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Report Summary/Argentina

Political Issue

According to the result of polls the president Fernandez Kirchner's rating improved in this week due to a hope of boost in the economy in this year. Results also show that she has been more favorite than her predecessor and husband Mr. Nestor Kirchner due to economic stability in the country. Morgan and Stanley has reported in this month that there are much chances of growth in Argentina's economy even more than expectations due to a boom in wheat corp.

Argentina's lower house has passed an opposition backed bill to increase pensions till 82 percent more. The pensions would be as equal to the minimum wages in the country. It is said now it will be difficult for the government as the country's economy is already in its initial stage of boost.

Economic Issue

Social/Humanitarian Issue

Food, Environment and Energy Issue

Geostrategic Issues

Foreign minister of Argentina visited Washington and met secretary of state there. He said Argentina has done its full efforts to solve regional dispute in the case of Colombia and Venezuela along other regional countries. US Secretary of State praised Argentina's role in mediation of Colombia and Venezuela dispute and said US always encourages such mediations and wants peace and stability in the region.

Report Summary/Brazil

Political Issue

The Economist magazine reported in Brazilian presidential elections the neck-and-neck situation is going to be change after the first television debate on 5th August among presidential candidates. Ms. Rouseff, who was leading over Mr. Serra with one point now she leads with 5-

10 percents of difference according to the new polls. She is getting the advantage of Mr. Lula's back who is very favorite in Brazilian people. Mr. Serra is trying to convince people that she is not Lula but on the other hand Mr. Lula said she is just like Nelson Mandela.

Brazil's Vox Populi institute has released poll results that show a clear difference in points between both presidential candidates. According to the poll Mr. Rousseff's popularity increased and he is having 43 percent points while her opponent got 32 percent points. It is said Ms. Rousseff is expected to be the new president of Brazil in October elections.

Mr. Serra is a professional person and he is very expert politician as he has served as minister and a governor of Brazil's most important state and financial hub Sao Paulo. But Ms. Dilma doesn't have a charismatic personality and neither she is expert in debate nor in profession as Serra but she is just getting benefit of Lula and giving very tough time to her opponent candidate of Brazil's opposition party.

Due to the growing role of internet in Brazil, a presidential online debate was held by Folha de Sao Paulo newspaper of Sao Paulo. It was held in many websites and on twitter and facebook as well. Three main candidates participated in this debate who answered each other's questions and also the answer the questions from the public.

Economic Issue

Social/Humanitarian Issue

The science and technology minister of Brazil said that Brazil is trying its best to get advancement in science and technology and in this purpose it is trying to get assistance from technological developed countries. The minister also said Brazil is going to invest \$23.4 billion US dollars in technological fields to boost this sector.

Food, Environment and Energy Issue

Geostrategic Issues

Brazilian agriculture minister said Brazil is China's tenth largest trading partner and both countries are doing trade in many sectors. He said though they have good trade relations but they still have potential to increase their trade in many fields as Brazil can export more agriculture goods to China and also pork. Brazil is importing fish from China and exporting pork. The agriculture minister said China is creating vacancies of job for its graduates who are expert in scientific fields and if Brazil also follow China's policies it could also be a very successful country in the future.

Report Summary/Chile

Political Issue

Economic Issue

Social/Humanitarian Issue

Finance minister of Chile said Chilean government has spent \$1 billion in rebuilding the earthquake affected areas. He said the government is investing on constructing bridges and roads first so that the connections would be rehabilitate among the disconnected areas. Chile's minister of public works visited China and said that Chile invites Chinese businessmen in rebuilding the Chile's infrastructure as they are professional in buildings.

Food, Environment and Energy Issue

Geostrategic Issues

Chinese ambassador to Chile spoke in Santiago that China is increasing economic relationships with Chile and Chile also wants to increase relations with China. He also said the trade between the two countries has reached \$17.42 billion in 2009 and Chile's trade increased 31 percent in this year. He said China is encouraging its investors to invest in South American country.

A group of Chinese academicians visited Chile and hold seminars in different places of Chile among them an address was in the congress of Chile. They spoke on Tibet that is an autonomous region of China. They presented Tibet's history, culture and politics and China's role to develop Tibet. They also answered the questions from the audience regarding the subject and received applaud.

Report Summary/Colombia

Political Issue

Colombia's defense minister said Colombian government will not negotiate with FARC or another rebel group National Liberation Army. FARC has almost 8,000 fighters and National Liberation Army has 2,000 and last week the president Santos said he can even dialogue with the rebel groups if they ensure they will leave violence. It is commented on his remarks with reconciliatory policy that if Colombian government hold dialogue with FARC or NLA it means government appreciate their business of drug trafficking and they are right.

A Colombia's court has declared the decision of giving seven military bases to US army as illegal because it did not get the approval of parliament. Last year the former president Uribe allowed 1,400 US soldiers to come in Colombia and provided its seven military bases and the former defense minister and the current president of Colombia Mr. Santos was the supporter of this decision of Uribe. But now court has given its decision against the military bases to provide to US. On this decision of Colombia some regional countries as Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil and

Venezuela has criticized Colombia. And some political analysts say the decision of court has created tensions for the new president.

Economic Issue

Social/Humanitarian Issue

A car was exploded with bomb in Bogota that caused the injury of nine people and it happened just after the few days when new president of Colombia sworn as president. The president Santos said it is the FARC rebels who are behind this blast as in the past they have been doing this to create anarchy in the country. His predecessor Mr. Uribe could controlled FARC's attacks by sending army against them to combat with them and that military action against FARC reduced their recruitments. In the meanwhile Obama government has announced that it will continue its assistance to the Colombian government to combat drug trafficking groups.

A plane came on earth while taking off in Colombia but it was a miracle that only an old lady died but later doctors said she was died of heart attack. There were 131 people on board but only 9 were severely injured and other 119 were taken to the hospital and freed after minor treatments.

Food, Environment and Energy Issue

Geostrategic Issues

Colombia's defense minister is planning to visit Venezuela where he will meet his Venezuelan counterpart and it is said a new phase of relationship is going to be start as both countries are going to sign some defense agreements that will bring both countries close to each other. Two other ministers are also accompanying defense minister. As trade minister is also with the minister of defense and both countries will also sign new agreements of trade.

Report Summary/Mexico

Political Issue

Mexico's war against drug cartels is really becoming a problematic issue for president Calderon who is doing his full efforts to control this but still there are no chances of success. Now the president has pleaded to the 31 state governors to assist him in their states as majority of the governors belongs to the opposition party PRI whose leader and former president of Mexico who also belongs to PAN has given opinion to legalize drugs in Mexico to collapse their economy. The president Calderon said by legalizing drugs in the country will attract more youngsters which is more problematic. So now the debate over legalizing drugs is continue in Mexican authorities.

Economic Issue

Mexico's economy minister said Mexico's economy will grow 5 percent next year and GDP will increase 4.1 percent this year. He said the growth in this year is more than expectations so in the next year the government is hopeful. The president Calderon has also said he will bring new policies to increase economy of the country by increasing relations with Europe and other Latin American countries. He said he will invite more foreign companies to invest in Mexico.

Social/Humanitarian Issue

Mexico's Supreme Court upholds its decision to legalize same sex marriage in Mexico City and adoption of children. Mexico City's mayor was the main supporter of this bill then the decision was taken to the Supreme Court where 9 of the 11 judges supported the bill. Mexico's conservative and ruling National Action Party and the community of Catholic Church strictly opposed the bill as they were arguing the legalization of same sex marriage can destroy our society. Argentina is the first Latin America country to legalize same sex marriage in the last month.

One of the mayors of a city of Mexico's northern state was kidnapped and his dead body is found in another state. He was kidnapped by some drug cartel members who came to his house in police uniforms and police vehicles and kidnapped him so later his dead body was found. Mexico's drug cartels have started targeting high officials since the president brought increase in the war against drug cartels. Before this he drug cartels have also killed a gubernatorial candidate in the northern city of Mexico. Since 2006 more than 28,000 people have been killed and 191 soldiers. Mexican president has sent a condolence letter to the guardians of murdered mayor.

Food, Environment and Energy Issue

Geostrategic Issues

Mexican foreign secretary visited Turkey and held a press conference with his Turkish counterpart. Both high officials said both Turkey and Mexico has more potential to increase trade and political relations so both countries will increase relations in these two major fields. Both officials sign some agreements in the field of education, science, culture, arts, press and sports. Mexican official said that Mexico will ease visa process for Turkish people and Turkish official also said Turkey will provide visa to Mexican citizens at airports to increase relationships.

US congress has passed the bill of \$600 million to protect US-Mexico border and the president Obama has also approved the bill without any comment on it. It is said this amount will be spent on militarizing the border and especially by using Predator drone attacks on illegal immigrants. Prior to this the technology has been used against Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan. US government will also hire 1,000 border agents more at its Southwest border as already 2,000 are deployed at this border since 2005. Except this 250 Custom and Border

Protections agents and 250 Immigration Custom Enforcement personnel are going to be deployed.

Due to unresolved Mexican trucking dispute, Mexican government is going to put taxes on some US goods that are brought from US by NAFTA agreement. Mexican government said it is putting taxes as a punitive retaliation from Mexicans as their trucks are not allowed in US. President Clinton has banned Mexican trucks in US and accused them they are not fit for US highways and later the problem was solved in Bush administration when the Mexican trucks were allowed in US but US environment lawsuits challenged Mexican trucks in court with the accusation that the trucks pollute the environment.

Report Summary/Venezuela

Political Issue

Criticism on Venezuela's 21st century socialism is this what is the difference in 20th and 21st century's socialism. It is said Chavez is just using the word 21st century's socialism but he himself is vague about 21st century's socialism. People of Venezuela say they just know socialism is for the poor people and to help them as Chavez himself has said many times that socialism is for poor people but not for the rich. He is following socialism while at the same time he is not Marxist but with a strong belief on Catholic Christianity.

