

Brazil to talk trade with India, South Africa

AFP, Brasilia

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva will host Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India and President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa here on September 13, the foreign ministry announced Friday.

The meeting will be the first summit in the India-Brazil-South Africa Dialogue Forum, created in 2003 to promote the interests of the three large emerging economies.

IBSA seeks to "unite these three great developing democracies behind a common vision on important matters on international agenda," the foreign ministry.

The day before the summit opens, chambers of commerce

from the three countries will hold a business seminar.

A similar meeting of academics will address science, technology, development policy, democracy and diversity.

Working groups will promote cooperation in agriculture, science, trade, investment, culture, defense, education, energy, health, tourism and technology cooperation will also be on the agenda.

The three nations formed a fund to combat hunger and poverty with projects in Guinea-Bissau and Haiti.

The summit will immediately follow a meeting of the Group of 20 developing nations. The G20, set up in 2003 and led by Brazil, will

meet September 9-10 in Rio de Janeiro.

Other developing nations are welcome to attend the meeting aimed at resuming stalled trade talks. In July, WTO chief Pascal Lamy suspended the Doha round when wealthy nations failed to compromise on tariffs and subsidies, especially in agriculture, at last ditch talks in Geneva.

The G20 now comprises 21 countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, China, Cuba, Egypt, the Philippines, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Paraguay, South Africa, Thailand, Tanzania, Uruguay, Venezuela and Zimbabwe.

British economy grows at fastest rate for two years

AFP, London

Britain's economy grew at its fastest rate in two years during the second quarter, compared with the first three months of 2006, unrevised official data showed on Friday.

Gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 0.8 percent during the three months to June 30 compared with the first quarter, the Office for National Statistics confirmed.

The figure, which marks the fastest quarterly rate of growth since the second quarter of 2004, was unrevised from last month's initial estimate.

On a 12-month basis, the economy grew at a rate of 2.6 percent in the second quarter compared with the same period in 2005, again unrevised from July's estimate.

The annual growth rate was also the highest since the fourth quarter of 2004. Both growth numbers tallied with analysts' consensus forecasts.

The ONS added that household expenditure rose by a two-

year high of 1.0 percent during the second quarter, up on the 0.3 percent increase in the previous three months.

On a year-on-year basis, household expenditure was 2.4 percent higher on the same quarter in 2005, up on the first quarter's equivalent of 1.5 percent.

However, Royal Bank of Scotland economist Ross Walker said that there were signs that GDP growth would ease in the third quarter.

"The economy grew at its fastest rate for two years in the second quarter, driven by a surge in consumer spending," he said.

"This momentum is unlikely to be sustained in the third quarter - we have already seen a fall in retail sales in July -- and a positive contribution to GDP growth from net trade remains elusive despite buoyant exports."

The Bank of England voted earlier this month to increase British interest rates by a quarter-point to 4.75 percent in a surprise move which was aimed at controlling inflation and dampening

Nickel, coffee hit peaks as oil prices spike

AFP, London

Crude oil prices rebounded, while nickel hit a historic peak and coffee futures in London reached their highest level in seven years in a volatile trading week for commodities.

On Friday, the Commodities Research Bureau's index of 17 commodities finished at 336.20 points, up from 330.62 points the previous week.

GOLD: The price of gold advanced, rebounding from a one-month low.

It jumped about 15.0 dollars on Monday amid tensions surrounding Iran's ongoing standoff with the international community over its nuclear programme.

On the London Bullion Market, gold prices increased to 621.25 dollars per ounce at Friday's late fixing, from 613.90 dollars a week earlier.

SILVER: Silver prices jumped to the highest point for almost three months.

Silver struck 12.69 dollars per ounce on Wednesday -- a peak last reached on May 31.

On the London Bullion Market, silver prices rose to 12.40 dollars per ounce at Friday's fixing, from 12.01 dollars the previous week.

PALLADIUM AND PLATINUM: Palladium prices touched a multi-month peak, while sister metal platinum lagged behind somewhat.

Palladium hit 347 dollars per ounce on Thursday, which marked the highest level since June 6.

On the London Platinum and Palladium Market, platinum rose to 1,223 dollars per ounce at the late fixing Friday, from 1,217 dollars the previous week.

BASE METALS: Base metal prices climbed higher, with star performer nickel reaching a historic high on declining stocks and rising demand from steelmakers.

The price of nickel broke through

the 30,000-dollar-a-tonne threshold for the first time Thursday, reaching 30,165 dollars per tonne.

On Friday, three-month copper prices on the LME gained to 7,506 dollars per tonne from 7,481 dollars the previous week.

Three-month aluminium prices firmed to 2,497 dollars per tonne from 2,484 dollars.

Three-month nickel prices surged to 29,300 dollars per tonne from 28,400 dollars. Three-month lead prices advanced to 1,220 dollars per tonne from 1,204 dollars.

