

# **BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD**

## **News Monitoring Report No. 115 on Latin America**

Reference period: Apr.09-16, 2010

Presentation: Apr.21, 2010

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### **Report Summary/Argentina**

#### **Geo-strategic Issues**

The president of Chile visited Argentina and met his counterpart there. Both of them said that their countries need cooperation in the various field as economic, cultural, commercial and strategic level. Argentinean president said that despite different ideas, Argentina has always been co operational with its neighboring country Chile. She said both countries have invested a lot on tunnels, bridges and other passages to strengthen their relationships. The leaders of the both countries also talk on the immigration issues between both countries.

The president Kirchner Fernandez visited USA to attend a nuclear summit on the invitation of the president Barak Obama last week. She also met with the president Medvedev of Russia and Dung of Vietnam. She talks with her both Russian and Vietnamese counterparts to increase with Argentina. Russia's trade surplus with Argentina is \$705 million and \$228 million with Vietnam. Argentina is exporting its agricultural products to these countries. Other than this Argentina is favoring Russia to join World Trade Organization and Russia is supporting Argentina on Falkland Island's issue against United Kingdom. President Fernandez visited Russia in December 2008 last time but no Russian president visited Argentina yet now. Medvedev would be the first one to visit Argentina in next week.

On the occasion of 125 years of diplomatic relations between Argentina and Russia, the presidents of both countries are going to sign some agreements in various fields of mutual interests and their stance on various international issues is similar. Both of the countries are working on different projects jointly as energy, civilian nuclear power, space exploration, high technology and transport development. Russian ambassador said that more focus will be on promoting cultural and humanitarian cooperation between both countries rather than other issues. The ambassador also said that the trade between both countries decreased 30 percent during the global economic crisis which is to increase now.

The president Kirchner said in Washington that the trade environment of Argentina provides a very favorable environment to the American business companies and their bondholders will succeed. She was telling in the Chamber of Commerce to invest in Argentina where a very suitable environment welcomes them to invest.

## **Report Summary/Brazil**

### **Social Issue**

Brazil's second largest city Rio de Janeiro was hit by heavy rains last week and the rains caused heavy flood. The flood took the lives of 200 people and several injured. The federal government said that thousands of houses are still at danger and risk and the government has sent national security forces to rescue the people from the area and announced \$208 million for emergency funds. The transportations system remained fail during the flood and many people stuck in the transports. The government said that it has evacuated people from Rio and the government is arranging stipend for the people who are the victims of the natural disaster. The state governor of Rio said that he is worry that a fatal disease can be spread in the area due to unburied bodies. The state government has taken it seriously and rescuing people from the affected areas.

The FIFA organization said that it will talk to the authorities of Rio government about the infrastructure and transportation system of Rio as Rio is going to held FIFA World Cup in 2014 and then World Olympic Games in 2016.

### **Political Issues**

Mr. Serra would launch his bid for presidency in this week. According to the last poll he has privilege over Ms. Rousseff by nine points. According to the last poll Serra got 32.7 percent support from the surveyors and his opponent candidate Rousseff got 32.4 percent support of surveyors. Serra is getting an advantage of his governorship of Brazil's most populated and largest state Sao Paulo which is also the economic hub of Brazil. He is also an experienced person in politics as he has been mayor of a city for years. On the other hand Ms. Rousseff is a handpicked candidate of the current president Mr. Lula. She has taken exiled in USA and Chile during the military dictatorship in 1964 – 1985. It is said that if Serra will follow the economic policies of Lula to be successful.

An officer of Brazil's state run oil company Petrobras told that Brazil may drill more oil well in the region. The oil company is going to spend \$200 to \$220 billion in Tupi field which is

the largest field in Americas. A senator told that the approval of this bill is to be pass from senate in May.

### **Geo-strategic Issues**

BRIC conference is going to held on April 16 in Brazil. The leaders of Brazil, India, China and Russia will attend nuclear summit of Obama in Washington and then come to Brazil. President Hu of China has come to Brazil after the nuclear summit in USA. This would be the last most important event in the last months of the current president Lula. Mainly the BRIC is focusing on economic and financial area but Iran's nuclear program will also discussed in this forum. As India's external economic relations' secretary said that mainly the economic issues are discussed but the BRIC countries will also discuss the regional and global issues.

An expert of BRIC said that despite mutual consensus on several occasions among BRIC countries, now the cooperation among the BRIC countries will be limited. He said after the global financial crisis the differences between the countries have increased and cooperation is difficult in such scenario. He also said that all four countries are trying to work on a common currency rather than dollar which does not seems so possible yet. Other than this issues there is a misconception between China and India on some issues like on security problems between both countries which will keep them away from each other.

China and Russia are the members of UNSC and favoring Obama's step to impose sanctions on Iran but their favor is minor. Both countries will also attend Iran's nuclear conference which is considered a response to Obama's nuclear summit. Apart from this, the BRIC countries will discuss economic reform in the institutions of the world as International Monetary Fund and global financial crisis. Russian president Medvedev's top economic advisor said that trade in national currencies will be in the top of agenda. He also said that Russia and Brazil will sign cooperation in cooperation in aerospace, energy, telecommunications and agriculture field.

Brazilian government has sent a condolatory address to the government of Poland on the death of Polish president along with his team of 97 members. The government of Brazil has announced three day mourning in the country.

Brazil's trade minister is traveling to Iran along with 100 businessmen. He will meet his Brazilian counterpart and several Iranian companies. This will be the biggest ever delegation to Iran and they will sign agreements with that trade companies. The president of Iran visited Brazil in last year and the president of Brazil plans to visit Iran next month in May.

In the nuclear summit the president Obama met his Brazilian counterpart and asked him to favor US to impose sanctions on Iran to close its nuclear program. Obama said Iran is producing its nuclear program to threat western countries and European countries are favoring USA to impose sanctions Iran. But the defense minister of Brazil said that Brazil does not want growing nuclear technology in the world but sanctions are not the solutions. Defense minister also said that both Brazil and United States signed a defense agreement to increase military after

the nuclear summit by Obama. The minister said that the agreement will increase military cooperation in future as well. The deal is of \$4 billion which will produce the 100 aircrafts.

Brazil is going to send beef to United States if the dispute between both countries is solved on cotton issue. Brazilian export will not ease USA's demand of beef but it would be enough for use. Brazil is the largest exporter of beef in the world and having large herds in the country where the animals are produced to export. But few times ago its beef export to US was banned due to a disease of animals' foot and mouth. But now once again the trade will be continue between both countries.

The trade minister of Egypt said that Egypt is near to finish the negotiations between Brazil and other Mercosur countries to start trade with these countries. He said Brazil is new emerging economy of the world and very efficiently it recovered from global economic crisis first of all. According to Brazil's trade ministry the export of Brazil to Egypt was \$87.7 million in 2009 while its imports amounted to \$1.53 billion.

## **Report Summary/Mexico**

### **Social/Political Issues**

Mexican government is going to register the users of its mobile phone users in the country. For this purpose it has given a deadline to the users to register their phones otherwise their connections would be blocked. Now the given date has past and the government is thinking to extend the pre given date and the bill for the extension has sent to the senate. But later the senate did not pass the bill so the date did not extend. Mobile phone registration process has started by the government due to increasing rate of robberies, kidnapping and other kind of violence. So to tackle these issues the government has decided to register the cell users of the country.

According to the Mexican public security ministry, the government is going to deploy army in Juarez state where the crimes and murders are increasing day by day. Almost 8,000 soldiers are monitoring the border city but the crimes are not decreasing. Ciudad Juarez has been the most dangerous and violent city in Mexico and in the world where criminal activities are increasing every day. The president said we want the confidence of the people so we will do the best what we could do.

### **Geo-strategic Issues**

First Lady Michelle Obama traveled to Mexico City and took a dinner with Mexican President Felipe Calderon and his family. She also visited an Anthropology museum in Mexico City and had a forum with youth, students and women. President Felipe Calderon visited White House last month with his wife but president has not paid any visit to Mexico yet.

Canadian president Harper visited Mexico to attend NAFTA summit where he will stay for two days. It was said that Calderon will put pressure on Harper to bring a change in the immigration policy for Mexican citizens. Harper said that in immigration process the government of Mexico is not responsible but there are some drawbacks in Canadian refugee law system so the parliament of Canada should change the existing system. All existing bogus cases in Canada are due to the flexibility in Canadian refugee laws. Last year 9,400 Mexicans applied

for Canadian visa but only 11 percent cases were accepted. But the government of Canada has offered that the businessmen of Mexico would be encouraged to apply for Canadian visas.

US consulate in Mexico received a small bomb attack last day and it is the second time in the same month when US consulate is targeted. The attack happened in a Mexican bordering state and no casualty took place. It is considered since US has been more active by granting funds and weapons to the Mexican government to fight against the drug cartels, the cartels have been more aggressive and trying to take revenge from the Mexicans. Last month three American diplomats were killed when they were coming from their child's birthday party and it is the second time that American are attacked. The government officials told media that the government is investigating about the bomb blast.

The president of Mexico is going to visit USA to attend a nuclear summit called by president Obama. In that summit the president will announce that Mexico has joined the Global Initiative against the Nuclear Terrorism and "it is ready to contribute to the development and enforcement of measure to combat the nuclear terrorism," the Presidency said.

## **Report Summary/Venezuela**

### **Social Issues**

President Hugo Chavez said in a TV address to his nation in Venezuela that the electricity emergency has increased in the country for 60 days. It was considered that due to the recent rainfall in the country the shortage of water in the Guri Dam would be filled but president's speech has declared the reality. Despite an oil rich country Venezuela remained unsuccessful to overcome the shortage of electricity in the country. Chavez is a leftist leader who has ruled Venezuela for 11 years but it is considered that his opposition has increased now especially due to electricity crisis in the country which may become the cause of his defeat in the recent elections.

The government is trying to search another option to overcome the electricity shortage rather than water. And for this purpose it is said that the government is planning to explore its vast gas fields which would be utilized for energy production in future.

### **Political Issues**

It is said that Venezuela has becoming more dependent on Russia as the latest weapon agreement shows the dependency. Prior to this last agreement the government of Venezuela has also purchased weapons as helicopters, submarines and planes from Russia. Russian government said it is just a trade deal with Venezuela there is not a matter of dependency. Also the government of Venezuela has rejected this and told it is just a trade deal with Russia.

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has urged thousands of gun-toting militia troops to be ready to fight for his socialist government, telling them that opponents may be plotting to oust or kill him. He was addressing on the occasion of the failed military coup of 2002 before the soldiers of army.

### **Geo-strategic Issues**

Uruguayan president visited Caracas last week and met Chavez there. Chavez warmly welcomed his Uruguayan counterpart and called him a mentor. It is said that Chavez is giving more protocol because he has been old guerilla fighter with leftist group. Both of the presidents signed an accord by which both countries will increase their trade and energy relations. Venezuela is supplying 17,000 barrels of oil per day to Uruguay but according to new deal Chavez announced 40,000 barrels per day and Uruguay will export 1,000 vehicles to Venezuela and help Venezuela to produce agricultural products. Other than this both countries planed to cooperate in building glass and cement factories. Venezuela is supplying oil in a heavy amount despite energy crisis in the country just to support his political ally.

Venezuelan ambassador to Organization of American States said in Washington that Colombian president's complaint to Inter-American Human Rights Commission against Venezuela is to divert the attention from Colombian spies. Venezuelan government captured some Colombians in Venezuela and they were blamed of spying in Venezuela. Colombian foreign minister said that they are going to complain United Nations against Venezuela for illegal detention of Colombians in doubt spying in Venezuela. Also Colombian government has also told that Venezuelan chopper has violated Colombian air space.

One of the State Department's spokesman said that Venezuela is purchasing more weapon equipments from Russia which is increasing tensions in the region especially its support to a Colombian rebel group FARC. The president of Venezuela said that the Yankees are stupid. He also said that he is very much concerned of Venezuela's security so he is buying \$5 billion weapons like tanks and missiles from Russia and already he has purchased \$4 billion weapons. He said Venezuela is replacing old weapon equipments by new one and he has made a deal with the Russian president recently when he visited Venezuela. The government has also issued licenses for 5,000 Russian vehicles which are coming in response of bilateral relations between Russia and Venezuela.