Venezuela's Communist Party urged the government to seek the repatriation of convicted terrorist "Carlos the Jackal," who is serving a life sentence in France for murder, hijacking a French plane and bombing in various places in different times during Cold War. The Communist Party his repatriation because he is suffering in serious diseases and his remaining sentence will be here in Venezuela. But it is said it is difficult that Chavez pursue his case.

Economic Issue

Social/Humanitarian Issue

Food, Environment and Energy Issue

Geostrategic Issues

Venezuela and Colombia are agreed on that they will now allow third country to monitor their countries that whether there are FARC rebels in Colombia or Venezuela but they will solve their problems their self with consensus. The foreign ministers of both countries are also going to meet some days later who they will negotiate on trade and some other mutual issues to create harmony between both countries. In the meanwhile, Russian government appreciated Venezuela and Colombia's step towards peaceful negotiations and reconciliations. Russia also said both countries should promote good relations between them.

Venezuelan government said last week that it has objections on the new nominated ambassador to Caracas who is Mr. Palmer and Caracas rejected to welcome him. Venezuelan government said US must change the ambassador name as no descent government will be ready to receive him as new ambassador. While Washington has said it has not received any formal notification from Caracas regarding the change in the name of ambassador.

President of Islamic Republic of Iran has sent a formal letter to the government of Venezuela in which Venezuela is greatly admired due to its role United Nations Security Council on taking a bold step for Iran.

Detailed Report/Argentina

Argentina wins U.S. praise for mediation in Colombia-Venezuela rift

Buenos Aires, Aug. 12 (UPI) -- Argentina has won glowing praise from the U.S. administration for its role in bringing Colombia and Venezuela together in a reconciliation that led to the resumption of diplomatic ties between the two countries after a 19-day break.

Accolades for Argentina came when U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met with Argentine Foreign Affairs Minister Hector Timerman in Washington.

Buenos Aires got the credit not so much for high-level diplomacy by President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner as for the role played by her husband Nestor Kirchner, current head of the South American Nations Union and a former Argentine president.

Nestor Kirchner and Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva arranged the summit meeting in Santa Marta, Colombia, where Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez shook hands on normalizing relations.

The positive outcome of the summit, however, was soured by a car bomb in Colombian capital Bogota Thursday, which analysts saw as a challenge to Santos from FARC armed guerrilla group fighting the government.

Santos promised a tough line against the militants when he took over this month. More recently, the summit raised the possibility that FARC might lose supporters in Venezuela earlier seen as an arms link for the guerrilla group.

FARC operates from shared jungle territory on the border and is seen behind "narcoterrorism" and drug trafficking to Central and North America.

Before Thursday's security setback, the Santos-Chavez patch-up was seen as a major breakthrough in relations between pro-U.S. Colombia and populist and left-wing Venezuela, which appeared to be easing its hostility toward Bogota.

Clinton said she hoped the gesture by Santos and the prompt and positive reply of Chavez would led to a long-term consolidation of relations between the two countries.

Timerman cited "the important role that Argentina is playing as mediator between regional countries."

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State P.J. Crowley told reporters in Washington Clinton and Timerman had an "excellent regional discussion" following which U.S. officials pursued talks with Latin American diplomats to encourage speedy normalization.

He said the U.S. administration would continue conversations with Colombian and Venezuelan diplomats "to encourage them both to continue to resolve their differences peacefully."

In the meantime, the U.S. administration has been embroiled in a row generated by Venezuela's refusal to accept the new American ambassador to Caracas.

Ambassador-designate Larry Palmer was nominated by the Obama administration in June but Chavez rejected him due to remarks Palmer made that Chavez thought critical of Venezuela.

The State Department said earlier this week the administration was standing by Palmer despite opposition from Chavez.

Argentine Leader More Popular Than Husband: Poll

Buenos Aires (Reuters) - Argentine President Cristina Fernandez' popularity has risen in recent weeks thanks to an economic rebound and she is now more popular than her ex-president husband Nestor Kirchner, who is seen bidding to succeed her in 2011, a poll showed on Sunday.

Fernandez' popularity rating stood at 36 percent, compared to around 29 percent in June, nosing ahead of Kirchner, who had 32 percent, the poll by consultancy Poliarquia published in newspaper La Nacion showed.

Fernandez succeeded Kirchner as president in late 2007. Their hopes that he could return to power dimmed last year as the economy stagnated.

Fernandez' popularity hit a low of 20 percent last year after as voters disapproved of her handling of a 2008 tax revolt by farmers.

The latest poll showed 54 percent believed Kirchner would run in 2011, while just 32 percent thought Fernandez would.

"She has a better image. But the results show there is a perception he represents power and authority," said Alejandro Catterberg, a director of Poliarquia.

The poll interviewed 1,000 people in 40 cities across Argentina between Aug 4-13, and had a margin of error of plus or minus 3.2 percentage points.

Argentina's Lower House Approves Bill to Raise Minimum Monthly Pensions

Argentina's lower house approved an opposition-backed bill to boost the country's minimum monthly pension payments and link them to the minimum wage, a move the government said would bankrupt the current system.

Lawmakers passed the bill early today. The proposal raises pensions to 82 percent of the minimum wage, which was increased to 1,740 pesos (\$443) starting in September and 1,840 pesos beginning in January, President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner announced on Aug. 5.

If the legislation passes the opposition-controlled Senate, retirees will receive a minimum payment of 1,427 pesos per month compared with the current 1,046 pesos, an increase that Fernandez and her husband, former President Nestor Kirchner, said the social security system can't afford.

"It would be good if they bring ideas and sustainable proposals that don't alter the fiscal surplus," Fernandez said yesterday in a speech at the presidential palace in Buenos Aires. "If they approve the projects that they are discussing, in three months we would be in default."

Soybean Invasion Sparks Move in Argentine Congress to Cut Wheat Export Tax

Argentine opposition leaders say they have support for a bill to eliminate export taxes on wheat and corn as a way to lure farmers away from soybeans, the country's biggest crop, and plant more cereals.

"We should totally cut duties on wheat and corn, which compete with soybeans and is a crop that distributes wealth more evenly," said Felipe Sola, an opposition lawmaker and former agriculture secretary. "Soybeans invade everything because they are easier to produce and are more profitable."

Farm leaders today marched on Congress to protest the current export tax regime, which levies tariffs of 23 percent on wheat, 20 percent on corn and 35 percent on soybeans. The duty on soybeans should be modified so that smaller producers pay less, Sola, 60, told reporters Aug. 11 in Buenos Aires.

Economy Minister Amado Boudou said lower taxes on agricultural shipments, which generate about 9 percent of government revenue, would mean fewer cash handouts for the poor and less spending on roads, schools and hospitals in South America's second-biggest economy. A reduction in the levies would be "hugely irresponsible," he said.

Export taxes "allowed the country to export not only agriculture but manufactured goods, substitute imports, generate jobs and strengthen the domestic market," Boudou, 47, said in a July 27 interview with Todo Noticias television channel. The opposition "has a tremendous voracity to take money from the government, as if governments don't need funds to govern."

A spokesman at the economy ministry didn't respond to messages left by Bloomberg.

Floods, Drought

Wheat rose to a 23-month high of \$8.68 a bushel on Aug. 6 after Russia, the world's fourth-biggest producer, banned exports as the country's worst drought in at least half a century ruined crops. Flooding in Canada and dryness in Kazakhstan and the European Union also reduced global supplies.

Today, wheat futures for December delivery rose for the first time in four sessions, gaining 1.4 percent to \$6.93 a bushel at 10:41 a.m. on the Chicago Board of Trade.

Sola, who was governor of Buenos Aires province from 2002 to 2007, said opposition parties have enough support for the proposal to be passed in the lower house. A vote in the Senate, where President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, 57, has to rely on independent lawmakers to gain majority support, would be close, Sola said.

Fernandez's Victory Front alliance lost its majorities in both houses in the June 2009 mid-term elections, one year after a conflict with farmers over her plan to raise soy export taxes sapped her support and led to nationwide protests. Tax opponents blocked highways, disrupted grain shipments and created food shortages. The upper house rejected the increase by one vote.

Taxes 'Distortive'

"Taxes on exports are distortive and don't encourage production in either the short- or long-term," Christian Gribaudo, a congressman from the opposition PRO party and member of the agriculture committee, said in an interview in Buenos Aires. "Argentina is going to lose markets at the hands of competitors."

Neighboring Brazil, the world's second-largest soybean exporter and third biggest exporter of corn, doesn't charge farmers with export duties.

The agriculture committee began debating the legislation last week.

Argentine farmers gathered a record 55 million tons of soybeans from their latest crop. The bumper harvest will help the economy grow 9.7 percent this year, Morgan Stanley said in an Aug. 9 report. Boudou said growth will be 7 percent, after an increase of 0.9 percent last year.

Soybean Expansion

The expansion of soybeans, which has enabled Argentina to become the world's biggest exporter of soy oil, has come at the expense of other crops and cattle ranching, said Ernesto Ambrosetti, an economist at the Argentine Rural Society, the country's biggest and oldest farm group.

In the 30 years to the 2008/2009 crop year, the area sown to soybeans soared to more than 18 million hectares (44.5 million acres) from 2 million, according to the Ministry of Agriculture's website. In the same period, the area dedicated to wheat shrunk to 4.7 million hectares from 5.2 million.

Bigger profits offered by soybeans led ranchers to move livestock away from the Pampas grasslands onto less fertile and more isolated terrains, and to increase the use of feedlots to fatten animals, he said.