Three-month zinc prices increased to 3,380 dollars per tonne from 3,295 dollars. Three-month tin prices rose to 8,600 dollars per tonne from 8,425 dollars.

OIL: Crude futures rebounded late in the week as supply concerns fuelled by Iran's standoff over its nuclear programme and production problems in the United States offset a surprise jump in stocks of US motor fuel.

At about 1600 GMT on Friday in New York, a barrel of crude for delivery in October advanced to 73.55 dollars per barrel from 72.10 dollars the previous week.

In London, a barrel of Brent North Sea crude for delivery in October increased to 73.78 dollars per barrel, from 71.92 dollars.

RUBBER: Rubber prices weakened owing to favourable growing conditions in leading Asian producer nations.

On TOCOM, Tokyo's commodity exchange, natural rubber for January delivery fell to 252.20 yen per kilogramme on Friday, from 252.80 yen a week earlier.

Singapore's RSS 3 January contract slid to 213.50 US cents per kilogramme on Friday, from 216.25 US cents a week earlier.

COFFEE: The price of coffee struck the highest point for more than seven years in London trade owing to low output in major producer Vietnam.

On LIFFE, Robusta quality for November delivery rose to 1,502 dollars per tonne on Friday, from 1,460 dollars a week earlier.

SUGAR: Sugar prices hit their lowest point this year before rebounding.

In London on Tuesday the price of white sugar hit a new low for 2006, reaching 373 dollars per tonne.

New York prices slid again below 12.0 cents, close to a nine-month low of 11.96 cents reached the previous week.

GRAINS AND SOYA: Grain prices advanced this week owing to keen buying, while soya stabilized amid rainy weather which boosts harvests but limits prices.

On the Chicago Board of Trade, the price of wheat for September delivery rose to 3.81 US dollars per bushel on Friday, from 3.61 dollars a week earlier.

Maize for September delivery increased to 2.26 dollars per bushel on Friday, from 2.18 dollars.

On the LIFFE, the price of a tonne of wheat for November delivery jumped to 84.75 pounds on Friday, the highest level since May 2004, from 82.00 pounds.

COTTON: Prices firmed on forecasts of rising Chinese demand, and following a heatwave in the cotton-producing US states of Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi.

On the New York Cotton Exchange (NYCE), the December contract stood at 55.60 US cents per pound on Friday, from 54.80 US cents a week earlier.

WOOL: Wool prices steadied in major producer Australia.

The Australian Eastern index closed at 7.46 Australian dollars per kilo on Friday, from 7.45 the previous week.

The British Wooltops index stood at 401 pence on Thursday, unchanged from the previous Thursday.



PHOTO: COMMERCIAL BANK OF CEYLON
S Renganathan, country manager (Bangladesh) of Commercial Bank of Ceylon Ltd, inaugurates the second offsite ATM (automated teller machine) booth of the bank on Satmasjid Road at Dhanmondi in Dhaka on Thursday. Senior officials, among others, were present.

SE Asia, Australia, NZ flag problems in FTA talks

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Southeast Asian nations, Australia and New Zealand Friday flagged difficulties in talks for a joint trade deal, but said they were confident of meeting a 2008 deadline to seal the pact.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), Australia and New Zealand are scheduled to finish negotiations for a free-trade agreement (FTA) by mid-2007, and implement the deal in January 2008.

Malaysia's Trade Minister Rafidah Aziz, who chaired a meeting between Asean economic ministers and their counterparts from Australia and New Zealand, said the nations were trying to be "pragmatic" about their differences.

"There are still some areas of difficulty, and some areas where the positions are not exactly the same," said Rafidah at a press conference with Australia's Trade Minister Mark Vaile and New

Zealand's Phil Goff.

"We hope that by weeding out the ones that are going to be problematical and the ones that are not really a priority, and concentrating on the global side, I am confident we can meet our deadline," she said.

The 10-member Asean, Australia and New Zealand launched talks for the trade deal in March 2005.

Progress has been slow in six rounds of talks, with Asean officials saying the areas of labour, environment and intellectual property that Australia and New Zealand want to introduce are sticking points.

Vaile, who hailed progress in talks on trade in goods, said Australia had taken on board the difficulties of negotiating with 10 countries at varying levels of development.

"It's not impossible or impassable issues, it's about how we structure a process that's unique to the arrangement to encompass

the needs of those different levels of development," he said.

"Our leaders do want this concluded in 2007. It's our responsibility to try and achieve that," he added.

New Zealand's Trade Minister Goff said labour and environment issues were always brought to the table in its negotiations with other countries.

"It's not about interfering in some other nation's sovereignty," he said. "It's an issue we will be talking about to see where there is common ground, if there is common ground and then take it from there."