Chinese president is visiting Venezuela on 17<sup>th</sup> April and the purpose of his visit will be more economical rather than political. Venezuela is the 5<sup>th</sup> trade partner of China after Brazil, Mexico, Chile and Peru. Both leaders will sign several agreements in the field of energy, infrastructure and technology. Other than this Venezuela has become China's 4<sup>th</sup> largest oil exporter in the world which is supplying 400,000 barrels of oil to China. Now the government of Venezuela has told that it has increased the quantity of oil export to China.

Venezuelan ambassador to Angola said that both countries are enjoying very good relations since 1986. Both countries have made several agreements since 1986 in various fields as energy, education, infrastructure and building schools for children.

### **Detailed Report/Argentina**

Buenos Aires, Argentina (AP) — Argentina and Chile's presidents said Thursday that ideological differences won't keep them from working closely together.

Argentina's Cristina Fernandez rejected the idea that her leftist politics would prevent a strong working relationship with Sebastian Pinera, a right-wing billionaire whose inauguration last month ended 20 years of center-left rule in Chile.

"Some people think the fact that a government has a political side different from that of Argentina could affect relations," Fernandez said as Pinera shared a stage inside the Casa Rosada, Argentina's presidential palace. "It's absurd ... I give all Argentines and Chileans my guarantee that that will never happen."

While Pinera's political opponents feared a swing to the right in a country still recovering from its long dictatorship, he has quickly presented himself as a post-ideological leader, impatient to work with anyone who can make progress happen. His delegation includes Chile's top communist, and in Argentina, he pointedly criticized those who seem to be obsessed with "nostalgia."

"Countries with tired spirits only speak and remember the past and fear the future. On the other hand, countries with young spirits not only reaffirm their pasts but also have hope, and know that the best thing is to look ahead," Pinera said. "The best of our bilateral relationship is ahead of us."

Chile and Argentina need to deepen every aspect of their relationship, he said, forging new economic, commercial, scientific, and cultural ties

"It seems so absurd to me that we spend thousands and thousands of millions of dollars in bridges and tunnels that bring us together, to encounter a customs process that separates us. The time we save using bridges and tunnels we lose waiting in line at the border."

The solution is not just more money, he said, but a change in attitude among officials in both countries.

Fernandez and Pinera's predecessor, Michelle Bachelet, signed a treaty last year consolidating the countries' integration plans. At lunch on Thursday, both leaders signed a presidential declaration reaffirming this and other previous treaties, which among other things address the need for improved border crossings and shared public works.

Pinera, on his first foreign tour as president, goes next to Brazil and then New Orleans, where he hopes to bring lessons learned in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina back to his quake-damaged country. Then, on Monday and Tuesday, he'll join 47 other leaders at a White House summit on nuclear non-proliferation, where Chile will likely be praised for secretly surrendering its last weapons-grade uranium to the U.S. last month.

Pinera is expected to support Brazil's candidacy for a permanent U.N. Security Council seat and push for the creation of a public-private investment fund for infrastructure projects in Chile and Brazil, according to Carlos Maldonados Prieta, a history professor and international advisor to the Chilean defense ministry.

Latin American leaders have talked for years about integrating energy and transportation systems. Financial, environmental and technical roadblocks have prevented most of their ideas from going anywhere.

But Pinera, as a billionaire entrepreneur with personal experience growing Chile's LAN airlines and other major companies, may prove to be just the catalyst the region needs, said Alexandre Barros, a Brasilia-based political analyst.

"Pinera is an excellent administrator and as one the country's leaders in the infrastructure area — aviation — his chances of success are great thanks to his experience and contacts," Barros said.

Topping Chile and Brazil's shared agenda is a highway that would pass through Bolivia, linking Brazil's southern Mato Grosso do Sul state with Chile's northern port of Iquique. If Brazil could truck its soybeans and other commodities to the Pacific Coast, it could reduce dramatically the cost of shipping its products to Asia and the U.S. West Coast by avoiding lengthy trips around the continent's southern tip or through the Panama Canal.

Argentina President Cristina Fernandez faces a busy week on the foreign relations front, as she wraps up a visit to the U.S. before returning home to meet Russia President Dmitry Medvedev on Wednesday and Vietnam Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung on Friday.

Fernandez has been in Washington since late last week, and is planning to attend the nuclear summit organized by President Barack Obama on Monday and Tuesday.

Talks on increasing trade are likely to top the discussions with the Russian and Vietnamese leaders. Argentina makes significant money on its sales to both countries, as it is a net exporter to both, largely due to its agricultural goods.

In 2009, Argentina's trade surplus with Russia totaled \$705 million, and with Vietnam it was about \$228 million, according to Argentine foreign ministry numbers.

Medvedev will be the first-ever Russian president to visit Argentina, and his trip comes after Fernandez visited Moscow in December 2008, the foreign ministry said in a statement.

Argentina said it backs Russia's request to join the World Trade Organization, while the Russian government supports Argentina's request that the U.K. negotiate sovereignty over the Falkland Islands, Argentina's Foreign Minister Jorge Taiana said in the statement.

Vietnam's Dung is scheduled to visit Mendoza province and the research center of local engineering company IMPSA, which has invested more than \$2 billion in wind power generation projects in Vietnam, the ministry said.

Buenos Aires, April 14 (Itar-Tass) - Russia and Argentina are expected to sign several documents on cooperation during the first ever visit of the Russian president to Buenos Aires on April 14-15, Russian ambassador to Argentina, Alexander Dogadin, told a news conference.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's visit to Argentina "will become an important step towards building strategic partnership relations between our countries. The groundwork for this was laid during Argentinean President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner's visit to Moscow in December 2008."

He stressed that Russia and Argentina stand on the threshold of important joint projects in energy, civilian nuclear power, space exploration, high technologies and transport development.

In particular, this concerns cooperation in the use of Russia's global navigation system GLONASS, Russia's possible participation in the construction of a nuclear power plant in Argentina, modernization of electric power plants in the city of Mar Del Plata on the Atlantic coast and electrification of railway sections. Moreover, the two countries prepare a contract on purchasing Russia's Mi171E helicopters for Argentina's Antarctic bases.

Dogadin stressed that special attention will be paid to cultural and humanitarian cooperation within the framework of the 200th anniversary of Argentina's statehood and the 125th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Russia and Argentina.

It is planned to sign a program of cooperation in culture and education. The ambassador said this year experts will hold consultations on mutual recognition of secondary and higher education diplomas in the two countries.

According to the federal customs service, in 2009 amid the global financial and economic crisis Russian-Argentinean bilateral trade tumbled by over 30 percent to 1.359 billion U.S. dollars. At the same time, Russia's exports reduced by 72.5 percent and imports – by 6.5 percent. Russia's trade deficit increased to 1 billion U.S. dollars.

In this respect it is necessary to balance trade between the two countries, Dogadin said.

"The countries realize the need for boosting our trade and economic cooperation and ensuring a more balanced trade turnover," he said.

Washington — Argentine President Cristina Fernandez says her country offers a favorable business opportunity for U.S. companies and that a multibillion-dollar debt-swap offer to resolve a legal standoff with American bondholders will succeed.

She tells the U.S. Chamber of Commerce that Argentina offers an attractive market for investors and a good way for companies to compete globally, given its skilled labor force and competitive exchange rate.

Her comments Friday come ahead of a \$20 billion debt-swap offer that Argentina hopes will satisfy bondholders and resolve lawsuits over its record \$95 billion default in 2001.

### **Detailed Report/Brazil**

Rio de Janeiro - A landslide swept away dozens of houses near Rio de Janeiro Wednesday night, worsening a disaster caused by heavy rains that has killed at least 138 people around Brazil's second-biggest city.

The heaviest rains in more than four decades that started on Monday triggered at least 180 mudslides that crushed shacks in hillside slums, causing most of the deaths, leaving 53 people missing and more than 3,200 homeless.

Hundreds of residents and rescuers scrambled to find buried victims late on Wednesday after a hill gave way in Niteroi, which lies on the other side of a bay from Rio.

“We are very sad ... It seems there were more than 40 houses,” said Jose Mocarzel, Niteroi’s public services secretary.

The Globo network reported that two bodies had already been pulled from the debris.

After flooding caused transportation chaos on Tuesday, the city famed for its beaches and Carnival slowly returned to normal on Wednesday but heavy rain began falling again in the evening and forecasters warned of more to come.

Firemen covered in mud struggled for hours to rescue an 8-year-old boy who had called for help from the rubble of a collapsed house in one hillside slum, only to find that the child had died by the time they reached him.

“I promised his father I would get the boy out alive but I couldn’t,” tearful fireman Luis Carlos dos Santos said.

The mudslide in Rio’s historic Santa Teresa area killed at least 18 people, most of whom had been sleeping on Monday night when the hillside collapsed.

Rescue authorities said 138 people were confirmed dead in Rio state, while 135 were injured.

Rio Mayor Eduardo Paes urged people living in high-risk areas to stay away from their homes as the city braced for another night of rain.

Authorities say at least 10,000 houses are still at risk of collapse and the national government has sent security forces to help with rescue operations. Paes appealed to the federal government for 370 million reais (\$208 million) in aid for emergency operations.

### Olympic Concerns

The transportation chaos renewed attention on Rio’s poor infrastructure as it prepares to host the soccer World Cup in 2014 and the Olympic Games in 2016.

The International Olympic Committee said in a statement it planned to have discussions with Rio officials once the situation returns to normal about how the disaster might affect preparations for the games.

“We remain confident that Rio will stage top-quality Games in 2016,” the statement said.

Niteroi was the worst affected area with more than 67 people dead, according to the fire service.

In one Niteroi slum, residents desperately searched for survivors in rubble left from 10 houses that collapsed from a mudslide, the Globo network reported.

“I lost my sister-in-law and a niece, and my nephew and brother-in-law are still missing,” nurse Samuel Franca, who managed to rescue his sister from the wreckage the day before, told Globo.

Traffic was moving again in most parts of Rio after nearly grinding to a halt Tuesday, though Paes urged people to postpone meetings and avoid unnecessary trips. Schools remained shut for a second day.

Most of the damage was concentrated in the slums where about a fifth of Rio’s people live, often in precarious shacks that are vulnerable to heavy rains.

In January, at least 76 people died in flooding and mudslides in Brazil’s most populous states of Rio, Sao Paulo and Minas Gerais. Then, dozens of people were killed in a landslide at a beach resort between Rio and the port city of Santos.

Rio de Janeiro (AFP) – As many as 200 people were buried in mudslides near Rio de Janeiro after record flooding in the region, local fire chief Pedro Machado told AFP Thursday. Rescue crews responded to the mudslides in Niteroi, a city across the bay from the state capital and part of the greater Rio de Janeiro metropolitan area. Previously, officials said at least 150 people were killed in floods in the Rio area following the worst rains in half a century.

April 8 (Bloomberg) -- Petroleo Brasileiro SA, Brazil’s state-run oil company, plans to expand its exploration activities in Angola, Agencia Angola Press reported, citing Chairman Jose Sergio Gabrielli.

Gabrielli held talks with Angolan President Jose Eduardo dos Santos yesterday while on a visit to the Angolan capital, Luanda, the Luanda-based news agency said.

Petrobras, as the company is known, operates three oil blocks off the coast of Angola and has stakes in three others, according to Paula Almada, a company spokeswoman in Brazil.

Exhausted Brazilian rescuers faced another day of grim searching through a wall of mud on Saturday, with almost 400 people now feared dead from landslides.

Civil Defence officials said late on Friday that at least 219 had been killed across Rio de Janeiro state since Monday, when some of the heaviest rains in half a century unleashed floods and mudslides.