"In the past six years alone, more than 9 million hectares that were used for cattle are now used for agriculture, mainly soybeans," Ambrosetti said in a telephone interview from Buenos Aires. Government export restraints and domestic price controls that aim to ensure domestic beef, wheat and corn supplies, have encouraged farmers to plant more soybeans, nearly all of which are exported, he said.

'Partner for Profits'

Former Economy Minister and ex-central bank President Roque Fernandez, 63, said that, in the longer term, the country should eliminate all export taxes.

“When prices are up, the producer has a partner that takes 35 percent of the international price, and when it rains or there’s a problem, that partner disappears,” Fernandez, who was minister from 1996 to 1999, said in an Aug. 11 interview in Buenos Aires. The government is “a partner for profits but not for losses.”

About 9 percent of the government’s 229.1 billion pesos (\$58.3 billion) in tax revenue in the first seven months of the year came from farm export duties, according to the Juan Rey Kelly, an economist at the Argentine Rural Confederation.

Boost Production

Eliminating farm export taxes would help boost production and domestic demand, leading to increased payments of other taxes, Sola said. The production of corn leads to a greater distribution of wealth than soybeans because it requires more manpower, agro-chemicals and transportation, he said.

Ricardo Echegaray, head of the federal tax agency, defended farm export duties at an Aug. 3 news conference, saying they help fund social programs aimed toward the poor. This year, 4 billion pesos of revenue generated by the tariffs have been disbursed to provincial authorities for spending on projects such as schools, houses and water supplies, according to the Buenos Aires-based tax agency. In the whole of 2009, such remittances totaled 2.9 billion pesos.

“They are one of the central pillars of President Fernandez’s wealth redistribution policy,” Echegaray said.

Detailed Report/Brazil

Economist: Dilma Rousseff Anointed by Lula to Carry Brazil's Presidency

Dilma Rouseff, Brazil's presidential candidate of Bulgarian origin, has high chances to win the elections in October 2010 primarily thanks to the firm backing of outgoing President Lula da Silva, according to The Economist.

In an article entitled “Reflected Glory: Lula’s Lady Is on Course to Inherit His Presidency“, The Economist describes Dilma Rousseff “a political neophyte: an adviser and bureaucrat who was almost unknown just a couple of years ago, and who has never before fought, let alone won, an election.”

Yet, even though her opponent Jose Sera of the Party of Brazilian Social Democracy is supposed to have the advantage because of his rich record, he is now falling behind in the presidential race of the largest Latin American nation because of the staunch support by extremely popular President Lula da Silva for Rousseff, the candidate that he personally promoted.

The Economist cites polls showing that Sera is 5%-10% behind Dilma Rousseff, an economist whose father was a Bulgarian leftist before emigrating to South America.

“Ms Rousseff is hardly charismatic, and has a weakness for offering half-hour answers to one-line questions. Mr Serra’s problem is that Ms Rousseff is the anointed successor of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the current president. Four-fifths of Brazilians approve of Lula, and nearly half say that in the presidential election they would vote either for him (if the constitution did not bar him from a third consecutive term) or his candidate. Since selecting his successor Lula has praised her to the skies (she is “like Nelson Mandela”) and criss-crossed the country with her in tow. Now most Brazilians know who Lula’s candidate is—and increasingly, they intend to vote for her,” concludes *The Economist*.

On August 5th, the day of the first televised debate between candidates, one polling firm put Ms Rousseff on 41.6%, a ten-point lead over Mr Serra. Marina Silva of the Green Party came a distant third, on 9%. Thus, Rousseff even stands chances of winning an outright majority in the first round, avoiding a runoff.

“For Dilma it is simple: to persuade people that she represents Lula. But Serra has to remind people that Lula is not the candidate—and somehow do it without opposing, or preferably without even mentioning, Lula,” says Rubens Figueiredo, a political consultant in São Paulo, as quoted by the magazine.

Reflected Glory: Lula’s Lady Is on Course to Inherit His Presidency

On Paper, José Serra of the Party of Brazilian Social Democracy (PSDB), Brazil’s biggest opposition party, should be able to win the presidential election due on October 3rd without breaking a sweat. He has held many big political jobs in a long and successful career, including congressman, senator, minister of planning and then health, and mayor and then governor of São Paulo, Brazil’s biggest city and most powerful state. He is up against a political neophyte: an adviser and bureaucrat who was almost unknown just a couple of years ago, and who has never before fought, let alone won, an election.

Instead Mr Serra is struggling to stay in the race. Polls put him five to ten points behind Dilma Rousseff, the candidate of the governing Workers’ Party (PT). The problem is not presentation, though Mr Serra looks dull except when he smiles, when he looks alarming. Ms Rousseff is hardly charismatic, and has a weakness for offering half-hour answers to one-line questions.

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On August 5th, the day of the first televised debate between candidates, one polling firm put Ms Rousseff on 41.6%, a ten-point lead over Mr Serra. Marina Silva of the Green Party came a distant third, on 9%. Exclude invalid responses, and Ms Rousseff would be close to winning an outright majority, avoiding a run-off. This poll may be an outlier, but others give her a growing lead (see chart).

Ms Rousseff looked nervous in the debate, and struggled to keep her answers snappy. Mr Serra was somewhat better. But since the debate was scheduled at the same time as an important football match, hardly anyone watched.

More worryingly for Mr Serra, the debate foreshadowed the difficulties he will face for the rest of the campaign. Probably rightly, Mr Serra has decided that attacking a president as popular as Lula would not win him many votes. He disagrees with Ms Rousseff on some things, such as foreign policy and the role of the state in the economy. But he agrees on others. He has felt obliged to promise to continue some of Lula's programmes, such as Bolsa Família, a grant to poor families. Meanwhile, with the economy growing strongly, Brazilians are enjoying life: "feel-good factor" has entered the Portuguese language.

But steady as she goes sells better for incumbents than challengers. Mr Serra's slogan, "Brazil can do more," exemplifies the difficulty. He is struggling to capitalize on his own record. He is best known for his role in Fernando Henrique Cardoso's governments of 1995-2002, which, despite some solid achievements, are recalled by Brazilians without fondness.

"For Dilma it is simple: to persuade people that she represents Lula," says Rubens Figueiredo, a political consultant in São Paulo. "But Serra has to remind people that Lula is not the candidate—and somehow do it without opposing, or preferably without even mentioning, Lula."

Ms Rousseff's lead is not yet unassailable. If Mr Serra can deny her outright victory, he might have a chance in a run-off. And in Brazil there is always the possibility of a scandal or blunder.

But there are still a few more votes for Ms Rousseff to squeeze out of being Lula's woman. Some 8% still tell pollsters they want to vote for the president's candidate, but do not mention her by name.

She will soon have more opportunity to reinforce that link. From August 17th Brazilian television and radio stations must start running free political advertising, with more time going to candidates whose alliances command more seats in Congress. This means that Ms Rousseff will get more than ten minutes, three times a week; Mr Serra must manage with just over seven minutes. That advantage could end up being the decisive one.

Brazil hopes to promote agricultural trade with China

Rio de Janeiro - Brazil wants to boost trade with China in agricultural products, and will export more pork to and import more fish from China in the next few years, Brazilian Agriculture Minister Wagner Rossi said Thursday.

The two countries enjoy a very good trade partnership, but there is still huge potential for expansion, Rossi told Xinhua in an interview.

"Today, China is our main trade partner, and Brazil, as I have heard, is already China's 10th largest trade partner," Rossi said. "I think as our economies are complementary, we have a great future for cooperation, especially in agriculture."

"We have a very positive attitude toward China. President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva considers China to be a very important partner, and our goal is to add new products in the trade with China and increase quantities and values of our trade," he added.

As Brazil and China share a common goal of providing better living conditions to their people, food production is very important in this regard, Rossi said, adding that the two countries can help each other in this area.

"We have a lot to learn from China and we can offer our experience in other fields. There is so much that both countries can learn from each other and improve the lives of their people," he said.

According to Rossi, there are many projects where Brazil and China can work together, not only on their own territories, but in other countries that China may already be helping.

The minister also considered China as an example to be followed.

"I think China is a successful case, because it has managed to feed a its population, and have one of the highest numbers of youngsters graduating from college, especially in scientific fields. That is an example we should applaud and follow," he said.

Latest Polls Show Dilma Winning Brazil Presidency in the First Round

Dilma Rousseff, from the Workers Party, seems to be opening a significant advantage over the other candidates in the race for the Brazilian presidency. On Tuesday, August 17, the Vox Populi Institute released a poll for TV Band and the web portal, iG, showing Dilma 16 percentage points ahead of her nearest rival, José Serra from the PSDB (Party of the Brazilian Social Democracy).

In the poll, Dilma has 45% of intended votes, with Serra at 29% and Marina Silva 8%. The other six candidates did not register 1% altogether. The error margin of the poll is give or take 1.8%.

The poll also registered 5% who would not vote (blank votes) and 12% undecided.

Vox Populi polled 3,000 voters in 219 municipalities between August 7 and 10.

Under Brazilian election rules, if the election took place today Dilma would be elected on October 3, with no need for a runoff on October 31. That is because, although she would have less than a majority, she would nevertheless have more votes than all the other candidates together.

In a previous poll by Ibope, the candidate handpicked by Lula Brazilian had already widened her lead to 11 percentage points over opposition candidate.

"A first-round win for Dilma is looking increasingly likely," said Rafael Cortez, a political scientist at Tendências Consultoria Integrada in São Paulo.

Candidates now are being allotted free TV and radio advertising slots. This will increase support for Rousseff among voters who remain undecided, said Cortez.

"These are mainly voters with low income levels, who have difficulty getting political information," Cortez said. Rousseff "is going to gain ground precisely in these sectors."

