hand. They said sicarios, or hired killers, are easy to find; he pays them less than 500 pesos, or \$40, a week. Gang members who sell heroin for him and then get hooked on the drug are killed. When drug loads turn up missing in El Paso, suspects are kidnapped and taken to Ciudad Juarez. Some are shot; some are tortured and then shot. Some are beheaded.

But it is not always about drugs. Authorities think retaliation and intimidation were the motives behind the consulate shootings. Their operating theory is that Redelfs was the intended target because Ravelo and other gang leaders thought the detention officer was too tough on gang members in the El Paso County Jail.

The violence did not begin with the consulate ambush; it likely will not end there. Last week, Azteca members in Ciudad Juarez sent an e-mail to some residents warning them to expect more violence in the next three or four months.

"People from Juarez," the e-mail said, "get ready because the problem comes hard, the murders are coming heavy and hard. And don't cry with your blankets because nobody cares about you."

Authorities said Ravelo assumed leadership after a series of killings along the border eight years ago. To get to the top, they said, Ravelo betrayed his predecessor, repeatedly stabbing him and then shooting him in the neck.

His ascent was helped, authorities said, by the 2008 arrests in El Paso of six Barrio Azteca leaders, all of whom were handed sentences of life in prison. Ravelo was indicted with the others in the sweeping federal racketeering case. In all, 26 gang members were convicted or pleaded guilty, except for Ravelo, who was never caught.

Authorities said he has slipped undetected between Ciudad Juarez and El Paso, sometimes coming with bodyguards and an armored truck to recruit hit men or simply to visit family members on the U.S. side.

For the most part, however, authorities say Ravelo lies low, living modestly with his common-law wife and their children in the Ciudad Juarez hillsides. Investigators think his base of operations is a tattoo parlor, though they said he rarely frequented the shop now, especially after the consulate shootings.

U.S. authorities have no jurisdiction in Mexico, and must rely on officials there to find and arrest him.

"He knows he is looking at life in prison with no parole in this country," said Mikeska of the FBI. "He's not a dumb man. And he's not the kind of person who would come in and surrender. Instead he's saying, 'Come get me.' "

Carmen Coutino, a Drug Enforcement Administration agent in El Paso, said the agency recently ran a three-day operation with more than 200 federal agents, arresting 54 gang members.

Ravelo's gang threatened to retaliate against El Paso police if it continued. "The consulate shootings, that's one of the reasons we did this," Coutino said. "There was a lot of intelligence-gathering, a lot of new leads. We're trying to find out what else we don't know."

Mexican President Felipe Calderon has admitted that March had been the bloodiest month yet in the state's three-year-long all-out war against drug cartels.

The death toll of those killed in the crossfire between police and drug gangs or assassinated by the military or cartels rocketed to 958 last month - the highest total since December 2006, when the newly inaugurated president militarized the fight against the drug trade.

The total number of deaths related to the war now stands at an incredible 18,757 - 2,550 of whom have died so far this year.

But claiming that "Mexico faces a problem of perception," Mr Calderon insisted that the media was exaggerating the violence.

"Public safety in Mexico is on a par with the best countries in Europe," the president stated.

Mr Calderon vowed to crush the drug cartels, which supply wealthy clients in the US with cocaine imported predominantly from Colombia, after controversially being declared the winner of the disputed 2006 presidential election.

The president has sent more than 50,000 soldiers to take over police duties in northern states on the frontier with the US, yet the pace of killings has only accelerated, allowing cartel bosses to boast that the government will "never win."

In a sensational interview with a local news reporter, one of Mexico's most wanted drug lords Ismael Zambada declared that Mr Calderon's fight was "already lost, because the narco, just like corruption, is now deeply rooted in Mexican society."

March 31 (Bloomberg) -- Mexico's Finance Ministry raised its forecast for economic growth this year to 4.1 percent, which would be the fastest pace in a decade, as U.S. shoppers increase demand for the country's exports.

Sales abroad will rise 10 percent this year, the ministry said today in a report. Consumer demand will also pick up in Mexico and spending on infrastructure will further stimulate the economy, the Finance Ministry said.

"The expected recovery process in 2010 will be supported by greater growth in internal demand, thanks to a recovery in employment and lending, as well as infrastructure investment and expected growth in exterior demand," the ministry said. The U.S. buys 80 percent of Mexico's exports.

The government had previously estimated the economy would grow 3.9 percent this year.

The Mexican peso may average 12.8 pesos per dollar in 2010, stronger than the 13.8 pesos per dollar forecast in this year's federal budget.

Investment may increase 5.3 percent while consumption rises 4.2 percent, the ministry said. Mexico will generate 9.2 billion pesos (\$745 million) of oil revenue above the budgeted amount because of rising crude prices, the report said.