The heavy rain also forced some 50,000 people to leave their homes, officials said, either because their homes were damaged or because they were ordered to leave due to fear of fresh landslides.

Rescue teams have pulled out scores of bodies since part of a hillside collapsed on Wednesday, sliding onto a shantytown built on a landfill in Niteroi, across the bay from Rio de Janeiro, burying an estimated 200 people.

The floods of the past days tore through the metropolitan area's precarious hillside slums, or favelas. Niteroi was hardest hit, with at least 132 dead, according to the civil defence authorities.

Some 150 people worked through the night searching for survivors in Niteroi's Morro do Bumba shantytown, with the help of eight excavators, as a stream of trucks came and went loaded with debris.

"There is a possibility" of finding survivors, said the Niteroi Civil Defense chief, Marival Gomes.

"It's not easy but there is hope."

Firefighters working at the site since Wednesday, however, appear to be working on the assumption that there are no survivors.

They said there was little chance of finding new survivors after part of the hillside fell away and swallowed everything in its path, including 50 houses, a daycare centre and a pizzeria.

A handful of people were rescued from the mud in the few hours after the landslide, but after that only bodies have appeared, according to reporters on the scene.

State Governor Sergio Cabral briefly visited Morro do Bumba late on Friday.

"We are very worried about diseases that could spread from the decomposing bodies buried under tons of dirt and garbage," Cabral said.

Cabral said he asked the Brazilian military to help in rescue efforts. Aid will include two army field hospitals to help survivors, he said.

The federal government released \$US113 million (\$A121.71 million) in aid for municipalities in Rio state affected by the floods and mudslides, Cabral said.

The number of people swept away remains unknown, but firefighters have estimated, based on witness testimonies, that some 200 people were buried under the rubble.

Cristiane Oliveira, 27, saved her daughters from the mudslide but lost her mother, uncles and cousins and still waited to see their bodies emerge from the piles of earth.

"I look and I think, 'Everyone is under there.' It's really sad," Oliveira told AFP.

In Rio de Janeiro city, where 67 have been killed, Mayor Eduardo Paes signed a decree authorising police to force people out of homes located in dangerous areas as intermittent rain continued to fall.

"The risk of new mudslides is enormous, even if it stops raining, because the ground is extremely flooded," said Jose Paulo Miranda de Queiroz, deputy commander of Rio's firefighters.

Amid stormy conditions, the navy released an alert for massive waves of more than four metres expected on Rio's beaches.

Rescuers raced against time Saturday amid fading hopes of finding survivors of a huge mudslide, with over 400 people now feared dead in some of the worst flooding to swamp Brazil in decades.

At dawn, rescuers pulled four more bodies from the thick mound of dirt and debris in the Niteroi shantytown of Morro do Bumba, bringing the updated death toll to 219, while another 200 people were believed to be buried alive in the slum, itself precariously perched atop a garbage dump.

Some 60 hours after the heaviest rains in half a century unleashed floods and mudslides, rescue workers appeared far from having finished the work of recovering bodies.

The floods tore through the metropolitan area's precarious hillside slums, or favelas.

Niteroi was hardest hit, with at least 134 dead, according to the civil defense authorities. Across the bay, another 60 were found in Rio de Janeiro.

Amid confusion over exact toll numbers Saturday, officials updated the number of confirmed dead to 219 after earlier lowering the figure to 214.

The heavy rain forced some 50,000 people to leave their homes, officials said, either because their homes were damaged or because they were ordered to leave due to fear of fresh landslides.

Geologist Marcelo Motta, who participated in an investigation of the mudslide, told Globo News television that two cracks in the rocky soil made the mound move and pushed down the hill a huge amount of trash saturated with water that had trapped methane gas.

Focus quickly turned on responsibility for the huge death toll and damage. Experts blamed government "complacency" for allowing the country's poorest to build housing haphazardly in areas at risk of natural disasters, such as on the sides of steep hills.

Rio state Governor Sergio Cabral, who briefly visited Morro do Bumba late Friday, laid blame on "all of society."

"I was criticized in some favelas when I got walls built to prevent them from expanding. In Rocinha, the state compensated 300 families (for relocation). But demagogues criticized us, and sometimes rabble-rousing can be deadly."

Cabral, who called for "strict measures to withdraw" from areas at risk, said he asked the Brazilian military to help in rescue efforts.

Rio Mayor Eduardo Paes has adopted a decree to remove "by force," with the help of police, people living in areas at risk.

Some 150 people worked through the night searching for survivors in Morro do Bumba shantytown, with the help of eight excavators, as a stream of trucks came and went loaded with debris.

"There is a possibility" of finding survivors, said the Niteroi Civil Defense chief, Marival Gomes. "It's not easy but there is hope."

Firefighters working at the site since Wednesday, however, said there was little chance of finding new survivors after part of the hillside fell away and swallowed everything in its path, including 50 houses, a day-care center and a pizzeria.

A handful of people were rescued from the mud in the few hours after the landslide.

Cristiane Oliveira, 27, saved her daughters from the mudslide but lost her mother, uncles and cousins and still waited to see their bodies emerge from the piles of earth.

"I look and I think, 'Everyone is under there.' It's really sad," Oliveira told AFP.

Labor Minister Carlos Lupi said a 30-year credit line of 567 million US dollars, with a three-percent interest rate, was set up to seed construction of public housing.

The federal government released 113 million US dollars in aid for municipalities in Rio state affected by the floods and mudslides, Cabral said.

After five days of rains, aggravated by numerous floods in the region, the sun was shining Saturday in Rio.

The threat of new mudslides forced Rio de Janeiro officials to begin removing 2,600 families from at-risk areas on Monday and prompted the closure of the trolley ride that leads tourists to the famous Christ the Redeemer statue.

The trolleys have been kept from taking tourists up the mountain where the statue stands because there is a chance of slides along the rails, said Daniele Wall, a spokeswoman with the Rio Health and Civil Defense Ministry.

She said the trolley rides were halted on Saturday, but the statue remained open to visitors.

Tourists can climb the mountain by car, but will not get the kinds of views that are available from trolleys that circle their way to the top.

Earlier on Monday, the Rio city government said in a statement that the 2,600 families being evacuated from risk areas would receive a stipend to pay for housing until they were relocated to new homes provided by the government.

All together, nearly 13,000 families are living in homes at risk for slides and will have to be relocated.

Firefighters said the death toll from flooding and landslides last week had reached 229 in and around Rio.

Most deaths happened in nearby Niteroi, a city of about 500,000 people across the bay from Rio, where up to 60 houses that had been built atop a giant, unstable landfill were destroyed in a single slide.

Brasilia: Brazilian opposition candidate Jose Serra will launch his bid for the presidency today, buoyed by an opinion poll lead and extensive experience ahead of what promises to be a tough race until the October 3 poll.

Beaten to the top job by President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in 2002, Serra must develop a strategy to overcome Lula's disciple, Dilma Rousseff who can count on the president's huge popularity and a rebounding economy.

Those advantages make her the favorite for most pundits. But analysts say that Serra's broad executive experience and national profile make him a formidable rival for Rousseff of the center-left Workers' Party, who is untested in elections.

"The race is only really beginning now and it won't be easy but Serra stands a real chance," said Rio de Janeiro-based political analyst Amaury de Souza.

A member of the centrist PSDB party, Serra is favored by some investors for his perceived fiscal discipline and reputation as a competent administrator, even though neither he nor Rousseff are seen as straying much from the current, largely market-friendly economic policies.

The 68-year-old former health minister resigned as Sao Paulo state governor last week in line with election laws and will be endorsed as candidate in the capital Brasilia this weekend. Rousseff also quit her post as Lula's chief of staff to run in the election.

The official campaign begins in July, with Serra hoping he can extend an opinion poll lead that dwindled to a few points from 20 points six months ago as the little-known Rousseff gained from a jump in national exposure. The latest poll showed him rebounding to a nine-point advantage.

Opposition leaders say they plan to play up Serra's vast experience and try to prevent Rousseff making the election a plebiscite on Lula's eight years in power that have seen Brazil's economy power ahead, lifting millions out of poverty. The economy recovered quickly from the global crisis, and Lula's popularity at around 80 percent is at historic highs.

"They want to make this a plebiscite on Lula; we want to know who is the best candidate to lead Brazil for the next four years," said Jose Anibal, a former PSDB president.

With training in engineering and a Ph.D in economics from Cornell University, Serra has held eight public jobs, including Sao Paulo mayor, and posts as both planning and health minister in the PSDB administration before Lula came to power.

A long-time critic of Brazil's high interest rates and inefficient public spending, Serra has the advantage of a successful spell as governor of Brazil's most populous state—the country's economic powerhouse and a strong election base.

Still, the former student leader who was exiled in Chile and the United States for much of Brazil's 1964-85 military dictatorship may struggle to hold a lead that pollsters say is in part due to him being better known than Rousseff. Rousseff has already reaped some of the benefits of having Lula on her side.

April 13 (Bloomberg) -- Brazilian presidential candidate Jose Serra and Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's chosen successor, Dilma Rousseff, are in a statistical dead heat six months before the October election, a Sensus poll released today shows.

Serra, the candidate for the opposition Social Democracy Party, was supported by 32.7 percent of those surveyed, while Rousseff, running under the Workers' Party banner, garnered 32.4 percent, according to the poll, which was commissioned by a Sao Paulo-based trade union.

The April 5-9 survey of 2,000 people has a margin of error of 2.2 percentage points.

New Delhi: Brazil, Russia, India and China will discuss the Iranian nuclear program and the impending sanctions during the BRIC summit, which is mainly a forum for discussing economic and financial issues.

But this time round, Iran is on the formal agenda of items for discussions at the summit. "We will discuss international and regional issues including Iran," said Parbati Sen Vyas, secretary for economic relations in the external affairs ministry. She further said that Iran would be part of "focused agenda" of the BRIC Summit for the first time.

The BRIC summit, which starts on April 16, also takes place after the Nuclear Security Summit, where Washington is expected to step up pressure on Iran and seek support from other countries on dealing with Iran. In a way the BRIC summit is likely to be a stock-taking exercise after the Nuclear Security Summit.

There is some amount of commonality among the four countries on Iran. Though concerns about Iran's nuclear program persist, none of the countries favor harsh or punitive sanctions against Iran. Though Russia and China, who are UNSC members, have supported Mr Obama's call for sanctions, the support is limited. Both the UNSC members and India believe that diplomatic efforts should continue and that the issue should be resolved through dialogue. India and China are also participating in Iran's international conference on nuclear disarmament, which is being seen as a response to Mr Obama's Nuclear Security Summit.

Apart from Iran, the focus will be on financial and economic issues which include the need for reform of multilateral institutions, including the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and the regulation of financial markets. On a question about whether the devaluation of the yuan would figure in discussions, Ms Sen, "There will be a general discussion on world financial and economic situation." She added that yuan devaluation was not on the agenda.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Chinese president Hu Jintao, Russian president Dmitry Medvedev and Brazilian president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva will kick off discussions at the summit with a restricted meeting followed by a plenary session. A joint statement will be released at the end of the summit. The prime minister is also scheduled to have separate, bilateral meetings with Mr Lula, Mr Hu and Mr Medvedev.

Additionally, National Security Advisor Shivshankar Menon will attend a meeting of high representatives on security on April 15. He will hold a dialogue with NSAs from Brazil, Russia and China. He is also expected to hold bilateral meetings with NSAs of different countries.

The first BRIC business seminar, a meeting of commercial banks and a meeting of development banks have also been added to the main event. After the BRIC summit, Mr Singh will also participate in the IBSA (India Brazil and South Africa) summit.

The leaders of Brazil, Russia, India and China will discuss broadening the array of world currencies used in international trade at their summit Friday as they seek to lessen their dependence on the dollar.

"Trade in national currencies will be on the agenda of BRIC leaders," Arkady Dvorkovich, President Dmitry Medvedev's top economic adviser, told reporters Friday.

The leaders will also discuss using special drawing rights from the International Monetary Fund for trade, he said.