Rousseff, former cabinet chief to President Lula, rose to 43% from 39% in the previous poll taken August 2-5, Globo said. Support for former Sao Paulo Governor Serra, the Social Democracy Party candidate, fell to 32% from 34%, according to Globo.

Green Party candidate Marina Silva had 8%; minor candidates had less than 1% combined. The nationwide poll of 2,506 people was taken between August 12 and 16 and has a margin of error of two percentage points, according to Globo.

In related news the leading opposition candidate for vice-president accused the ruling Workers' Party of having relations with the Colombian FARC guerrillas, sparking controversy during a tranquil debate among vice-presidential hopefuls.

José Índio da Costa, running with José Serra challenged the PT and its presidential candidate Dilma Rousseff to explain the relationship.

"The issue is that the PT has relations with the FARC, which are linked to drug-trafficking" said Da Costa in a debate organized by the O Estado de Sao Paulo newspaper. "Dilma has to give explanations.

"If the FARC call me to a meeting, I take the federal police and I arrest them," he said. "The FARC are not a social movement".

His comment sparked one of the few feisty replies from Deputy Michel Temer, vice-presidential candidate for the ruling coalition.

"To associate Dilma with drug-trafficking is very serious. I don't think that is the case," said Temer, president of the Lower House. "There is no relationship between Brazilian government and the FARC, or between Dilma and the drug-trafficking."

Brazil committed to developing science, technology

Brazil will speed up science and technology development as investments in those areas will reach 41 billion reais (23.4 billion U.S. dollars) by the year's end, Minister of Science and Technology Sergio Rezende said Wednesday.

"Brazil was trying to accelerate scientific development via cooperating with other developing countries," the minister said.

He cited achievements in this area. The number of local scientists' articles published in international journals has sharply increased over the past few years and surpassed those

submitted by Russian and Dutch scientists. The government's science and technology projects also remained unscathed despite the global financial crisis.

Earlier this week, Rezende attended the opening ceremony of the Third International Congress of Free Software and Electronic Government(CONSEGI), an important forum held in Brazil to exchange technological experiences and information.

Brazil holds its first online presidential debate

Brazil has held its first presidential online debate, with the three main candidates answering questions from each other and from the public.

Dilma Rousseff, Jose Serra and Marina Silva tackled a range of subjects during the two-hour debate.

Live streaming of the event was carried by dozens of websites and also could be followed on Twitter and Facebook.

Campaigning has moved up a gear for the 3 October election, with daily election advertising on TV and radio.

The debate, organized by Folha de Sao Paulo newspaper and the UOL web portal, was held in Sao Paulo in front of an audience of several hundred people.

It was made possible after Brazil amended its electoral law in 2009 to allow a debate to take place without being transmitted on TV.

It was split into six blocs, with the candidates responding to questions from each other, then to selected video questions from members of the public and finally to questions from journalists.

The candidates, Dilma Rousseff from the governing Workers Party (PT), Jose Serra from the Social Democratic Party (PSDB) and the Green Party's Marina Silva tackled subjects ranging from abortion, to political alliances, to campaign donations from private companies.

Health and education also emerged as key themes.

Internet use has grown rapidly in Brazil in recent years. Earlier this month market research firm Comscore said Brazil, along with Indonesia and Venezuela, led the surge in global use of Twitter.

However, television remains the key tool to reach voters, above all in rural regions, analysts say.

The online debate came a day after election advertising began on free-to-air radio and TV networks in Brazil.

Detailed Report/Chile

Ambassador: China wants to boost mutual investment with Chile

Vina Del Mar, Chile, Aug. 14 (Xinhua) -- China attaches great importance to economic cooperation with Chile and is committed to boosting mutual investment between the two countries, the Chinese ambassador to Chile has said.

Speaking at Chile's national steel conference on Friday, Lu Fan said there was a severe lack of mutual investment between China and Chile despite an increase in bilateral trade volumes in recent years.

The trade volume between China and Chile reached 17.42 billion U.S. dollars in 2009, during which Chilean exports increased by 31 percent year on year, and this year trade continued to grow, Lu said.

In the first half of this year, bilateral trade reached 10.9 billion dollars, an increase of 58.9 percent compared with the same period of 2009, and Chilean exports amounted to 7.65 billion dollars, he said.

"This has further strengthened China's position as the leading trading partner of Chile. At the same time, bilateral trade continues to diversify. In addition to copper and other mineral products, exports of wine, fruit and meat products have also gained rapid development," he said.

However, there is "a severe lack of mutual investment between the two countries," the Chinese ambassador said.

The Chinese government encouraged and facilitated its enterprises to invest in the South American country to further develop economic cooperation, he said.

The Supplementary Agreement on Trade in Services of the Free Trade Agreement between China and Chile took effect on Aug. 1, and negotiations are underway on a supplementary agreement on investment.

Chile spends 1 billion dollars in rebuilding quake-hit areas: official

The Chilean government has spent 1 billion U.S. dollars in rebuilding areas hit by the Feb. 22 major earthquake, Finance Minister Felipe Larrain said on Saturday.

The statement was made on Saturday when Larrain and Minister of Public Works Hernan de Solminihac inaugurated the bridge Lo Gallardo in the Region of Valparaiso, which was seriously damaged in the 8.8-magnitude earthquake.

Larrain told Xinhua that 1 billion dollars have been spent on emergency work and other projects such as the aforementioned bridge.

The bridge, which links the towns of Santo Domingo and Llole and measures 800 meters, is the first to be put into operation in Chile, among other reconstruction projects which are still underway. The repair work cost approximately 1.4 million dollars.

Larrain said that the total cost of the country's post-quake reconstruction was estimated at 8.4 billion dollars for the next four years.

Chile invites Chinese enterprises to join post-quake reconstruction

The Chilean government invites Chinese businessmen to participate in rebuilding the South American country after the devastating earthquake on Feb. 27.

"We invite (Chinese business people) with all our heart to come and visit us and to support the reconstruction of the country," the Minister of Public Works Hernan de Solminihac said in an exclusive interview with Xinhua on Saturday.

Chile Welcomes China to Join Reconstruction

Solminihac recently conducted a working visit to the Chinese cities of Beijing and Shanghai, where he held meetings with the Chinese officials and entrepreneurs who have rich experience in fighting natural disasters like earthquakes.

"During the visit I was able to hold talks with various authorities to exchange experiences about earthquakes, consequences and how to get prepared for and mitigate the effects of these natural disasters," he said.

He added that "those meetings were very helpful because the Chinese were keen to participate not only in the reconstruction of Chile but also in the development of our country."

He explained that Chile's Program for Reconstruction and Concessions, with an estimated total investment of more than 8 billion U.S. dollars, were "very attractive to Chinese investors.

The third senior Chilean official to visit China since March, Hernan de Solminihac described relations between China and Chile as "very well designed," saying "we feel content as it looks very dynamic."

Reconstruction Progress

The quake that hit Chile in February and the tsunamis that followed caused 521 deaths, thousands of missing and huge economic losses. Solminihac said that the emergency phase that came right after the earthquake had been completed and currently the government was working on a comprehensive reconstruction.

He said that the government had a detailed plan of how to do the reconstruction, with the most emergent having to do with connectivity, drinking water and access to productive areas.

He said his ministry was now simultaneously engaged in many projects, such as the bridge of Lo Gallardo, which was the first to have finished, and by November another two major bridges in the area of Biobio would be put into operation.

Meanwhile the program aimed at providing drinking water for the population is expected to be completed by the end of this year, with an equal or better level than pre-quake times. The February earthquake destroyed 40 percent of the tap water pipes in the rural part of the country.

To summarize the progress so far, Solminihac said that "during this year we have completed the emergency stage, we have started the full-scale reconstruction and we are optimistic that everything that has to do with Public Works is advancing well."

Tibet's development impresses Chilean lawmakers

A delegation of Chinese academicians briefed Chilean legislators on current situation in China's Autonomous Region of Tibet in a seminar at Chile's congress on Wednesday, and won praise from the audience.

"It was a very enlightening event where we had the chance to learn all the developments experienced by this region of China," said Hernan Larrain, chairman of the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee.

"For us it was particularly useful to increase our knowledge about the region and its current situation," said Robert Leon, a congress deputy from the opposition Christian Democratic Party.

During the meeting, the Chinese scholars answered questions about the history, social progress and economic development of Tibet.

The visit by the Chinese delegation, mostly composed of Chinese specialists in Tibetan studies, was aimed at promoting mutual understanding between the two peoples and presenting a true picture of Tibet.

Before meeting with Chilean legislators, the Chinese specialists held seminars at the Presidential Palace, the Foreign Ministry and universities in Chile.

Detailed Report/Colombia

Obama will continue helping Colombia fight drug trafficking

Washington (CNN) - President Barack Obama on Thursday extended U.S. assistance to Colombia in combating civilian aircraft involved in drug trafficking.

A White House statement said Obama issued a memo to the State Department and Defense Department authorizing the continuation of what is called U.S. Drug Interdiction Assistance to Colombia.

It is the seventh straight year that the interdiction assistance has been extended.

The memo said Colombia has appropriate procedures in place to protect against innocent loss of life from interdiction against civil aircraft "reasonably suspected" of illicit drug trafficking.

'Terror' Car Bombing outside Radio Station

A car bomb has exploded in the Colombian capital Bogota, injuring nine people, in what the new president called a "terrorist attack".

The blast, which happened outside a radio station, shattered windows in at least 30 buildings and also damaged a bus.

Police said most of the wounded had been in the vehicle, which was passing by when the device went off.

Mauricio Marentes, 28, who lives near the bomb site, said: "I woke up and my floor and bed were covered in glass."

Authorities said the car was packed with at least 110lb (50kg) of explosives.

They had located the owner and said the vehicle had been reported stolen on July 31 from a shopping centre in the north of the city.