The economy will probably expand 4 percent next year, the report said. A 4.1 percent increase would be the fastest annual growth rate since a 6 percent expansion in 2000.

Detailed Report/Venezuela

April 1 (Bloomberg) -- Prime Minister Vladimir Putin will pay his first visit to Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez tomorrow as Russia seeks to regain lost influence in Latin America through energy and arms deals.

The highlight of the one-day trip to Caracas may be the formation of a joint venture to pump oil from Venezuela's Orinoco Belt. Putin also plans to meet Bolivia's Evo Morales, who like Chavez opposes U.S. policy in the region.

Chavez, who visited Russia eight times during his decade in power, has wooed Putin by signing more than \$4 billion in arms deals and inviting state energy companies OAO Gazprom and OAO Rosneft to explore for oil. Venezuela was alone supporter of Russia during the five-day Georgian war in 2008 and hosted joint naval war games later that year.

"Chavez has already signed up for more weapons than he can buy, and Russian energy companies aren't really interested in exploration and production in Venezuela," said Pavel Baev, a professor at the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo. "It's much more a political project."

The two countries fed off each other's anti-Americanism as oil prices hit all-time highs in the final year of the Bush administration. Now, under the conditions of the global financial crisis, Putin's successor President Dmitry Medvedev is seeking a more "sober" foreign policy, Baev said.

Arms Customer

“Chavez isn’t the same as he was one or two years ago, but he still has money,” said Fyodor Lukyanov, editor of Russia in Global Affairs magazine. “Russia is trying to get out of it as much as it can.”

Venezuela turned into Russia’s largest Latin American arms customer after the U.S. suspended weapons sales amid a chill in relations. Chavez has placed orders for Sukhoi jet fighters, Russian-made helicopters and Kalashnikov rifles.

Venezuela also backed Russian encouragement for closer cooperation among producers of natural gas, with Energy Minister Rafael Ramirez calling for exporters of the fuel to follow the same principles as the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries.

Igor Sechin, Putin’s deputy for energy, has pushed for the formation of a venture between Petroleos de Venezuela SA and oil producers Rosneft, Gazprom, OAO Lukoil, OAO Surgutneftegaz and TNK-BP. The joint company may spend more than \$20 billion pumping oil in the Orinoco Belt, Sechin said after meeting Ramirez in Moscow in February.

“In the present economic situation, Gazprom won’t be ready to invest serious money in Venezuela,” said Lukyanov. “It’s more symbolic, a reminder that Russia is still the biggest player on the hydrocarbon market.”

No Trespassing

Russia shouldn’t be seen as trespassing in America’s backyard because the U.S. itself reduced economic cooperation with Venezuela, said Vladimir Sudarev, deputy director of the Latin America Institute at the Russian Academy of Sciences.

“Putin feels he’s repaying a debt by going, since Venezuela opened the gates of Latin America to Russia,” said Sudarev. “Competition with the U.S. is pointless in Latin America, but Russia can look for niches.”

Medvedev is expected to visit Latin America later this month for a summit of the so-called BRIC nations: Brazil, Russia, India and China. He visited Venezuela in 2008 on a Latin American tour that included stops in Peru and Cuba.

Caracas, Venezuela—Russia offered to help Venezuela set up its own space industry, including a satellite launch site, as Prime Minister Vladimir Putin made his first visit to the South American country on Friday.

Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez announced the offer by Russia hours before Mr. Putin arrived, saying officials would discuss the possibility of setting up a "satellite launcher and a factory." He didn't give details or say how much that might cost.

Russian and Venezuelan officials said they planned to sign new agreements for energy projects in Venezuela, as well as industrial, commercial and agriculture projects.

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin made a short visit to Venezuela, and agreed Friday with host President Hugo Chavez on a joint oil production project worth \$20 billion, Israel Radio reported.

The deal provides assistance by Russian oil corporations to the Venezuelan state-owned petroleum company in improving yield rates up to 450,000 barrels per day.

According to the report, President Chavez announced that Russia is willing to assist his country in the development of nuclear power plants.

Venezuela: President Hugo Chavez affirmed Sunday that Venezuela and Russia are forging a strategic alliance aimed at the establishment of a new international order based on multilateralism.

“Russia and Venezuela have merged in the construction of a pluripolar world to make true the world equilibrium advocated by Simon Bolivar. This is our goal and no one will ever take us out of that way,” the Venezuelan leader said in his Sunday address Las Lineas de Chavez.

According to him, the visit of Russian Prime Minister recently to Caracas was a clear signal in that direction.