"We continue to think that this instrument has good potential, although our G8 partners have not agreed with this yet," Dvorkovich said, referring to SDRs. "Our BRIC partners, including China, support us more in this. It is possible we will discuss a common position."

Medvedev and his fellow BRIC leaders will meet in Brasilia on Friday for their second summit. At their first conference in Yekaterinburg in June, the leaders called for emerging economies to have a greater voice in international financial institutions and for a more diversified global monetary system.

Russia has regularly sought to promote regional currencies in trade and diversify its reserves, the world's third-largest stockpile, to reduce risks posed by the dollar's dominance. Medvedev last year questioned the dollar's future as a reserve currency and called for a mix of regional currencies to make the world economy more stable. He said a new supranational currency could reduce vulnerability to movements in the dollar.

China is also seeking greater use of its currency to reduce reliance on the dollar after Premier Wen Jiabao said last month that he was "worried" about holdings of dollar-denominated assets.

Plans to consider allowing the yuan to trade against the ruble will not increase the currency's volatility because the Central Bank would limit fluctuations, Dvorkovich said. "We do not see a danger here," he added.

Beijing has faced criticism, in particular from the United States, for keeping the yuan artificially low, but Dvorkovich said it was not their place to interfere.

"This is part of China's sovereign policy, and there couldn't be any international decision on this issue," he said.

The BRIC summit may help consolidate the four countries' positions on issues including reform and regulation of financial institutions and coordination of macroeconomic policies.

"We see that the role of BRIC is to guarantee timely solutions to these issues," Dvorkovich said.

Russia and Brazil will separately discuss cooperation in aerospace, energy, telecommunications and agriculture, he said.

Trade between the countries fell 32 percent last year to \$4.6 billion, according to the Economic Development Ministry.

Before going to Brazil, Medvedev will visit Argentina on Wednesday and Thursday to meet with his counterpart Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner and the country's business community, Dvorkovich said.

"The potential of Argentine companies is underused in Russia, and there are possibilities to expand investment and cooperation in trade," Dvorkovich said. "Unfortunately, apart from Argentine restaurants in Moscow, I don't know of anything else."

Russia could offer Argentina its expertise in hydroelectric energy, he said.

"A considerable part of Argentina's hydro energy system works on Russian equipment," Dvorkovich said.

Trade between Russia and Argentina fell to \$1.35 billion last year from almost \$2 billion a year earlier, according to the Economic Development Ministry.

Brazil. Brazilian government had sent condolatory address over the death of the Polish President Lech Kaczinski and declared official three-day of mourning. All 97 people on board presidential Tu-154 plane died after it crashed by Smolensk, AFP reported. "I would like to offer you my, the Government of Brazil and Brazilian people's sincere condolences and solidarity to the people of Poland," said the Brazilian President Palácio da Alvorada, noting the two countries are connected by friendship and co-operation as well as through the big immigrants Diaspora.

A 100-member business delegation from Brazil led by Trade Minister Miguel Joao Jorge Filho will arrive here Monday to explore business opportunities in Iran, state-run IRNA news agency reported.

The Brazilian minister will meet his Iranian counterpart Ali-Akbar Mehrabian on his two-day trip to the Islamic republic.

This will be the biggest ever Brazilian delegation to the Islamic republic, the report said.

They are scheduled to meet officials and representatives of Iranian companies.

The visit of the Brazilian minister to Iran will pave the way for the upcoming first visit of Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva to Tehran in a month.

Washington (Reuters) - The United States and Brazil signed an agreement on Monday meant to bolster military ties, but Brazil's Defense Minister Nelson Jobim did not offer any hint about a key defense contract sought by U.S.-based Boeing Co.

The U.S.-Brazil accord, which was announced last week and signed at the Pentagon by Jobim and U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates, is the first agreement of its kind in more than 30 years between the two countries.

"This agreement will lead to a deepening of U.S.-Brazil defense cooperation at all levels," Gates said at the signing ceremony.

Gates, who leaves on a trip to South America later this week, said the accord also offered a "transparent, positive model for engagement throughout the Americas."

A similar accord with Colombia last year that allowed increased use of Colombia military bases by U.S. troops raised eyebrows in the region. Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez called it part of a plot for invasion.

The U.S.-Brazil accord contains no provisions related to the use of Brazilian bases. It does promote military exchanges -- such as naval ship visits -- and cooperation on "the acquisition of defense products and services," the Pentagon said.

Brazil is in the final stages of picking a company to manufacture 36 jets, a contract worth more than \$4 billion. The deal could eventually rise to more than 100 aircraft.

U.S. officials have said a victory by Boeing could bring the U.S. and Brazilian militaries closer together. But Brasilia has sent signals that Boeing's Super Hornet might be passed up in favor of France's Rafale jet, manufactured by Dassault.

Jobim last week said the Brazilian air force preferred the Rafale.

Asked about the matter at the Pentagon, Jobim suggested a final decision was still weeks away. He still needed to present his recommendation to Brazil's president. It would then need to be reviewed by the National Defense Council before a final decision is reached, he said.

President Barack Obama met with Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva of Brazil and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan Tuesday in Washington D.C. to discuss Iran's controversial nuclear program.

The meeting took place on the sidelines of a summit that focused on nuclear security in the face of terrorist threats.

The subplot among the many sideline meetings during the summit has been Iran's nuclear program. Brazil favors further talks with Tehran, while Washington and European powers advocate tightening sanctions on Tehran.

Iran insists that its nuclear program pursues peaceful ends only.

"We are absolutely against any development of nuclear weapons," Brazilian Defense Minister Nelson Jobim said Monday on the sidelines of the summit.

However, he again highlighted the fact that "Brazil's position is to pursue talks to the last."

Jobim further called on the international community to "analyze Iran's geo-strategic surroundings" with "many nuclear-armed countries," and to give Tehran "guarantees that it will not be attacked."

For Brazil, sanctions never worked, Jobim said. That is why the South American giant favors further talks.

Lula hosted controversial Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad last year in Brazil, and he plans to visit Iran in May.

April 14 (Bloomberg) -- Brazil may need to drill more wells to find the 5 billion barrels of oil reserves needed in a proposed swap for new shares in state-controlled Petroleo Brasileiro SA, an official said.

The two wells that Petrobras will drill for the government's petroleum agency may not hold enough crude to swap, Florival Carvalho, the petroleum agency's superintendent of planning and research, said today in Rio de Janeiro.

"We need to carry out studies to see if it gets to 5 billion barrels or not," Carvalho told reporters at an oil conference. "In three to four months we will finish testing both of the wells."

Brazil's government is seeking to swap 5 billion barrels of oil in the pre-salt region for Petrobras shares. The company, based in Rio de Janeiro, plans to spend \$200 billion to \$220 billion to tap field including Tupi, the largest discovery in the Americas since Mexico discovered Cantarell in 1976.

Investors are more interested in how much the government will charge Petrobras for the reserves in the share swap than the agency's exploration results, because the government will give Petrobras more reserves until it reaches the 5 billion barrels, Paula Kovarsky, an analyst at Itau Securities Equity Research, said today in a speech at the conference in Rio.

#### May Approval

Brazil's senate will approve the oil-stock swap proposal after May 6, Senator Romero Juca told reporters in Brasilia yesterday. He is a leader of the ruling coalition in the senate.

Minority shareholders will be able to buy new shares in line with how much they currently own. Petrobras may raise \$10 to \$20 billion from minority shareholders, Kovarsky said.

Petrobras will finish testing the first well within two months and will start a second one in May, Carvalho said.

Petrobras preferred shares climbed 0.4 percent to 34.32 reais in Sao Paulo trading at 12:26 p.m. New York time. They have declined 6.5 percent this year, compared with a 3.4 percent gain for the benchmark Bovespa index.

Brasilia (Reuters) - The leaders of the world's top four emerging markets will renew calls for a greater say in the global economic order when they meet in Brazil's capital this week but they may struggle to come up with clear proposals to advance a common agenda.

At their first summit last year in the Russian city of Yekaterinburg, the so-called BRIC countries of Brazil, Russia, India and China were at the forefront of a push to overhaul global financial regulations and move toward a new international reserve currency.

But with the worst of the global economic crisis now over, differences between the four countries have become more evident, exposing the limitations of the group's ambitions.

"Don't expect the BRICs to make bombastic or revolutionary proposals because it's not going to happen," said Roberto Jaguaribe, undersecretary of political affairs at Brazil's foreign ministry.

Finding alternatives to the U.S. dollar as a global reserve currency and using local currencies for trade are not on the official agenda of the leaders' two-day meeting in Brasilia that begins on Thursday, although they will be discussed.

The BRICs, a term coined by Goldman Sachs economist Jim O'Neill in 2001 to describe the growing influence of big emerging economies, represent 40 percent of the world population and around 20 percent of global economic output.

The foursome is sure to cite that growing clout to push its demands that the BRICs and other developing countries be given more say in global financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

While the BRICs share concerns on global governance issues, they have little in common besides being large, fast-growing economies with massive domestic markets.

China's relations with Russia and India are complicated by security tensions, and Beijing and Moscow are not enthusiastic about Brazil and India's push to broaden the United Nations Security Council. Differences abound on climate, trade and currency issues.

"On trade and climate, it's difficult to see more than a generic statement to advance global talks," said Andre Nassar of the Institute for International Trade Negotiations, a research group based in Sao Paulo.

As a major food exporter, Brazil wants to cut trade barriers on agriculture, something that India has been reluctant to do. Russia, a major oil producer, is unlikely to embrace any ambitious emissions reductions.

China's undervalued currency, the yuan, is also a point of tension since it erodes the competitiveness of domestic manufacturers in other BRIC countries. Last week, Brazilian Finance Minister Guido Mantega backed calls for China to revalue the yuan, saying it would be good for the global economy.

Still, few expect the BRICs as a group to pressure Beijing on the issue.

"I think they'll leave that one to the United States to deal with," said Roberto Abdenur, a former Brazilian ambassador to China and the United States.

## Mutual Trade

In the absence of a far-reaching external agenda, the BRICs will focus on strengthening trade and investment ties with delegations of business leaders, bankers, cooperatives, and state development banks exploring business opportunities.

"Greater intra-BRIC cooperation would help members, as this could in itself emerge as a strong counterweight to established powerhouses in economic and political terms," said a senior official at India's finance ministry, who requested anonymity.

China and Brazil will use the summit to sign a five-year strategic plan to further expand their fast-growing trade relationship. And Chinese companies are expected to unveil some investments in Brazil, one of China's main suppliers of commodities such as iron ore and soybeans.

For Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, the BRIC summit is one of the last big events he will host before leaving office at the end of the year. He is expected to use the occasion to reiterate Brazil's push for a permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council.

Beijing sees the BRICs as a forum allowing it to bolster links with other major emerging economies, strengthening the perception that it is helping other developing countries as it is often urged to do.

But China is keen for the BRICs not to be seen as a challenge to Washington.

"We come together seeking mutual benefit ... rather than confrontation with other third parties," said China's vice foreign minister, Cui Tiankai.

Still, there are concerns that China's economic and diplomatic might may end up undermining the BRIC as a coherent group, since it doesn't need others to effectively push its agenda. The sheer size of its economy also means that policy coordination with its BRIC peers will be difficult.

"China's power will likely provide a challenge to BRIC cooperation and the BRICs as a grouping," said Michael Glosny, China expert at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Chicago, April 14 (Reuters) - Fresh Brazilian beef may be sold in U.S. grocery stores beginning next year for the first time in a decade if the two countries resolve a dispute over cotton, livestock analysts said.

However, analysts said imported Brazilian beef would not be enough to ease the tight supplies of ground beef in the United States, which have kept ground beef prices near a record high.

Much of the beef imported into the United States is lean, and is combined with local supplies, that have a higher fat content, to make ground beef for fast-food outlets.

But such imports have dropped during the past two years as major suppliers like Australia and Canada have reduced production amid the global recession that hurt profitability.

Brazil is the world's No.1 beef exporter and has the world's second largest cattle herd but its fresh beef has long been banned by the United States because of foot and mouth disease.