The blast came just days after President Juan Manuel Santos took office vowing to continue his predecessor's war on leftist Farc guerrillas and cocaine traffickers.

Mr Santos, the successor to Alvaro Uribe, said the latest attack was meant to create fear and make people skeptical about the government.

As he visited the blast site in Bogota, the leader urged people to continue with normal life, adding: "We are going to continue fighting terrorism with everything we have."

His predecessor's tough tactics have weakened the leftist guerrilla groups that have fought the government for decades.

Bombings and attacks in Colombian cities dropped sharply after Mr Uribe took office in 2002 as he sent troops to battle the rebels.

Several top commanders have been killed or captured and the membership of Farc, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, has fallen due to desertions.

But the insurgent group is still a force in rural areas where it has often allied itself with traffickers and paramilitary gangs to benefit from the cocaine trade.

Guerrillas now rely on ambushes and homemade landmines to attack army patrols.

In March, a Farc bomb killed nine people in the Pacific coastal town of Buenaventura.

And two people were killed in a bombing at a video store in Bogota in 2009. Authorities said that attack was linked to extortion by Farc.

Colombia rejects FARC talks offer

Editor's Note: Following in the footsteps of Alvaro Uribe, his predecessor and mentor, Colombia's former defense minister and new president, Juan Manuel Santos will not stray from his own terrorist roots. Like Uribe, Santos does not want peace for Colombia. Making peace with FARC in Colombia was never to the advantage of either regime. Civil war has always provided a cover for their own drug running business and a pretext for military funding from the US. If Santos made peace with FARC he could no longer blame them for Colombia's lucrative cocaine industry or the murder of thousands by his own paramilitary death squads. The civil war affords an additional bonus to Bogota and Washington: fertile ground for falsely accusing Venezuela for "supporting terrorism" and demanding that President Chávez prove a negative 'an impossibility.

The Colombian government has rejected an offer for talks from the country's most powerful rebel group.

In a videotaped message released before the appointment of president Juan Manuel Santos, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Farc) leader Alfonso Cano offered to open peace talks with the new government.

"Colombia will never talk with terrorists, that is a lesson we have already learned," Rodrigo Rivera, the defence minister, told local media on Sunday.

"There is no dialogue with those who turn to terrorism."

In a separate interview with local radio, Rivera said that government forces knew where Cano is hiding.

He is "fleeing from the security forces. He has no rest... we are not going to let up," he said.

Conditions

After taking office, Santos said he would not close the door to talks, but they would have to be "based on the unalterable premise that (the guerrillas) give up arms, kidnapping, extortion, drug trafficking, and intimidation".

The Farc has an estimated 8,000 fighters. Another leftist rebel group, the National Liberation Army, is believed to have some 2,000 fighters.

Colombia has been beset for years by violence involving leftist guerrillas, right-wing paramilitary death squads, and powerful drug cartels.

Santos said on Friday that he did not believe the conditions were ripe for talks with the Farc, and ordered Rivera to press ahead with an offensive against them.

As defense minister, Rivera is in charge of both the armed forces and the national police.

6 badly injured in 'miracle' crash flown to Bogota

Bogota, Colombia (AP) — Survivors say everything seemed normal as a jetliner with 131 people on board prepared to land in a storm at a Caribbean resort island. Suddenly it plunged to earth, killing one person — a death toll so low the island's governor called it a miracle.

"The pilot informed us that we were going to land in San Andres, we buckled our seat belts, we settled in — and a second later, boom! A big bang," said 25-year-old survivor Alvaro Granados, who was flying with his wife and two children. "When my wife and I stood and looked behind us, we saw that the back of the plane was missing."

Authorities say it happened so quickly the pilot didn't report an emergency to the control tower on Colombia's San Andres Island.

Experts are trying to figure out why the Aires airline Boeing 737 jetliner hit the ground short of the runway on Monday — and how 130 of the people on board survived as the aircraft skidded on its belly with its fuselage fracturing and its landing gear and at least one engine ripping off.

After the jet ground to a stop, passengers scrambled from their seats or were helped to safety. Authorities said firefighters quickly doused flames that broke out on a wing.

The one fatality was Amar Fernandez de Barreto, 68, and doctors said she may have succumbed to a heart attack. Officials said 119 people in all were taken to hospitals or clinics, most of them for minor injuries.

Manuel Villamizar, director of the emergency operations center in Bogota, told reporters late Monday that he had arranged for six of the badly injured to be flown in from San Andres. The health ministry said a total of 13 injured were being moved to Bogota.

Col. Donald Tascon, deputy director of Colombia's civil aeronautics agency, speculated the plane's low altitude as it approached for a landing — perhaps 100 feet just before the crash — may have avoided more severe damage and saved lives.

"It was a miracle, and we have to give thanks to God," San Andres Gov. Pedro Gallardo said.

Mr. Granado, the passenger, said there was little turbulence when the plane went down.

US base ruling risks new tensions for Colombia's president

Colombia's new president, Juan Manuel Santos, on Wednesday found himself in embarrassing straits with his chief military sponsor, the United States, after a top court ruled US access to Colombian bases unconstitutional.

The verdict handed down by Colombia's constitutional court Tuesday meant Santos, who assumed power August 7, will have to renegotiate the October 2009 deal giving US forces the right to use seven Colombian bases to fight drug gangs.

The development risked renewing regional tensions over the deal, which was viewed with outright hostility by neighboring Venezuela and critically by regional powerhouse Brazil and other countries, including Argentina and Bolivia.

Those nations voiced fears that the boosted US presence could embolden Colombia to make forays outside its borders, as it did in March 2008 when its forces briefly entered Ecuador to destroy a rebel camp, nearly triggering a war with Ecuador's ally Venezuela.

Colombia's court found the 2009 accord with the United States should have been enshrined in a treaty with Washington subject to congressional approval, rather than the executive decree decided by Santos's predecessor and mentor, Alvaro Uribe.

Santos's government said it was studying the ruling, which was prompted by a lawsuit by a group of Colombian lawyers.

"The truth is that right now the verdict doesn't have a direct impact," Interior Minister German Vargas Lleras said.

"The number of (US) personnel lending cooperation to Colombia's forces is circumscribed by pre-existing agreements, which means this matter has not yet been implemented."

The Uribe administration had argued that the bases accord was not new but merely an extension of a 1974 military pact with the United States, and as such required no legislative oversight.

The accord provides for the United States to deploy a maximum of 800 uniformed military personnel and 600 civilian contractors to the Colombian bases. All would enjoy immunity from criminal prosecution.

Since 2000, the United States has channeled more than six billion dollars to Colombia through its Plan Colombia initiative to fight drug trafficking and insurgencies. Most has been spent on reinforcing Colombia's military.

The US State Department has said that, despite the legal setback over the bases, the United States would maintain its close cooperation with Colombia.

But a Colombian political analyst, Fernando Giraldo, said the court verdict left Santos, Uribe's former defense minister, in "a very difficult situation."

"He is compromised by this accord, having been defense minister at the time and the one who publicly announced it. Insisting on (congressional) approval could create difficulties with Venezuela," he said.

Santos and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez only last week resumed diplomatic ties Chavez had cut in July after Uribe accused him of sheltering Colombian rebels.

Chavez had previously frozen diplomatic ties with Colombia over the bases issue.

Colombian Defense Minister joins FM Holguín in visit to Venezuela

The purpose of his visit is to establish together with his Venezuelan colleague the bilateral committee on cooperation for defense

With a view to fully restoring Venezuela-Colombia relations, the second meeting between Venezuelan Minister of Foreign Affairs Nicolás Maduro and his Colombian counterpart María Angela Holguín will be held in Caracas.

The meeting is intended to bolster the organization of five work committees agreed by Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez and Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos.

Ministers of Defense and Trade will come together with Holguín. All three Colombian ministers are expected to arrive on Thursday in advance to an official meeting on Friday.

Colombian Defense Minister Rodrigo Rivera plans to meet with his Venezuelan counterpart, General Carlos Mata, in order to establish the bilateral committee on cooperation for defense.

According to the information released by Caracol radio, both officials will set the strategies related to antiterrorism efforts and joint surveillance on the border.

Detailed Report/Mexico

Mexican president asks governors for support in drug war

Mexico City - Mexican President Felipe Calderon Thursday pleaded with state governors for more support in the fight against organized crime and the drug trade.

Speaking to the 31 regional leaders, Calderon urgently emphasized how vital it was for all state governments to participate in the national fight against the drug cartels.

Federal-state cooperation in Calderon's drug war is often lacking, since the majority of states are led by governors who do not belong to Calderon's ruling PAN party.

'I ask you to support the military and federal police in their work in your states,' the president pleaded at the opening of the meeting with the governors.

Calderon declared war on the cartels four years ago when he entered office, but politicians are alarmed by the escalating civilian death toll as federal police battle it out with drug gangs. An estimated 28,000 civilians have been killed in the struggle, many of the innocent victims of drug gangs seeking to set an example for local politicians and police to give them protection.

During recent weeks, politicians and former president Vicente Fox suggested that the drug trade should be legalized to drive down prices and make the illegal trade less lucrative.

But Calderon disputes legalization, saying that cheaper drugs would invite millions more young people to try them.

In light of increasing murders and recognition that the government is losing ground against the powerful cartels, Calderon has spent the past two weeks laying the groundwork for a new initiative to improve security in Mexico.

He has met with various groups, churches, parties, business people and other sectors of society to discuss the issue.

Some of the governors emphasized the urgent need to provide more chances for education and jobs for young people to give them prospects for the lives other than crime.

Mexico debates legalizing marijuana

A heated debate is under way among senior officials in Mexico over whether the government should legalize the use and sale of marijuana.

The discussion comes as violence from competing drug cartels in the country continues to spiral out of control, claiming thousands of lives every year.