His visit reaffirms our strategic alliance. It was a full agenda that closed with the signing of 31 agreements in such different fields as oil, gas and nuclear energy, military, education, research, transport, and agriculture, he pointed out.

The president also rated the meeting between Bolivian President Evo Morales and Putin another sign towards multilateralism.

The Miraflores Palace housed the Putin-Evo meeting.

Uruguay and Venezuela will seek new ventures on Wednesday when Presidents José Mujica and Hugo Chávez meet in Caracas.

The Uruguayan Head of State will travel on Tuesday as part of a diplomatic and trade offensive that seeks to open new areas for exports, mainly agricultural products.

Eduardo Brenta, the Minister of Labor, said on Monday in Montevideo that Mujica's visit to Caracas is part of a strategy to boost production in the agricultural sector, DPA reported.

During the meeting, "the (two parties) will discuss issues related to business activities, particularly trade promotion of agricultural products," the Minister said.

Chinese President Hu Jintao will pay visits to Brazil, Chile and Venezuela in April, announced on Thursday the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Hu will attend a summit on nuclear safety to be held on 12 and 13 April in Washington, said Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang.

Then he is scheduled to travel to Brazil to attend the second summit of the large emerging economies (BRIC: Brazil, Russia, India and China). Subsequently, he will visit Chile and Venezuela, said Qin Gang, AFP reported.

Bolivian President Evo Morales will travel to Venezuela Thursday night, where he will meet his Venezuelan counterpart Hugo Chavez and Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, respectively.

Morales will try to close a trade deal with Chavez, said Ivan Canelas, his spokesman. The two countries have already signed eight agreements on energy, agriculture-livestock, rural development, higher education, social development, education, sports, health and security cooperation.

Morales will meet Putin on Friday, during the latter's one-day visit to Venezuela. They will discuss a credit of 100 million U.S. dollars for the Bolivian army.

In 2008, Bolivia asked for Russia's help to get that credit to acquire weapons and logistic equipment for the Bolivian army, including trucks, cargo planes, patrol boats, helicopters, and others.

Morales will be accompanied by Bolivian Economy Minister Luis Arce Catacora during his trip to Venezuela. He is scheduled to return on Friday night.

Venezuela's main thermoelectric plant, Planta Centro, was shut down April 5-6 due to failures in five of its generating units, the Venezuelan daily El Nacional reported April 7. In an official announcement, the government said the five units were disabled April 5.

In reporting the shutdown two days later, the Venezuelan government appears increasingly hesitant to expose the reality of the country's worsening electricity crisis. As STRATFOR reported April 5, Unit 3 at Planta Centro experienced a fire late April 4 that was caused when water came into contact with a generator's electrical switch. The extent of the damage and estimates on repair time remain unclear.

Unit 3 was the only unit running at Planta Centro at the time of the incident and was reportedly generating 170 megawatts of its installed capacity of 2,000 megawatts. Unit 4 at the plant has been shut down since March 26 for repairs and was scheduled to come back online April 5. As of April 7, all units appeared to be out of commission, since the Web site of state power agency Operation of Interconnected Systems (OPSIS) showed Planta Centro output at zero megawatts.

Assuming engineers working on the plant have Unit 4 in good enough shape to bring it back online, it will take time to get the entire plant running again. Thermoelectric plants require a high degree of heat to run the power-generating turbines. Engineering sources say temperatures at a cold offline plant would have to be raised to 1,000 degrees Fahrenheit for its generators to work, which would take approximately 18 hours. STRATFOR will be watching to see if Unit 4 does indeed come online the evening of April 7. If it does not, there likely are other complications afflicting the plant.

Planta Centro is a key thermoelectric plant that supplies the northwestern states of Lara, Yaracuy, Carabobo, Aragua and Falcon. The shutdown of the plant raises fears that Venezuela's thermoelectric capacity, which rests on shaky infrastructure while Caracas tries to get the natural gas needed to run the plants, will be unreliable in the event of a potential shutdown of the Guri hydroelectric dam. The Guri, along with the nearby dams it supports, supplies the country with roughly 70 percent of its electricity.

And the Guri dam remains in critical condition as the water level of the reservoir continues to sink. OPSIS data for April 7 shows an 11-centimeter drop from 249.50 to 249.39 between April 6 and April 7. These numbers are highly suspect, however, since STRATFOR has noted discrepancies in OPSIS reporting over the past month. In addition, the shutdown of Planta Centro would mean more pressure will inevitably be put on Guri to generate power. The Guri water level had been showing an average drop of 15 to 16 centimeters per day, so the accuracy of OPSIS data showing an 11-centimeter drop without significant rainfall or decreased thermoelectric output is questionable.

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