"If the meat starts flowing north it's going to be later. Time wise, it's more like 2011 than this year," said Ron Plain, livestock economist at the University of Missouri.

The average price for ground beef was about \$1.78 this week, close to its all time high of \$1.92 per lb set in 2008, according to government figures.

"Because we don't have enough lean ground beef materials here in the domestic market we have been relying on the import market increasingly to make up the difference," said analyst Altin Kalo of the Steiner Consulting Group based in Manchester, New Hampshire.

"It has become especially so after 2001 or 2002 when you had food service operators like McDonald's and others that really started to use imported beef in a larger scale," he said.

U.S. beef and veal imports during January, the latest available data, were down 28 percent from last year to 184.9 million lbs. January imports from Brazil totaled 11.4 million lbs, a 55 percent cut from the 20.7 million lbs last year.

The beef currently imported from Brazil is in cooked and canned form and is used with other processed foods.

#### Foot/Mouth Has Kept Brazil Beef Out

"It's been almost a decade now since we allowed beef from Brazil to come to the U.S. They have had some issues with foot-and-mouth disease and just never seem to be able to control it," said Kalo.

In an eleventh hour move last week to head off Brazilian penalties on a wide range of U.S. goods, the United States offered concessions on an export loan guarantee program and promised action that could clear the way for beef and pork imports from Brazil, and work to set up measures to prevent the introduction of foot-and-mouth disease in the United States.

Brazil was set to impose tariffs and lift property right protection on \$820 million in U.S. goods after the World Trade Organization ruled against U.S. cotton subsidies.

The United States will also work with Brazil to provide up to \$147.3 million in annual funding for technical assistance and other programs to help Brazil's cotton sector.

#### Minimal Market Impact Likely

Brazil exports very little pork to the United States.

Plain said he did not expect Brazilian imports to have any impact on domestic livestock or meat prices.

"Governments don't tend to move very quickly and so I wouldn't expect impact on current hog prices or current cattle futures. It's just too far out in the future to really get the futures market excited," Plain said.

A U.S. cattle group voiced concern about imports of Brazilian beef.

"...We are extremely concerned whenever there is a suggestion that science-based international standards for sanitary and phytosanitary risks in agricultural product trade are not observed or are being bargained on the trade negotiation table," the Texas Cattle Feeders Association said in a weekly newsletter.

Cairo, April 14 (Reuters) - Egypt expects to complete free trade negotiations with the four Mercosur countries -- Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay -- in July, Egypt's trade minister said on Wednesday.

"We expect to reach an agreement and sign the free trade agreement at the start of July ... to start a new page in relations between Egypt and Brazil and the Mercosur countries," Trade Minister Rachid Mohamed Rachid told a conference in Cairo. Brazil's Minister of Development, Industry and Foreign Trade Miguel Jorge also attended the conference.

Egypt's exports to Brazil totaled \$87.7 million in 2009 while its imports amounted to \$1.53 billion, Egypt's trade ministry said in a statement.

"We can't forget that Brazil is considered today one of the strong emerging countries on the global economic stage, and was also one of the first countries to recover from the global economic crisis in 2009," Rachid said.

"The ventures between us and Brazil are very diverse. There is a lot of cooperation in the industrial sector," Rachid told reporters on the sidelines of the conference, adding that areas of cooperation between Brazil and Egypt included transportation, textiles, agriculture and fishing.

Washington - Chinese President Hu Jintao left Washington Wednesday morning for Brazil, after attending the Nuclear Security Summit.

At the summit, which was aimed mainly at preventing acts of nuclear terrorism, Hu delivered a speech explaining China's policy and practice on nuclear security.

He also put forward proposals on strengthening international cooperation in coping with nuclear security challenges in the world.

"Enhancing nuclear security serves the interest of all countries and requires concerted action," Hu said in his speech.

On the sidelines of the summit, Hu met with US President Barack Obama and the two leaders exchanged views on China-US relations and major global and regional issues of shared interest, and reached important agreement.

"It's a positive and constructive meeting," Ma Zhaoxu, spokesman of the Chinese delegation said Monday when he briefed reporters.

Both sides believe that a good China-US relationship serves the common interests of the two countries and contributes to world peace, stability and prosperity, Ma said.

"It is important for the two sides to work together to increase dialogue, enhance mutual trust and expand cooperation and continue to move China-US relations," he said.

From Washington, Hu is traveling to Brasilia to attend a summit of BRIC countries -- Brazil, Russia, India and China -- and pay a state visit to the Latin American country.

At the BRIC meeting, President Hu and leaders of the other three countries will discuss the global economy and financial situation, issues related to the Group of 20, reform of the international financial system, climate change and cooperation among the four countries, Chinese diplomats said.

After his trip to Brazil, Hu will pay a state visit to Venezuela and a working visit to Chile.

### **Detailed Report/Mexico**

April 8 (Bloomberg) -- Mexico's government may decide against extending a deadline for wireless carriers to register users, forcing America Movil SAB and rivals to suspend service for more than a third of their customers, a lawmaker said.

Eight of the 14 members of the Senate's communications committee plan to block a proposal to add a year to the deadline, committee member Rogelio Rueda said. Carriers have until April 10 to add users to the list, aimed at preventing criminals from using mobile phones in extortion and kidnapping schemes.

America Movil and rivals such as Telefonica SA will face "chaos" without the extension because they would lose revenue from almost 30 million customers, said Canek Vazquez, author of the proposal. Wireless carriers, which began collecting subscriber names with the government about a year ago, have obtained personal information for only about 65 percent of Mexican users.

Members of the National Action Party and the Party of the Democratic Revolution on the communications committee agreed to block the deadline extension, Rueda said in an interview. Rueda and Vazquez, a deputy in the lower house of Congress, are members of the opposition Institutional Revolutionary Party, which hasn't officially endorsed the proposal.

The registry is intended to help authorities trace calls to criminals, who used mobile phones in about 95 percent of extortions in 2008, according to the proposal Congress approved that year to create the database.

#### **Seeking More Time**

America Movil has joined its rivals in asking lawmakers to postpone the deadline because users whose phones are shut off won't have a way to reactivate them, Guillermo Ferrer, the company's director of institutional relations, said today in an e-mail. Wireless phones are the only means of communication for many Mexicans, he said.

"We hope the senators will consider these points and grant an extension that makes registration possible for the 30 million users who still haven't registered," Ferrer said.

Mexico's Federal Telecommunications Commission may establish a way to reactivate the phones, said Andres Coello, an analyst at BBVA Bancomer SA in Mexico City, in a research note today.

"Though we believe that the impact on America Movil will not be relevant, it could affect the value of the shares if the Senate does not extend the deadline and if several million lines do not register by April 10," Coello said.

A federal judge threw out America Movil's legal challenge to the law, the Reforma newspaper reported on April 6. The company has 10 days to challenge the ruling, the newspaper said.

#### Law Permits Delays

Mexican law allows companies to ask courts to delay government regulations by claiming that the rule will infringe their rights, a tactic used by America Movil in the past.

A spokeswoman for Telefonica, Mexico's second-largest wireless carrier, didn't respond to telephone and e-mail messages seeking comment.

America Movil controls 71 percent of the Mexican mobile- phone market, while Telefonica, based in Madrid, has 21 percent, according to data compiled by Bloomberg. Grupo Iusacell SA and NII Holdings Inc. provide service to the rest of Mexico's subscribers.

America Movil fell 57 centavos, or 1.8 percent, to 30.75 pesos by 4:10 p.m. New York time in Mexico City trading, the biggest one-day drop in two months. Telefonica declined 0.8 percent to 17.51 euros in Madrid.

The Mexican Senate Thursday rejected a lower house bill that would extend for one year the April 10 deadline for mobile phone users to register their numbers in a government data base or have their service cut.

The Senate telecommunications commission declined to act on the bill Wednesday, and the full Senate ended its final session of the week Thursday without considering it.

Senators of the ruling conservative National Action Party, or PAN, and left-wing Democratic Revolution Party, or PRD, remained firmly against moving the deadline, which had been sought by the country's four mobile companies and agreed to by the lower house.

The two parties have between them 76 of the 128 Senate seats, while the Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI, has 33. In the lower house, the PRI has more seats than the PAN and PRD combined.

Mexico's No. 2 mobile phone service provider, a unit of Spain's Telefonica SA (TEF), said late Thursday that it won't suspend service to its customers who haven't registered their phones, and will defend the decision in the courts if necessary.

According to the Federal Telecommunications Commission, or Cofetel, as of Thursday the National Registry of Mobile Phone Users, or Renaut, had 54.7 million registered users out of 83 million mobile lines in the country.

The country's four mobile phone operators--America Movil (AMX), Telefonica SA (TEF), NII Holdings Inc. (NIHD), and Grupo Iusacell--would have to cancel any lines not registered after Saturday.

One phone company executive who asked to remain anonymous said Cofetel was seeking a way to avoid lines having to be suspended definitively, which would allow users to register late and have their service restored.

Officials from mobile companies have expressed hopes that it wouldn't come to a massive number of suspensions, while declining to speculate on the potential impact on revenue from a loss of customers.

The Congress passed the law last year requiring all mobile phone users to register. The data will be verified in a second phase. Opponents question how effective it will be in combating telephone extortion rackets, which is its stated purpose.

Under the law, any unregistered lines would have to be canceled with no liability for the companies concerned.

Most of Mexico's mobile customers have prepaid phones, but postpaid customers with minimum-term contracts would face continued bills even if their lines are canceled, Cofetel President Hector Osuna confirmed Thursday in an online chat session posted on the Web site of the El Universal newspaper.

Opponents of the Renault have also expressed concerns about the confidentiality of the data base, which government officials have defended.

In a tacit acknowledgement of those concerns, PRD senators said Wednesday in an emailed statement that they would present a bill "with the purpose of protecting the data derived from the registry," and to make sure it was only used for its intended purpose.

The Federal Police will replace the Army to guard Juarez city in Chihuahua state from criminal acts that had claimed thousands of lives in this northern city of Mexico, the Mexican Public Security Ministry (SSP) said Thursday.

Federal Police commissioner Facundo Rosas said that from Thursday the police "will be in charge of the public security in Ciudad Juarez, as the Collaboration Agreement between the Army and the municipality expired."

Ciudad Juarez is considered one of the most dangerous cities in Mexico. Turf wars between criminal gangs have caused 4,200 deaths in 2008 and 2009, and 500 so far this year.

Rosas told a press conference that the government's new strategy will enhance information gathering, intelligence analysis and investigation to combat against organized crime, kidnapping and blackmails.

Under the "Safe Corridors" program, the SSP will deploy 5,000 agents to patrol in the city's main streets, and carry out inspections in bars, billiards bars, schools and addiction treatment centers.

"Our main aim is to re-establish trust among people, we have not lost field against crime and we will continue fighting against it till we recover the tranquility of the city," Rosas said.

Rosas said that the replacement will proceed gradually.

Up to 8,000 soldiers have been policing the border city since March 2008, but violent deaths have continued, with thousands of residents fleeing the city.

First Lady Michelle Obama flies to Mexico City on Tuesday for her first solo official international trip, which will include events with youths, women, and dinner with Mexican President Felipe Calderon and his wife, Margarita Zavala.

That dinner will be at Los Pinos, the official Mexican presidential residence. President Obama and Mrs. Obama will reciprocate on a grand scale when they host a state dinner for Calderon and Mrs. Zavala at the White House on May 19.

Mrs. Obama has never been to Mexico, and the Tuesday-Thursday visit will draw enormous interest.

"It will be on the front pages of every single newspaper in Mexico," Mexico's ambassador to the U.S., Arturo Sarukhan, told me when we talked on Thursday in the Mexican Embassy a few blocks from the White House.

Mrs. Obama's stay in Mexico City is designed to emphasize the close relationship between the two countries, even as leaders of both nations wrestle with the cross-border problem of drug use in the U.S. and escalating violence among drug cartels in Mexico.