Felipe Calderon, Mexico's president, has said he is firmly against the legalization, arguing that it would only create "millions" of more drug addicts.

But Vicente Fox, the country's former president and a member of Calderon's conservative National Action Party, has urged the government to legalize drugs in order to "break the economic structure that allows gangs to generate huge profits in their trade, which feeds corruption and increases their areas of power".

"We should consider legalizing the production, distribution and sale of drugs" because "radical prohibition strategies have never worked," he explained.

Al Jazeera's Franc Contreras reports from Mexico City, the capital.

Turkey, Mexico to step up cooperation, ease visa procedures

Turkey and Mexico will strengthen economic and political cooperation and work to ease visa requirements for visits between them, the semi-official Anatolia news agency reported Friday.

There was a great potential for Turkey and Mexico to cooperate in the economic field and the two countries agreed to hold talks on encouraging mutual investment and preventing double taxation, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu was quoted as telling a joint press conference with Mexican Secretary of Foreign Relations Patricia Espinosa.

The two countries decided to make mutual high-level visits every year and facilitate a diplomatic exchange program, Davutoglu said after meeting Espinosa here.

Mexico condemns all forms of terror acts and will work together with Turkey for intensifying the fight against terrorism in the international community, Espinosa was quoted as saying.

The two top diplomats signed a cooperation program and an agreement memorandum to further cooperation in such fields as education, science, culture, arts, press and sports, the agency reported.

Espinosa said the signed documents would boost economic cooperation, noting that Mexico was working to ease visa procedures for Turkish citizens.

Davutoglu expressed appreciation for Mexico's plan to ease visa requirements, adding that Turkey would begin issuing visas to Mexican citizens on their arrival at airports.

Espinosa arrived in Turkey Friday for an official visit at the invitation of Davutoglu.

Obama signs law to militarize US-Mexico border

President Barack Obama signed into law Friday legislation that will further militarize the US-Mexico border. It includes the deployment of Predator pilotless drones, like those used in Afghanistan and Pakistan, to conduct surveillance against immigrants crossing the border.

Obama signed the \$600 million bill without making any comment. Previously, the administration and its supporters had claimed that a crackdown on the border was a necessary precursor to comprehensive immigration reform, to include a path to legal status for undocumented workers.

The president's silence on any path to legalization only underscores that the border legislation is part of a turn to the right in the run-up to the 2010 midterm elections. The Democratic Party is preparing to compete with the Republicans in the scapegoating of immigrants by boasting of its record of police-state persecution of one of the most exploited sections of the American working class.

A statement issued by the White House said that the legislation, the Southwest Border Security Bill, would allocate the \$600 million "to enhance technology at the border, share information and support with state, local and tribal law enforcement, and increase (federal) presence and law enforcement activities at the border."

It added that the law would provide "increased agents, investigators and prosecutors, as part of a multilayered effort to target illicit networks trafficking in people, drugs, illegal weapons and money."

The bill will pay for the hiring of 1,000 more Border Patrol agents to be deployed along the Southwest border. With 20,000 such agents, the Border Patrol has already doubled in size since 2005. The government will also hire 250 new Customs and Border Protection officers and 250 Immigration and Customs Enforcement personnel.

The legislation allocates \$32 million for the deployment of more Predator drone aircraft to conduct spy flights over the border. Additional money will go to set up military style bases in the border area and to assist local police agencies.

The Obama administration had already ordered 1,500 National Guard troops to the US-Mexico border. These units should all be in place within the next weeks.

A written statement issued in Obama's name on Thursday, after the Senate's passage of the legislation in an extraordinary session, emphasized the border crackdown, while making no mention of normalizing the status of some 12 million undocumented immigrant workers who are facing conditions of super-exploitation and repression within the US.

Earlier this week, the administration's Immigration and Customs Enforcement director John Morton vehemently denied reports of plans for a wide-ranging amnesty for the undocumented. Right-wing groups denounced the administration after the leaking of an internal memo supposedly contemplating the possible granting of delays in deportation to limited categories of immigrants.

"The President doesn't support amnesty, the [Homeland Security secretary] doesn't support amnesty and I don't support amnesty," said Morton, speaking to Fox News. He vowed that his

agency would redouble its effort to increase deportations. "There is no administration in the history of this country that has removed more people from the United States," he said.

In his statement, Obama boasted of having made "securing our Southwest border a top priority since I came to office." He claimed that the new law would "build upon our successful efforts to protect communities along the Southwest border and across the country."

While vowing to "work with Congress toward bipartisan comprehensive immigration reform," the statement said that the purpose of such legislation would be "to secure our borders, and restore responsibility and accountability to our broken immigration system."

Gone is any reference to even the punitive measures included in a proposed pathway to legal residency for undocumented immigrants floated earlier this year. This bipartisan proposal would require these immigrants to confess to immigration crimes, pay fines and "get to the back of the line" of those applying for legal status.

Obama's secretary of Homeland Security, Janet Napolitano, appeared at the White House Friday to praise the new border legislation for providing "permanent resources" for enforcement and calling the effort "a matter of national security."

While Napolitano made a brief reference to "immigration reform," she indicated no timetable for enactment of such legislation, asserting that the issue was "in the hands of Congress." In other words, having reneged on an election promise to press for immigration reform during his first year in office, the Obama White House is making it clear that it will do nothing to push for normalizing the status of the undocumented. Instead, it is joining with the Republican right in an attempt to whip up anti-immigrant chauvinism with a campaign to convince the public that immigrants are responsible for rising crime, disappearing jobs and threats to "national security."

The bill was passed under extraordinary conditions, with both the House and Senate called into special sessions. For the Senate, it marked only the second time that such a session had been held during the August recess since the vacation period was formalized in 1970. The only other time was in response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Having secured unanimous consent from both Democrats and Republicans, the formality of the vote was carried out by just two senators.

The portrayal of immigration enforcement as some kind of national crisis is based entirely on right-wing anti-immigrant propaganda fomented by the Republican Party and abetted by the Democrats.

The recent passage of anti-immigrant legislation in Arizona—ruled unconstitutional last month by a federal court—has been followed by a proposal floated this week in Florida for an even more reactionary state law. Like its Arizona counterpart, the Florida law would order state law enforcement personnel to investigate the immigration status of state residents where there existed a "reasonable suspicion" that they are undocumented.

The legislation, proposed by Florida State Attorney General Bill McCollum, in an attempt to outdo an even more right-wing rival for the Republican gubernatorial nomination, would impose 20-day jail sentences for even legal resident aliens if they are caught not carrying their documents. It also would allow judges to impose stiffer criminal sentences on immigrants than they would on citizens.

The claims that such measures are justified by an immigration-driven crime wave, the stock-in-trade of Republican politicians like Arizona Governor Jan Brewer, have no factual basis whatsoever. Arizona itself has seen its crime rate drop 12 percent over the last year; between 2004 and 2008 it fell by 23 percent, even as its undocumented immigrant population rose.

And, according to FBI figures, the four US cities with populations over 500,000 that recorded the lowest rates of violent crime—San Diego, California, Phoenix, Arizona and the Texas cities of El Paso and Austin—are all in the border states that are now being treated by Washington as the scene of a national emergency.

There is a deliberate attempt by both parties, aided by the media, to associate immigrants with crime, drug-trafficking and the ongoing war between the Mexican military and the drug cartels. They deny the essential reality: that millions of people worldwide are driven to leave their homelands by intolerable economic and social conditions created by transnational banks and corporations that subordinate everything to profit.

Obama is outdoing the Bush administration in the brutality of the crackdown by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) against undocumented immigrants. According to recently released ICE figures, during the first nine months of the present fiscal year, the US government deported 279,035 people. This represents a 10 percent jump compared to the same period for Fiscal Year 2008—the last full fiscal year of the Bush administration. The number of people deported today is roughly double what it was five years ago.

While the Obama administration had claimed that its deportation campaign was targeted at so-called “criminal aliens,” the ICE figures reveal that only 17 percent of those deported were accused of serious crimes. More than half—51 percent—had no criminal record, while the rest had been charged with minor offenses.

Leading Republicans dismissed the new repressive legislation backed by Obama and the Congressional Democrats as insufficient, insisting on the deployment of far more personnel and resources along the border, combined with an even more draconian crackdown on the millions of undocumented immigrants living and working in the US. The official debate on immigration moves inexorably further to the right.

Many immigrant workers are torn from their families, which often include spouses or children who are US citizens. Undocumented immigrants also hesitate to travel back to their native countries to visit relatives, for fear of arrest at a US airport and subsequent deportation. These human tragedies are a matter of indifference to both big business parties.

Rather, the entire political establishment seeks to foment and exploit anti-immigrant chauvinism as a means of diverting rising popular anger over record unemployment and falling living standards away from their source, the profit system.

At the same time, the police state and militarized measures being employed against immigrants pose a grave threat to the democratic rights of all sections of the working class. There is no reason to believe that the Predator drones flying the border areas of the Southwestern US will be limited to spying on immigrants. They could well be used for the Afghanistan-style “targeted killings.” That is well within the realm of possible policy decisions by a White House that has already claimed the right to assassinate US citizens abroad.

The fight to defend democratic rights, jobs, wages and social conditions of working people in the US can only be waged successfully by unifying all sections of the working class – native-born and immigrant alike – against the reactionary, pro-capitalist policies of both the Democrats and the Republicans. This struggle must include the defense of immigrant workers against raids, deportations and sweat-shop exploitation by the employers. Working people must oppose the militarization of the US borders and uphold the right of workers from every country to live and work in the land that they choose.

Supreme Court rules Mexico City gay adoption legal

Mexico City (Reuters) - Mexico's Supreme Court upheld on Monday a Mexico City law allowing married same-sex couples to adopt children in its second landmark gay rights decision this month.