Asean, Australia and New Zealand officials are to hold the next round of talks in the Australian city of Hobart in September.

Goods traded between Asean, Australia and New Zealand combined expanded in 2005 by 23 percent to 35.56 billion dollars compared to 28.84 billion dollars in 2004, a joint statement said.

China to rein in investment in coal-chemicals

AFP, Beijing

China will soon issue new regulations to put the brakes on increasing investment in the coal-chemicals industry which has been attracting interest amid soaring oil prices, state media said Saturday.

"Investment in coal-chemicals projects in China has shown signs of overheating -- many proposed plants will face great risk in terms of both technical feasibility and capital investment if we don't put a brake on them," the China Daily quoted an unnamed National Development and Reform Commission official as saying.

"The upcoming policy aims to set the coal-chemicals industry on the right development track," the official said.

The industry includes coal-liquefaction technology which offers an alternative to crude and has attracted a surge in investment due to high global oil prices.

According to the commission, the majority of the projects underway, with an annual capacity of more than 100,000 tonnes, do not have a viable technology and do not satisfy the government's criteria.

However, the regulations were not aimed at projects with foreign participation, according to the official.

In July, Anglo-Dutch energy giant Royal Dutch Shell and the main Chinese coal producer Shenhua announced they would launch a joint feasibility study for a coal-liquefaction plant with an investment of 12 billion dollars in the northwestern region of Ningxia, which has one of China's most important coal reserves.

Coal supplies more than two-

thirds of the country's energy needs.

South Africa's Sasol, one of the leaders in the sector, also has two factory projects in the northwest, in Ningxia and in Shaanxi province.

DHL opens quality control centre in Gulshan

DHL, the world's leading express and logistics company, has opened its modern new quality control centre (QCC) at its country office at Gulshan in Dhaka recently, says a press release.

The new centre is designed to ensure that shipment information is visible to the network within 15 minutes of the event capture, so that every shipment can be processed immediately, and every shipment query answered promptly.

The centre will also provide real-time visibility and pro-active operational crisis management 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The three key activities of the QCC are dynamic shipment movement, management, operational crisis management and security monitoring, the release added.

"The centre is the first of its kind in the country, and will serve as the nerve centre for all DHL Bangladesh shipment movement control. It will also provide a real-time link for us to pro-actively manage customers' shipments throughout DHL's extensive network," said Desmond Quiah, country manager of DHL Express Bangladesh.



Mirza Azizul Islam, chairman of Sonali Bank, receives a crest from Anis A Khan, chairman of Bangladesh Leasing and Finance Companies Association (BLFCA), at the inaugural ceremony of a foundation course for entry-level officers organised by the BLFCA recently.

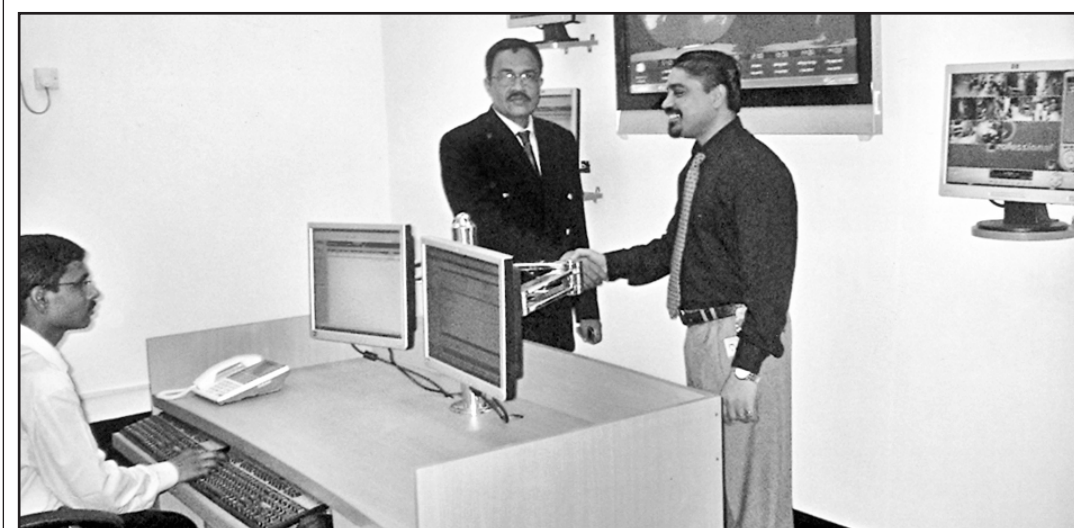


PHOTO: DHL
DHL Express Country Manager Desmond Quiah is seen with DHL Express Bangladesh National Operations Manager Stanford Tabarias at the launching ceremony of the company's quality control centre at Gulshan in Dhaka recently.