"I think it underscores the importance that Mexico has for the United States and for the Obama administration, that the First Lady's first solo international trip is going to Mexico," a senior White House official told me on Thursday.

Besides the Los Pinos dinner, Mrs. Obama will also tour Mexico's famous Museum of Anthropology, spending time with Mrs. Zavala, who met with Mrs. Obama at the White House on Feb. 25. Mrs. Zavala was in Washington then to attend a conference on reducing demand for drugs -- one of her major issues. Mrs. Obama will also meet with students and on Friday the White House said she will deliver an address at the Universidad Iberoamericana. The two first ladies are close in age -- Mrs. Obama is 46, and Mrs. Zavala is 42. Both are lawyers (Mrs. Zavala is a former member of Mexico's Congress), and both are mothers of young children. Both basically gave up their professional careers when their fast-rising husbands took on their respective presidencies.

Sarukhan told me Mrs. Zavala also has on her agenda obesity and diabetes issues, sharing "a common concern with one of (Mrs.Obama's) signature programs." Mrs. Obama is the lead on the Obama administration fight to reduce childhood obesity, a problem that plagues the U.S and Mexico.

"Mrs. Obama's international agenda will amplify the President's commitment to advancing mutual interests, mutual respect and mutual responsibility between nations and peoples around the world," the White House said in announcing Mrs. Obama's Mexico trip in March. "During this visit, Mrs. Obama will have the opportunity to engage the citizens of Mexico, particularly young people, and build on her recent conversation with Mexican First Lady Margarita Zavala de Calderon on the issues of education and economic advancement in both countries."

News of Mrs. Obama's stops started coming out earlier in the week. On Thursday, CNN Expansion, a Spanish language Web site and a joint venture between CNN and Expansion, a business magazine, reported some details of Mrs. Obama's schedule.

"The agenda is divided between activities with the U.S. Embassy and Los Pinos.

On Sunday, El Universal, a Spanish language Mexico City newspaper, reported that the visit will take place under heavy security.

"It will be interesting to watch Michelle Obama, who chose Mexico as her first foreign trip alone," the paper said. Mrs. Obama will discuss with Mexico's first couple, the paper said, "issues related to infant health, obesity and addiction, among other topics. It should not be forgotten that the visit takes place in a context where Mexico and the United States are seeking to reinforce anti-drug cooperation."

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton led a group of top Obama national security officials to Mexico City last month, including Defense Secretary Robert Gates, Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. Michael Mullen, to discuss the Merida Initiative, a partnership between the U.S., Mexico, Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Central American nations to fight drug trafficking and organized crime. The trip came just after three people connected to the U.S. consulate in Juarez were murdered.

Said Mrs. Clinton on March 23, the murders "were but the latest horrible reminder of how much we have to do together."

The White House released the following statement as well as Mrs. Obama's official schedule for her visit:

In recognition of the deep ties between the United States and Mexico, First Lady Michelle Obama will visit Mexico City, Mexico, April 13-15, on her first solo official trip as First Lady. During this visit, Mrs. Obama will have the opportunity to engage the citizens of Mexico,

particularly young people, and build on her recent conversation with Mexican First Lady Margarita Zavala around areas of interest to both first ladies.

The following is Mrs. Obama's public schedule including pooled and open press events: Tuesday, April 13 -- First Lady Michelle Obama will arrive at Benito Juárez International Airport in Mexico City. Mrs. Obama's evening arrival will be open press, however space is limited.

Wednesday, April 14 -- Mrs. Obama will start her day by traveling to Los Pinos -- the residence of President Calderón and Mrs. Zavala -- where she will meet privately with Mrs. Zavala. This event will be closed press.

Upon conclusion of her visit at Los Pinos, Mrs. Obama will accept Mrs. Zavala's invitation to tour the Museo Nacional de Antropología (National Museum of Anthropology). The museum is a centerpiece of Mexican culture and history housing the largest collection of ancient Mexican pieces in the world. This event attended by both first ladies will be covered by a pre-determined pool of American and Mexican press.

Then Mrs. Obama will visit with students and teachers at Escuela Siete de Enero, a public elementary school that serves local low-income students ages 6-12. The school also participates in a mentoring program with the American School Foundation (ASF), an academically rigorous, international, university preparatory school offering students from diverse backgrounds an American independent education, in Mexico City. Mrs. Obama's event will be covered by a pre-determined pool of American and Mexican press.

Mrs. Obama will then travel to the Universidad Iberoamericana, a multidisciplinary institution serving over 11,000 students including 800 graduate students, to address invited university and high school students from in and around Mexico City. Mrs. Zavala will attend Mrs. Obama's address as a guest of honor. This afternoon event is open press, however space is limited. In the evening, Mrs. Obama will return to Los Pinos to attend a reception with women leaders organized by Mrs. Zavala. Following the reception, Mrs. Obama will have dinner hosted by Mexican President Felipe Calderón and Mrs. Zavala. This event is closed press. Thursday, April 15 -- Mrs. Obama will begin her day by thanking United States Embassy employees and their families. This event will be closed press.

Then Mrs. Obama will host a group of young leaders at La Hacienda de los Morales, an event center with a rich history dating back to the 16th century, for a breakfast roundtable discussion. Mrs. Obama will ask these men and women about their experiences and encourage them to continue their leadership in the community. Mrs. Obama's event will be covered by a pre-determined pool of American and Mexican press.

Upon conclusion of the roundtable breakfast, Mrs. Obama will depart Mexico City.

Thursday, April 15 -- On the return trip from Mexico, the First Lady will stop in San Diego, California, for a Let's Move! event. Further details on this event will be circulated next week.

Guadalajara, Mexico — Seeking to smooth relations with Mexico at a high-profile summit here, Prime Minister Stephen Harper blamed Canada's decision to impose visas on Mexican nationals on Canada's refugee system, and urged Parliament to enact changes to stem the flow of "bogus" claims.

Harper arrived in Mexico's second-biggest city Sunday for two days of talks with Mexican President Felipe Calderon and U.S. President Barack Obama. The annual gathering of the NAFTA partners has become known as the Three Amigos Summit.

Calderon was expected to push Harper to reverse the federal government's decision last month to impose visas on all Mexican nationals entering Canada.

Although the prime minister did not back down on the visa policy, he attempted to deflect blame from the Mexican government after emerging from a bilateral meeting with Calderon.

"This is not the fault of the government of Mexico. Let me be very clear about this. This is a problem with Canadian refugee law, which encourages bogus claims," said Harper. "And Parliament should be seized with this issue, and I hope our Parliament will take advantage of the attention that's been brought on this issue to deal with this problem."

In some of the strongest remarks he has made about Canada's refugee system since becoming prime minister, Harper said the status quo "can't continue."

"We have many legitimate refugee claimants, and of course we have lots of people who are going through our immigration system in very large numbers legally, but we are spending an enormous amount of money on bogus refugee claims that encourages those claims."

Asked what kind of changes Harper has in mind, a spokesman for the prime minister said Immigration Minister Jason Kenney is reviewing Canada's refugee policies.

Last month's imposition of the visas has incensed Mexican officials and caused an uproar in the Mexican press, threatening to overshadow cooperation with Canada on other key issues, such as the United States' Buy American policies.

Calderon was expected to propose a number of alternatives to the visas during his meeting with Harper, such as enhanced screening by Mexican authorities of travellers to Canada, as well as a crackdown on immigration brokers who urge Mexicans to seek asylum in Canada in exchange for a fee.

Mexican officials have warned that their government is ready to retaliate with a similar blanket visa requirement if Canada doesn't back down. So far, Mexico has only imposed visas on Canadian diplomats.

In addition to defusing a diplomatic controversy with Mexico, Harper's remarks could help him score points among many Canadians, if recent polls are any indication.

An Angus Reid survey released last month found that 69 per cent agree with Canada's recent decision to slap visas on Mexico and the Czech Republic.

Last year, Mexico accounted for more than 9,400 refugee claims, or one-quarter of Canada's total. Only 11 per cent of the Mexican claims were accepted.

Government officials say refugee claims from Mexico have slowed to a trickle since the imposition of the visas.

However, marshalling any major changes to Canada's refugee system through the minority Parliament could prove to be a significant challenge for the governing Conservatives, since the opposition Liberals have traditionally positioned themselves as the champions of recent immigrants and refugees.

Earlier Sunday, Harper announced Canada will train Mexican police officers to assist Mexico in its brutal war against rival drug cartels.

Through the Anti-Crime Capacity Building Program, Canada will invest as much as \$15 million a year in projects across the Americas that combat the illicit drug trade, corruption, human trafficking and other regional problems.

Slightly more than \$430,000 will go to Mexico to help it fight its drug war, which claimed more than 6,000 people last year, almost double the number of deaths in the previous year.

Under the program announced Sunday, the RCMP will train 300 mid-level Mexican police officers with the help of the United States and other countries. The Mounties will also train 32 new police commanders in areas such as police management, investigation and intelligence skills.

Funding for the program had already been earmarked in the January federal budget.

Later Sunday, Harper was to attend a working dinner with Calderon and Obama, who arrived here late Sunday afternoon.

The three leaders will meet again Monday morning. They are expected to discuss a range of issues, including the global recession, security and climate change.

After the Mexico summit, Harper will fly to Panama, where he is expected to sign a free-trade agreement with Panamanian President Ricardo Martinelli. It will be the first time a Canadian prime minister has visited Panama.

Almost a year after finding itself in a spat with Mexico over visas, Canada has set up a special invitation-only program for Mexican business travelers.

Participants in the program will be able to get their visa requests processed within 24 hours, the federal government said, as it announced the program this week.

"Canada welcomes travelers from Mexico and has been looking at ways to provide enhanced services to applicants," Immigration Minister Jason Kenney said in a news release.

"Canada and Mexico are among each other's largest trading partners," added Peter Van Loan, minister of international trade, in the release.

"This program will help Canadian and Mexican companies do business together and continue to fuel our economic recovery."

The welcoming comments are a different tone than the government was taking last year, when it announced that Mexicans visiting Canada would need visas, a requirement it also placed on residents of the Czech Republic.

The move prompted an outcry from both countries.

The Harper government said it was imposing the rules to help stem the waves of refugee claimants from those two countries, which were at the time Canada's top two sources of refugee applicants.

Critics and experts said Canada had sparked a "visa war" that could hurt trade relations with the European Union, because of the Czech Republic's membership in the EU, and with Mexico, a North American Free Trade Agreement partner.

Mexico retaliated by saying it would require visas of all Canadian diplomats, holding off for putting the requirement on the more than 1.3 Canadians tourists who come to the country each year due to economic considerations.

The Canadian government said the new program — being established at this country's visa office in Mexico City — is meant to help employees of Mexican companies who must often travel to Canada.

It will reduce paperwork and provide priority processing of visa applications.

Participation in the program will be by invitation only. Businesses with key connections to Canada will be identified by the Canadian Embassy or Export Development Canada, and then invited to take part.

Businesses will have to have good records of sending employees to Canada and having them behave themselves while in the country to get such an invitation, the Canadian government says.

The embassy has already invited 113 companies to enrol in the program and 12 businesses have registered.

The program is modelled on a similar and successful program introduced in New Delhi, India, in June 2008.

Last month, Kenney proposed \$540 million worth of new measures to overhaul the system for dealing with refugee claims from foreigners who arrive on Canadian soil.

Kenney has said the changes, once implemented, will cut the time it takes for a refugee claimant to get a hearing to two months from the current 19 and reduce to about two years from the average 4 1/2 years it now takes to evict a rejected applicant from Canada.

(AXcess News) New York - A bombing incident at a U.S. consulate in Mexico received very little news media attention and absolutely no response from President Barack Obama, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton or Attorney General Eric Holder.

An explosion occurred at the U.S. consulate in Nuevo Laredo in Mexico on Saturday morning. A small bomb was thrown over the wall of the consulate but there were no casualties reported by U.S. or Mexican authorities.

The attack in the Mexican border city was the latest alleged attack by Mexican drug gangs who are targeting the U.S. due to American law enforcement assisting Mexican President Felipe Calderon's attack on Mexican cartels.