The court on August 5 threw out a challenge led by the federal government to the part of the law approving gay marriage, but only ruled on Monday -- after more than a week of deliberations -- on the legislation's more controversial adoption provisions.

Mexico City's left-leaning Mayor Marcelo Ebrard, expected to seek the presidency in 2012, pushed through the legislation this year, making Mexico City the first Latin American capital to extend to same-sex couples the same marriage and adoption rights as heterosexuals.

Mexico's ruling conservative National Action Party and the Catholic Church strongly opposed both provisions, arguing they would be destructive to traditional families.

"Given that the interests of the child must come first, the proposed reform is constitutional," said Supreme Court Justice Arturo Zaldivar.

Nine of the court's 11 judges voted to uphold the law.

Activists see the legislation as part of a sea change in attitudes on homosexuality in much of traditionally conservative Latin America.

Argentina became the first Latin American country to allow gay marriages and adoptions last month when the country's Senate approved the groundbreaking bill.

Mexico Peso Rises as Government Says Economy May Grow 5 Percent Next Year

Mexico's peso gained for a third day as Finance Minister Ernesto Cordero said the economy may grow as much as 5 percent next year, faster than the estimate for this year.

The peso rose 0.3 percent to 12.6925 per dollar at 8:52 a.m. New York time, from 12.7278 on Aug. 13. The currency has gained 3.1 percent this year against the dollar, the third-best performer among the 16 major currencies tracked by Bloomberg, behind Japan's yen and Singapore's dollar.

Cordero said the economy may grow between 4 percent and five percent next year, El Universal newspaper reported. Gross domestic product may rise 4.1 percent this year, he said.

"The number is definitely better than previously estimated," said Omar Martin del Campo, a trader at Banco Ve Por Mas SA in Mexico City. "We can't lose sight that these projections are tied to the performance of the U.S. economy."

The yield on Mexico's 10 percent bond due in 2024 fell three basis points, or 0.03 percentage point, to 6.65 percent, the lowest level since the government issued the security in 2005, according to Banco Santander SA.

Mexico Is Right to Retaliate Over U.S. Ban On Mexican Trucks

The Mexican government announced Monday that it will expand the list of U.S. products subject to punitive import duties in retaliation for a brazen, 15-year-long refusal of the United States to honor its NAFTA commitment to allow Mexican long-haul trucks to compete in the U.S. market. Given continued U.S. intransigence on the issue, Mexico's decision is understandable, if not laudable.

The dispute is not very complicated. Under the terms of the deal, Mexican trucks were to have been able to compete in U.S. border states by 1995, and throughout the United States by 2000. But President Clinton, at the behest of the Teamsters union, suspended implementation of the trucking provision on the grounds that Mexican trucks weren't safe enough for U.S. highways.

By 1998, the Mexicans had had enough, and brought a formal complaint under the NAFTA dispute settlement system, and in 2001, prevailed with a unanimous panel decision that found the United States in violation of the agreement, and ruled that Mexican trucks meeting U.S. safety standards had to be given access to the U.S. market.

In response to the NAFTA decision, Congress stipulated 22 safety requirements that Mexican trucks had to satisfy in order to gain access to the U.S. market. But before the U.S. Department of Transportation could grant any permits to Mexican truckers, in 2002, environmental and labor groups filed a lawsuit to block implementation on the grounds that the regulations violated U.S. environmental law.

In 2004, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously struck down the truck ban, and soon after a government pilot program was developed to allow a limited number of Mexican trucks to serve the U.S. market. But funding for the pilot program was cut off by a Teamsters-friendly Congress in 2008, which effectively put the U.S. market off limits to Mexican trucks once again—and the United States squarely in violation of its NAFTA obligations, again.

In August 2009, after it became apparent that the administration and Congress preferred the economic cost of the trucking ban to the political cost of crossing the Teamsters, the Mexican government tried to change the equation by imposing \$2.4 billion in retaliatory duties on about 90 U.S. products. A Mexican trucking association also filed a \$6-billion lawsuit against the U.S. government.

But with no discernible progress toward resolution over the past year, the Mexican government announced yesterday that it will expand the list of U.S. products subject to punitive, retaliatory duties in an effort to convince Congress and the administration to finally live up to America's word.

The Mexican government is right to retaliate, and to expand the list of products subject to punitive duties. Of course, retaliation hurts innocents, like U.S. businesses and workers, and Mexican businesses and consumers, who have nothing to do with the central dispute. And it increases the amount of red tape and the role of governments in international trade. But retaliation—when authorized by agreement and properly targeted—can also be an effective tool in promoting trade liberalization, reducing red tape, and diminishing the impositions of government.

It is by changing the political calculus that retaliation can be effective. Thus far, U.S. politicians have found the economic costs of the Mexican trucking ban and the retaliation to be tolerable (for themselves)—at least relative to the expected political costs from doing the right thing by ending the ban. By expanding the list to include other products, like oranges, the Mexicans hope to impress upon other U.S. interests, like the citrus industry in a very important swing state, that they have dogs in this fight as well.

Between the rising costs on the economic side of the equation and the diminishing political benefits on the other, support among politicians for the truck ban should dissipate.

The Obama administration's failure to connect the dots is surprising. Its fealty to the Teamsters directly undermines the lofty goals of its National Export Initiative, which seeks to double U.S. exports in five years. On trade policy, the administration appears yet to fully grasp that the hip bone's connected to the thigh bone, the thigh bone's connected to the knee bone, the knee bone's connected to the ankle bone, etc. When you restrict imports (in the immediate case, imports of Mexican trucking services), you restrict exports.

The rising economic and political costs of the truck ban suggest that something's going to have to give soon. By amplifying the stakes, the Mexicans are right to hasten that day.

Calderon Plans Steps to Boost Mexico's Trade, Attract Foreign Investment

Mexican President Felipe Calderon announced measures he said will cut red tape in the economy, increasing exports to Europe and Latin America and drawing more foreign investment. The measures will reduce the amount of information exporters must supply to the government to ship goods to Europe and Latin America, Calderon said, speaking to reporters today in Mexico City. He said he'd also slash the amount of time needed to acquire the certificate of origin, the document that shows that a product is made in Mexico.

“The government is firm in its commitment to deregulate the economy,” Calderon said. “We’re going to be able to spend less time and resources on paperwork.”

The announcement is part of a broader effort to trim bureaucracy in the \$1.09 trillion economy, including changes announced June 30 to simplify corporate tax payments. Companies will now have to pay a tax known as the IETU once a year instead of once a month.

Calderon said today he plans steps to encourage foreign direct investment, including allowing international companies to register electronically with the Economy Ministry instead of having to go to the ministry in person.

The Mexican peso rose 0.6 percent, to 12.5912 per dollar at 12:12 p.m. New York time, from 12.6625 yesterday.

Mexican mayor found dead 3 days after kidnapping

Monterrey, Mexico - The kidnapped mayor of a northern Mexican town was found dead Wednesday, extending a rash of deadly attacks on political figures in an area besieged by drug gang battles.

Santiago Mayor Edelmiro Cavazos' body was found near a waterfall outside his town, a popular weekend getaway for residents of the industrial city of Monterrey, said Nuevo Leon state attorney general Alejandro Garza y Garza.

Police have not determined a motive, but the assassination bore the hallmarks of drug cartels waging vicious turf battles in northeastern Mexico: Cavazos' hands were bound and his head was wrapped in tape.

Garza y Garza suggested it was a drug gang hit, saying Cavazos participated in state security meetings and was "showing his face in the fight against organized crime."

However, Cavazos had not made any dramatic security decisions since taking office in November 2009, said Jorge Santiago Flores, the local president of the mayor's National Action Party. He said it remains a mystery why anyone would want to kill Cavazos.

"He was a very kind person. He was a man who worked a lot in the community and always helped those in need, donating medicine and helping people who asked," Flores said.

Cavazos, 38, was kidnapped from his home Sunday night by 15 armed men wearing uniforms from a defunct federal police force, a tactic frequently used by Mexico's drug gangs.

Garza y Garza said the gunmen arrived in seven vehicles with police patrol lights. When Cavazos and his security guard went to see what was going on, the assailants forced them into the cars.

The security guard was driven around for about 15 minutes and released unharmed by the side of a road, Garza y Garza said. The guard then reported the kidnapping to police.

President Felipe Calderon, who belongs to the National Action Party sent his interior secretary, Francisco Blake Mora, to Nuevo Leon for a security meeting with the state government.

Nuevo Leon Gov. Rodrigo Medina said he would press for more federal soldiers and police in the state.

The region been besieged by drug gang fighting, including a new war between the Gulf cartel and its former ally, the Zetas gang of hit men.

Mexico's drug gang violence has surged since Calderon intensified the fight against traffickers in late 2006, deploying thousands of troops and federal police to root out cartels from their strongholds.

More than 28,000 people have since been killed in the country's drug war. The government says most are victims of cartel infighting. But assassinations of police, government officials and politicians have also increased.

In June, gunmen ambushed and killed the leading gubernatorial candidate for Tamaulipas state, which neighbors Nuevo Leon, a week before the elections. A mayoral candidate in Tamaulipas was killed in May.

A total of 191 soldiers have been killed fighting drug gangs between December 2006 and Aug. 1, 2010, according to a list of names on a wall of a Defense Department anti-narcotics museum. Reporters saw the list Wednesday during a tour of the museum - the first time the government has made the number public.

Mexican president expresses condolences over mayor's murder

Mexican President Felipe Calderon on Wednesday expressed condolences over the death of Edelmiro Cavazos Leal, the mayor of Santiago, a small town in the northern state Nuevo Leon.

"We express our most heartfelt condolences to the family of Cavazos Leal and our solidarity at this difficult time," said a statement from the president's office.