According to one law enforcement official, Mexican police investigators are reviewing videotapes from security cameras throughout the consulate in hopes of identifying a suspect or suspects involved in the bombing incident.

The U.S. State Department ordered the closing of its consulates in Nuevo Laredo and Coahuila.

This bombing was the second attack on the U.S. consulates and consulate staff in Mexico within one month. Three people working at the U.S. Consulate in Ciudad Juarez were killed by gun fire on March 13.

Law enforcement experts believe the Mexican drug cartels are retaliating against U.S. interests due to the large number of cases in which drug kingpins and their minions are being extradited to the U.S. to stand trial.

For example, a law enforcement task force of federal, state, and local agents and officers on recently arrested 10 people linked to a Mexico-based drug trafficking organization that allegedly smuggled large quantities of methamphetamine into the United States and distributed the drug throughout Southern California, the Central Valley and the State of Washington, according to reports obtained by the National Association of Chiefs of Police.

Dubbed the Don Chuy Drug Trafficking Organization, the narcotics ring allegedly obtained multi-kilogram quantities of methamphetamine in Mexico; arranged for the transportation of the drugs into the United States, primarily by using hidden compartments and fake car batteries in vehicles driven through international ports of entry; and distributed wholesale quantities of the drug through cells based in the Inland Empire, California's Central Valley and Washington.

During an eight-month investigation into the Don Chuy organization, law enforcement authorities seized approximately 90 pounds of methamphetamine with a street value of well over \$5 million. Authorities made a series of large seizures of narcotics, including the seizure of almost seven pounds of methamphetamine on August 11, 2009; the seizure of almost five pounds of nearly pure methamphetamine on September 9; the seizure of approximately 24 pounds of

methamphetamine that was discovered in a tractor-trailer on Interstate 5 in Kern County on October 26; the seizure of more than 10 pounds of methamphetamine in Fresno on November 17; and a seizure this morning of approximately five pounds of methamphetamine at a house in Gardena that authorities believe was maintained by the Don Chuy organization.

Also, as authorities investigated people who allegedly transported methamphetamine for the Don Chuy organization, they seized eight kilograms of cocaine secreted in a vehicle that attempted to enter the United States at the Calexico Port of Entry on September 18.

The Don Chuy Drug Trafficking Organization is named after the ring's alleged leader, Jesus Marquez-Marquez, who is known as "Don Chuy" and allegedly stored drugs in Tijuana stash houses before the drugs were moved across the international border. Marquez-Marquez, who is the lead defendant in a criminal complaint filed yesterday in United States District Court, is believed to be in the Mexican state of Michoacan. Several of Don Chuy's top lieutenants - including David Jimenez-Pedroza, who allegedly oversaw domestic distribution of Don Chuy narcotics - were arrested today or were previously taken into custody.

The criminal complaint charges a total of 31 defendants with conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine, a charge that carries a statutory maximum penalty of life without parole in federal prison.

Mexican President Felipe Calderon traveled on Monday to Washington to attend the Nuclear Security Summit summoned by his U.S. counterpart Barack Obama, the Mexican Presidency's office said.

During the Summit, Calderon will announce Mexico has joined the Global Initiative against the Nuclear Terrorism and "it is ready to contribute to the development and enforcement of measure to combat the nuclear terrorism," the Presidency said.

The Nuclear Security Summit is aimed at guaranteeing the security of the nuclear materials and facilities in the world to avoid them being controlled by non-state operators, including terrorist groups.

The Summit is also aimed at seeing the universality of the international juridical regime of nuclear security, and the strengthening of the informal mechanism of cooperation in the subject.

"Mexico has been invited for the historical contributions it has done to the disarming and non-proliferation and as a member of the United Nations Security Council Committee attending to the nuclear non-proliferation issues," the presidency said.

During the Summit, some 40 heads of state and government will meet and have theme meetings, as well as hold talks to review the threat of the nuclear terrorism and the role of International Atomic Energy Agency at the security subject.

### **Detailed Report/Venezuela**

Caracas, Venezuela (AP) — Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez offered Wednesday to help Uruguay expand a refinery and supply it with crude oil.

Chavez and visiting Uruguayan President Jose Mujica, popularly known as "Pepe," signed accords pledging to deepen trade and energy ties between the two South American nations.

Venezuela's president expressed admiration for the 74-year-old Mujica, a former leftist guerrilla leader who took office last month. Chavez embraced Mujica when he arrived at the presidential palace, affectionately calling him "a mentor."

Chavez presented Mujica with the Order of the Liberator — Venezuela's highest honor — and gave him a replica of a sword used by South American independence hero Simon Bolivar — the namesake of Chavez's socialist-inspired "Bolivarian Revolution."

Chavez said Venezuela will renew a deal to sell Uruguay up to 40,000 barrels of oil a day under preferential terms.

"The entire consumption of Uruguay doesn't surpass 40,000 barrels a day," Chavez said before he met with Mujica at the palace.

Chavez said he and Mujica also would discuss Venezuelan help in expanding Uruguay's La Teja refinery. He said it should be upgraded with equipment allowing it to refine heavy crude from Venezuela's eastern Orinoco River basin.

Under the accords, Uruguay will export 1,000 vehicles to Venezuela and help the oil-dependent country develop agriculture projects. The two nations also plan to cooperate in building glass and cement factories, producing software and establishing construction companies.

Since 2005, Venezuela has shipped 17,000 barrels a day of oil to Uruguay.

Under the 2005 agreement, Uruguay pays for 75 percent of the oil in cash. It can purchase the remaining 25 percent of the bill over a 15-year period at 2 percent interest. Since the shipments commenced five years ago, Uruguay has run up a \$524 million debt, Uruguayan Economy Minister Fernando Lorenzo said.

The previous agreements were the product of Chavez's friendly relations with Mujica's predecessor, Tabare Vazquez.

While Mujica shares some of Chavez's leftist views, he has vowed to take a more moderate approach to politics.

Prior to his election in November, Mujica denied he would radically reform Uruguay's stable parliamentary democracy and push the country toward socialism — like Chavez. Mujica says he's more inspired by the performance of Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

Despite a severe energy-related crisis at home, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has promised generous assistance to Uruguay that will include crude oil at discounted rates and help with oil refining.

Chavez is facing political pressures before the National Assembly elections in September over the effects of a drought that depleted water reserves in hydroelectric facilities, causing prolonged disruption in electricity and water supplies in both urban and rural population centers.

The drought broke this week with heavy rainfall and flooding in central Venezuela, but with the loss of two lives. Chavez hailed the rainfall, which followed speeches last month invoking God's help with the drought.

Amid signs that more rain could help refill the reservoirs and restore the hydro-based power grid, Chavez extended hospitality to old guerrilla fighter and new Uruguayan President Jose Mujica.

Chavez has bestowed discounted oil contracts on allies and friends in the past and used preferential oil deals to befriend Caribbean and Central American countries grouped together in Petrocaribe.

Welcoming 74-year-old Mujica to the presidential palace, Chavez offered to supply Uruguay more crude oil at discounted rates and help with raising the refining capacity at La Teja refinery, in the capital, Montevideo.

The refinery expansion has been planned for some time but has not been undertaken because of the high costs involved. Initially Venezuela's national oil company PDVSA offered to finance the whole project with a price tag of more than \$600 million.

Under the deal announced by Chavez, Venezuela will likely supply Uruguay with up to 40,000 barrels a day of crude oil -- nearly the entire average consumption of the country -- on preferential terms.

There was no mention of the debt that Uruguay has already built up with previous preferential deals for oil it receives from Venezuela.

A 2005 agreement guaranteed Uruguay 17,000 barrels of oil a day in a deal that required only 75 percent of the payment in cash, with the rest paid over a 15-year period at 2 percent interest.

Uruguayan officials said the country's debt to Venezuela currently stands at \$524 million. Repayment of the debt was not mentioned in official media reports on the talks between Chavez and Mujica.

Chavez said he would also like to include Uruguay in any future endeavors to explore the Orinoco basin for oil. Extensive tar sands in the river basin have given geologists hope the area may be a major source for crude oil.

Chavez lamented the decline of farming in Venezuela, pointing out the poor milk yields compared with those in Uruguay, MercoPress reported.

"Uruguayan cows average 25 liters per day; our cows hardly make two to three liters, we've even forgotten how to milk in spite of the fertile lands we have," Chavez said.

"Uruguayans are giving us a big hand in reintroducing the camp work discipline and improving the quality and efficiency of our cattle," said Chavez.

Uruguay hopes it can raise its earnings from Venezuela through more diversified exports that are still about a third of the annual value of oil it buys from Venezuela.

Venezuelan Ambassador to the Organization of American States (OAS), Roy Chaderton Matos, said in Washington that the concern voiced by President Álvaro Uribe about the situation of a group of Colombians who have been accused of spying in Venezuela seek to divert attention from the heart of the issue.

"I am aware of Colombia's reaction. They have implemented a counter-attack strategy. They are complaining about a situation they ignore. They are trying to draw attention to their complaints instead of the situation that caused the detention of a group of alleged Colombian spies acting in Venezuelan territory," Chaderton told reporters at a breakfast.

The Venezuelan Ambassador was referring to the fact that the Colombian government has asked the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) to issue some precautionary measures to avoid "irreparable harm" to the lives of a group of Colombians arrested since March in Venezuela on charges of espionage.

The Venezuelan government deemed unacceptable President Alvaro Uribe's position over the arrest of a number of Colombian citizens who were allegedly spying in Venezuela.

In an official statement issued by the Venezuelan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the government of President Hugo Chávez stresses that "once again the current Government of Colombia wants to present itself as a victim in a case that implies a group of people caught red-handed with evidence of espionage that threatens our country."

On the position of President Uribe, the Venezuelan Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that "there is an attempt to undermine for a long period a possible restoration of normal relations with Venezuela."

Jaime Bermúdez, the Colombian Minister of Foreign Affairs, reported on Friday that his government intends to report at the United Nations the detention of several Colombian people in Venezuela for allegedly spying the electrical system.

Bermúdez said that Colombia had reported the case at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). "We will do the same at the United Nations," he added.

The Colombian minister considers that there can be no political prejudgment. "The legal system and the rights of the citizens cannot be subverted by political interests. We are paying attention to the case. We hope the international community helps us solve this problem," the minister said to Colombian radio station La FM.

The top diplomat added that in his view the arrest of eight Colombians in Venezuela was inadmissible.

Caracas, April 8 (Reuters) - President Hugo Chavez extended an electricity emergency for another 60 days on Thursday despite recent rainfall that raised hopes that severe power shortages would end in the oil-exporting nation.

Chavez's popularity has been dented since a bad drought exposed problems in Venezuela's hydro-dependent grid and led to strict power rationing.

The power shortages and rationing could boost opposition prospects in legislative elections in September that will be a curtain-raiser for a 2012 presidential election.

Chavez, signing the emergency extension decree on television, called on Venezuelans to continue saving energy by switching off lights.

"We have renewed the electricity emergency while we continue working hastily to build new thermoelectric plants," he said. The emergency decree allows the government to mobilize resources to deal with the electricity crisis.

The leftist president who has been in power for 11 years reported substantial rainfall in the Caroni river basin that feeds Venezuela's largest hydroelectric dam, the Guri.

"This is bad news for the squalid ones who said there would be a collapse" of the electrical system, Chavez said, using a term with which he refers to his political opponents.

Water levels at the Guri and other hydroelectric dams have dropped to critically low levels amid the worst drought in a century, which is blamed on the El Nino weather phenomenon.

Venezuela depends on hydro generation for more than 70 percent of its power, and the shortages are jeopardizing its ability to emerge from recession.

The government has put in place energy-saving measures since December, and light industry and businesses have been told to slash electricity use by 20 percent or face being cut off -- even as Venezuela's economy suffers a recession that led to gross domestic product shrinking 3.3 percent last year.

A lack of investment to maintain and expand the country's electrical system during a period of rapidly rising consumption also lies behind the power crisis.

As it scrambles to boost alternative power generation, Venezuela is speeding up development of its gas fields to provide gas for turbines.

Chavez announced the start of production from a second well in the Cardon IV gas field off the Paraguana Peninsula. He said estimated gas reserves of the field had been raised to between 12 trillion and 20 trillion cubic feet (340 billion and 570 billion cubic meters).

Venezuela on Thursday gave Chevron (CVX.N) the go-ahead to tap natural gas from a 7 trillion cubic feet (200 billion cubic meters) field offshore from the delta of the Orinoco river. The government said the first production was expected by 2013.

Caracas (Reuters) - Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez called U.S. officials "stupid" on Thursday for criticizing his arms purchases from Russia and said he would keep buying weapons until the country is ready to defend itself.

The leftist leader has spent billions on weapons bought from Russia and China since the U.S. slapped an arms embargo on the South American oil supplier after it expelled DEA agents it accused of spying.

"They are worried in the United States because Venezuela is buying I don't know how many weapons and is arming itself to attack I don't know who: don't be stupid, Yankees!" said Chavez during a ceremony to receive the first of eight naval patrol boats purchased from Spain.

Following a visit to Venezuela last week, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said sales of weapons to Venezuela "could exceed \$5 billion" and could include T-72 tanks and S-300 advanced anti-aircraft missiles, RIA agency reported.

Venezuela has already spent over \$4 billion on Russian weapons and recently bought 18 K-8 jets and a network of 10 radars from China.

Washington accuses Chavez, a close ally of Cuba and Iran, of starting an arms race in the region where several nations have beefed up their military in recent years. It also says he supports FARC guerrillas who have waged war against the Colombian government for over half a century.

"We're hard pressed to see what legitimate defense needs Venezuela has for this equipment," U.S. State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley said. "If Venezuela is going to increase its military hardware, we certainly don't want to see this hardware migrate to other parts of the hemisphere."

Chavez says he is simply replacing out-of-date equipment and shoring up his country's defenses against possible attacks from Colombia and the United States. He has been fiercely critical of a security agreement signed by Colombia that allows U.S. personnel access to military bases in the Andean country.

The Venezuelan government has issued licenses to import 5,000 Russian vehicles scheduled to arrive this year, Trade Minister Richard Canán reported on Friday.

The high-ranking official told state-run TV channel Venezolana de Televisión (VTV) that a license was agreed upon to import 5,000 cars, buses and trucks made in Russia, as part of the close bilateral relations, AP quoted.

Canán said that the new units are expected to arrive during the year, state-run news agency Agencia Bolivariana de Noticias (ABN) reported.

"We have moved farther away from the US Empire and its domination logic. It hurts the Venezuelan hysterical rightwing, because for them there is one country only to trade and this is the United States," the minister added.

The Chinese government has moved away from the rhetoric against the United States. The purpose of the visit of Chinese President Hu Jintao to Venezuela, on April 17, is mainly economic, former Venezuelan Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Vladimir Villegas and expert in international relations Carlos Romero agreed on saying.

"On several occasions, President Chávez has mentioned ideological issues, such as the Chinese communism, but the leaders of the Asian country have not made any comments in this regard, because they are only interested in very specific things, that is, increasing their exports and raising their imports of raw materials, such as Argentinean soy or Venezuelan oil," Romero elaborated.

As a matter of fact, when Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez visited China in September 2008, he was quick to extol the figure of Chinese leader Mao Tse Tung. Hours later, the Chinese Foreign Ministry clarified: "China and Venezuela keep normal, state-to-state relations. They do not rely on ideology, or are targeted against a third party, or will affect foreign countries."

Chinese pragmatism implies that the United States -its traditional foe- is its major trade partner.

The Caracas' view

In the opinion of Vladimir Villegas, Jintao's visit, from Venezuela's point of view, is also part of Chávez's strategic policy to diversify Venezuela's trade and economic relations in several fields.

For his part, Romero stressed the importance given by President Chávez to the ties with China. In this connection, from the establishment of bilateral diplomatic relations in 1974 through 1997, 20 agreements have been executed. However, since Chávez's inauguration in 1999, 285 agreements in several areas, including energy, infrastructure and technology, have been initialed.

As a result of such proximity, the expert said, bilateral trade last year totaled USD 11 billion. Nevertheless, Venezuela is China's fifth Latin American trade partner, after Brazil, Mexico, Chile and Peru.

In addition, Venezuela has become China's fourth largest oil supplier with a current oil delivery of 400,000 barrels, expected to heighten soon to one million barrels.

Among the agreements reached there is the establishment of a bilateral investment fund, currently amounting to USD 12 billion and intended to total USD 20 billion.

Villegas noted that the efforts at approaching countries far from the United States, such as China are not only Venezuela's initiative, but also of several governments in the Latin American region.

"It is a simultaneous phenomenon in Latin America. In some cases, Venezuela has been the pioneer, like, for example, with Iran. But the foreign ministries of remaining countries have also sought diversification," he said. And numbers attest to it.

Venezuela is in danger of becoming militarily dependent on its main weapons supplier Russia, experts here said, after President Hugo Chavez reached a five-billion dollar weapons deal with Moscow. Russia has become Venezuela's chief military supplier, racking up \$9.4 billion in weapon sales to Caracas over the past few years, including last week's deal, which was announced by Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin in Moscow hours after returning from a trip to Caracas during which the sale was not even mentioned.

We are becoming dependent on Russia, and eliminating any real competition between potential suppliers," said Raul Salazar, who served as President Hugo Chavez's defense minister from 1999 to 2000. Political analyst Carlos Romero expressed the concern that the massive weapons purchase "breaks with the tradition of peace in this country." Chavez, who also has pursued joint cooperation with Russia on space exploration, is on a worrisome "armament track" that has led him to spend some 16 billion dollars on weapons over the past three years, Romero said. The firebrand leftist leader "wants to show that he has a central role on the world stage," Romero said.

And some analysts worried that the Caracas government paid too much for the Russian weapons, at a time when Venezuela is so financially strapped by the recession that it is forced to ration electricity. "A good part of the country is asking how the president can spend so much money at a time when Venezuela can barely afford basics like electricity and water," said foreign analyst Maruja Tarre. "No one sees the usefulness at this time and the news has created a scandal in Venezuela. The government didn't even dare to announce it," she said.

According to Russian sources, the new Venezuelan order would include three diesel submarines, 92 T-72 tanks, dozens of BMP-2 armored vehicles, 10 Mi-28N helicopters, patrol planes, multiple rocket launchers and air defense systems. Russia has so far sold the South American country \$4.4 billion worth of military equipment, mainly Sukhoi-30 fighters, helicopters, and assault rifles. Moscow also extended Venezuela a \$2.2 billion loan last year for weapons purchases, which would be used to help finance the latest deal.

But Putin's comments about the sale were not very precise and the Venezuelan National Assembly recently approved a confidentiality agreement with Russia on technical-military cooperation. Until now, the Russian leader vague comments are the only ones to address the purchase in public. "If you add all the military spending of the countries of the world, they would still be less than those of the United States. And they are so cynical that they criticize us for equipping ourselves to strengthen our defensive capabilities," said Chavez.

He was referring to a statement by US State Department spokesman, Philip Crowley, who said Washington was concerned that the arms would wind up in other countries. For his part, Colombian President Alvaro Uribe warned of the risk of an "immensely damaging" regional arms race. Venezuela claims that new US military agreements with Bogota allowing Washington use of Colombian military bases for counternarcotics operations pose a potential security risk to

his country. "We have to have our armed forces as well equipped as possible, but we are buying something that does not guarantee that we will win in a war," said Salazar. "Russia has not invested in its weaponry in years.

In its 2010 budget, the Venezuelan government allocated 4.1 percent of the country's gross domestic product to defense, or about 6.5 billion bolivars, an amount equivalent to either \$2.5 billion or \$1.5 billion, depending on which of two official exchange rates are used. – AFP

Luanda — The bilateral cooperation between Angola and Venezuela are excellent, said Friday in Luanda the minister counselor and chargé d'affaires of the Venezuelan Embassy in Angola, Jesus Alberto Garcia.

The Venezuelan diplomat was speaking on the sidelines of the 200th anniversary of that Latin American country, to be marked on April 19, said that the relations are based on agreements signed in 2006 by the Presidents José Eduardo dos Santos and Hugo Chavez, Angola and Venezuela, respectively.

According to Jesus Garcia, the countries signed agreements on energy, diplomatic and education sectors.

Jesus Garcia said that in Venezuela is assisting in Angola's reconstruction and construction of roads and primary schools to house nearly 2,000 students in the northern province of Bengo and is granting scholarships to Angolans students.

Although Angola and Venezuela established diplomatic relations in 1986, it was only in September 2006 that the latter opened its Embassy in the Angolan capital, Luanda.

Colombian authorities reported on Monday that a Venezuelan helicopter gunship violated its airspace in the department of Arauca, where other Venezuelan over flights have been reported in previous months.

Col. William Arcos, of the Arauca Police Force, said that the helicopter was seen over a village of the Colombian department. The chopper allegedly entered further into Colombian territory, DPA reported.

"A Venezuelan helicopter gunship coming from that country flew near the military detachment we have in (the village of) Caracol," the official reported.

According to Arcos, the helicopter flew for several minutes over the territory of Arauca and later entered the Venezuelan territory.

In January, the Colombian government sent a protest note related to the flight of a Venezuelan helicopter over the city of Arauca. Caracas denied the claims.

Venezuela has diversified its oil markets and is selling more than 460,000 barrels per day to China, a 21 percent increase from a year ago, the South American OPEC nation's oil minister said on Monday.

President Hugo Chavez's leftist government has sought for years to diversify Venezuela's oil markets away from dependence on its traditional customer and top buyer, the United States.

"Today we are selling more than 460,000 barrels per day to China (and) we are building a refinery jointly with China." Oil Minister Rafael Ramirez said in an interview on state television VTV.

Chavez's goal is to raise oil sales to China to 1 million bpd, which appears unlikely without raising Venezuelan output. Ramirez has said Venezuela expects production to remain flat at 3.01 million bpd this year.

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez addressed 35,000 armed supporters to mark the anniversary of a failed 2002 coup attempt.

Militiamen young and old raised assault rifles and clenched fists in the air as their leader entered the parade area in Caracas in an open military jeep for a rally marking the anniversary of an abortive coup that ousted him briefly in 2002.

"You should be ready to take up arms at any moment and give your lives if necessary for our nation's independence and the socialist revolution," Mr Chavez said, unsheathing a sword that once belonged Venezuelan independence hero Simon Bolivar.

The show of force by the government-organized militia -- whose number is thought to be several hundred thousand nationwide -- appeared aimed at defending his 11-year government from what Chavez and his supporters perceive as the threat of another coup attempt or an attack from abroad.

Tension between Venezuela and the US has risen since Colombia announced that the U.S. military will have access to its bases, and Venezuela ramped up purchases of weaponry from Russia.

However, US Defense Secretary Robert Gates, who will visit Colombia this week, said on Tuesday he did not see Venezuela as a military threat, adding that it had serious economic problems.

Electricity shortages caused by a severe drought and prolonged economic recession have dented Chavez's popularity ahead of elections for the National Assembly, a prelude to a crucial 2012 presidential vote.

Chavez, a former paratrooper turned socialist revolutionary, said the drop in water levels at the country's largest hydroelectric dam, the Guri, had slowed following recent rain and insisted that the electricity crisis would end this year.

"We cannot allow the bourgeoisie to occupy seats in the National Assembly," Chavez, dressed in green military fatigues and a red beret, told his supporters. "We cannot allow them to undo the revolutionary laws."

Three years after he was elected president, his opponents organized massive demonstrations triggering a coup that briefly ousted Chavez on April 11, 2002. The military restored him two days later after his supporters took to the streets.

In a move that will anger its opponents and further polarise Venezuela, Chavez's government decreed April 13 a holiday to be known as the "Day of National Jubilation."

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