The statement said that the president had ordered the nation's interior minister, Jose Francisco Blake Mora, to review security in the area along with the regional government.

The mayor's body was found on Wednesday on the side of a highway linking Santiago to Cola de Caballo, another town in the same state. He was kidnapped on Sunday.

Nuevo Leon's state attorney, Alejandro Garza Garza, told local broadcasters that the murder was probably conducted by drug traffickers who wanted to challenge authorities.

"But the only thing they will achieve is to make us, the authorities, unite with more strength against organized crime," said the state attorney.

This was the second murder of a high-profile politician in Mexico this year. At the end of June, Rodolfo Torre Cantu, a gubernatorial candidate for the Institutional Revolution Party (PRI) in Nuevo Leon's neighboring state Tamaulipas, was gunned down along with four bodyguards during his campaign ahead of the nation 's July 4 regional elections.

Detailed Report/Venezuela

Moscow celebrates Colombia-Venezuela diplomatic ties

The Russian Foreign Minister underscored the political readiness of the governments of both countries to resume talks. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs praised on Thursday amended diplomatic relations between Venezuela and Colombia.

"Russia has received with satisfaction the news about reestablishment of diplomatic relations between the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the Republic of Colombia," stated a press release from the Russian Foreign Ministry.

The text noted that "political willingness of the governments of both countries has made reestablishment of dialogue possible," Efe quoted.

"We are convinced that this will help build relations between Caracas and Bogotá in the spirit of good neighborhood and taking into account mutual concerns, as well as reinforcing peace and stability in Latin America, with which Russia actively increases its engagement," the notice added.

Colombia refuses third-country verification of rebels' presence in Venezuela

Colombian Foreign Minister Maria Angela Holguin ruled out the possibility of a third country's verification to determine whether there are Colombian rebel camps in Venezuela, El Tiempo newspaper said Thursday.

"We are looking forward. We are going to see which security mechanisms we will enforce," Holguin was quoted as saying.

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez cut ties with Colombia on July 22 after Bogota accused Caracas of sheltering left-wing Colombian rebels. However, diplomatic relations were restored after Chavez met with Colombia's newly inaugurated President Juan Manuel Santos.

Holguin said she was to meet with her Venezuelan counterpart Nicolas Maduro on Aug. 20 and discuss the establishment of five commissions reached during the two presidents' meeting.

These commissions were initiated to address joint issues especially over economy, free trade and security.

Venezuelans Have Little Consensus on '21st Century Socialism'

For years, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has described his program of boosting state control over the economy as "21st Century Socialism". The president does not spell out how this version of socialism differs from 20th century socialist experiments in other countries, or from classical Marxism. Many Venezuelans have only a vague idea of what "21st Century socialism" means.

"I do not really know what his form of socialism is. I do not understand it. It must be something he invented," says one retiree from a well-to-do Caracas neighborhood.

Ask ordinary Venezuelans for a definition of 21st century socialism, and some are at a loss for words.

"I do not know a precise word. I know it has helped me," says a disabled woman from a poor neighborhood. "Some say socialism means assistance, protection, that sort of thing."

President Chavez defines his program in generalized terms.

"This nation belongs to everyone," he said. "It is everyone's property. And that property must be distributed equally, in harmony."

He ties his socialist ideals to Christianity.

"Christ cared about the poor, not the rich," he said. "Christ said: It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the poor."

Among Venezuelans who say they understand the meaning of 21st-century socialism, most define it in relation to their own political beliefs. A Caracas chef sees it in a positive light.

"Equal earnings, everyone living at the same level," he said. "Living well, with wealth distributed equally among the people."

But clothing designer Leslie Contreras heaps scorn on the concept.

"21st century socialism: a pretty way to say communism. That is all it is," she said. "Everyone ends up the same. The rich leave and the middle class becomes poorer."

President Chavez has been intentionally vague in defining the term, allowing him to mold the concept to fit the rhetorical need of the moment - according to political analyst Luis Vicente Leon, who adds that few Venezuelans spend time pondering political terminology as long as their needs are met.

"What do Venezuelans care about? That they have food, health care, medicine, and services," he said. "They do not care how it is provided, just that they have it."

In a neighborhood that sports a free dental clinic thanks to the government, Chavez-backers note that 21st century socialism is in its infancy.

"It is a work in progress," said one man. "We are on the path to socialism, to greater equality among Venezuelans."

But economist Orlando Ochoa says a day will come when the concept implodes.

"Twenty-first century socialism is an attempt to revive 20th century Marxist socialism, financed by oil money," he said. "Some people see it as humanism, cooperation, and social investment -

the way the government portrays it. The gulf between reality and perception will have to be bridged."

Until then - whether anyone can define it or not - the term remains the daily bread of Venezuela's political diet.

US reiterates that Palmer is the ambassador-designate to Venezuela

Washington has said it shares Palmer's "concerns" and that it has not received any formal notification from Venezuela against the prospective ambassador

Larry Palmer is still the ambassador-designate to Venezuela, said on Tuesday a State Department spokesman, Mark Toner, after President Hugo Chávez reiterated that his government would not accept the US diplomat.

"He is still our nominee," Toner said in a press conference, as quoted by AFP.

Chávez insisted on Monday that "no decent government could possibly welcome Mr. Palmer."

The US Senate -currently in recess until mid-September- has yet to vote on Palmer's nomination. The diplomat told the Senate that Colombian guerrillas are deployed in Venezuela. He pointed to "low morale" in the Venezuelan military and to Cuban influence in the Venezuelan Armed Forces.

Washington has said it shares Palmer's "concerns" and that it has not received any formal notification from Venezuela against the ambassador-designate.

The head of the US diplomacy in Latin America, Arturo Valenzuela, advocated the nomination of Palmer when he met with Venezuelan Ambassador to US Bernardo Álvarez in Washington last Wednesday, said a US State Department spokesman.

Bilateral Relations: Ahmadinejad praises Chavez for "revolutionary stands towards Iran"

Source: IRNA – IRI President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad here Monday appreciated Venezuelan government's revolutionary stands towards Iran in a written message to President Hugo Chavez.

According to the official website of the President's Office, Ahmadinejad has in the letter appreciated Caracas' stands regarding the recent anti-Iranian UNSC resolution, reiterating, "The Islamic Republic of Iran's government and nation are resisting firmly against the bullying and pressures of the global arrogance."

The UN Security Council and atop it the US and its western allies, says President Ahamdinejad, are totally opposed to the success and advancement of the independent countries and nations, as President Chavez, too, has said, creating obstacles in the way of their growth and progress. Ahmadinejad has also referred to the Iran-Turkey-Brazil trilateral Tehran declaration, as a sign of Tehran's good will, which faced "The efforts made by the Security Council, led by the United

States, a few European countries, and some permanent and non-permanent UNSC member states to issue a resolution, of course non-unanimously, against Iran.”

President Ahamdinejad has expressed hope that the structure of the United Nations would be drastically changed relying on cooperation and intensive consultations among various countries, particularly the oppressed and subjugated ones, in accordance with the real needs of the nations and the justice seeking efforts of the entire justice lovers and oppressed of the world.

The UN impotence in dealing effectively with the human catastrophes in such places as Gaza is contrasted with the highly politicized UNSC resolutions against Iran, under the US pressure in the letter, singling out the ineffective reaction of that world body towards the massacre of the world peace activists in International Peace Flotilla heading for the highly oppressed people of Gaza, carrying most needed basic necessities for the for remaining alive.

Communists: 'Jackal' should return to Venezuela

Caracas, Venezuela -- Venezuela's Communist Party urged the government on Monday to seek the repatriation of convicted terrorist "Carlos the Jackal," who is serving a life sentence in France for murder.

Party representative Pedro Eusse said President Hugo Chavez's administration should ask France to let Ramirez serve the remainder of his sentence in his homeland.

The Venezuelan-born prisoner, whose real name is Ilich Ramirez Sanchez, is not getting adequate health care in France and authorities there are denying his right to communicate with lawyers, Eusse charged.

"They have violated his human rights, he's been incommunicado," he said at a news conference.

Eusse described Ramirez's health as "delicate" without giving any details.

There was no immediate comment from France's government about Eusse's charges or from officials in Chavez's administration on the Communist Party's petition.

Ramirez is serving a life sentence for the 1975 murders in Paris of two French investigators and Michel Moukharbal, a Lebanese man who was an informant for the French government.

He also has been blamed for a series of Cold War-era bombings, assassinations and hostage dramas, including the 1976 hijacking of an Air France jet en route to Uganda. He has testified that he led a 1975 attack that killed three people at the OPEC headquarters in Vienna, Austria. Venezuela's then-oil minister, Valentin Hernandez Acosta, was one of the 70 hostage seized by the attackers and later freed in Algeria.

Ramirez was captured in Khartoum, Sudan, in 1994, and hauled in a sack to Paris by French secret service agents. Venezuela's government has questioned whether Ramirez's rights were violated when he was abducted and whisked away to France.

It wasn't known how Chavez's administration would react to the Communist Party's petition. Telephone calls to Venezuela's Foreign Ministry seeking comment from government officials went unanswered Monday.

Chavez has praised Ramirez in the past as a "revolutionary fighter," saying he selflessly joined the Palestinian struggle as a member of the Palestine Liberation Organization. The comment raised concerns among Jewish organizations such as the Simon Wiesenthal Center, which said Chavez condoned terrorism by eulogizing Ramirez.

One of the socialist president's political opponents expressed doubts he would ask for the return of a convicted terrorist.

"I don't think Chavez will accept it because a move like that wouldn't been seen in a positive way by the people, given that Carlos - even though he's a Venezuelan and the government is responsible for ensuring his rights - has been accused and convicted of terrorism," Timoteo Zambrano, an opposition politician, said in a telephone interview.

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