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BUSINESS

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Developed world blasted over WTO deadlock

LatAm leaders to push development as Rio summit opens

AFP, Georgetown

Leaders of Latin American countries opened a trade summit here late Friday, with Guyana's President, Bharrat Jagdeo, blasting developed countries for failing to eliminate barriers obstructing free trade.

"The slow pace of the Doha Round of trade negotiations within the World Trade Organisation is striking demonstration of the indifference on the part of the developed world to the welfare of the developing world," Jagdeo told members of the Rio Group.

Warning that "social discontent will continue to breed and endanger the stability of our community" if poor health care, access to education and rampant poverty continued,

the Guyanese leader called on the Latin American grouping to put aside other differences and pressure the developed world to focus on development.

"Our group should, therefore, seek, despite whatever differences we may have to find common grounds from which we can fight for the interest of the poor and underprivileged of our countries," Jagdeo, a Russian-trained economist, told the gathering that included Brazil's President, Luiz Inacio Lula Da Silva and Chile's President, Michele Bachelet.

Top trade negotiators of the United States, European Union, Brazil and India were this weekend due to hold low-keyed bilateral talks in London and Geneva to discuss

the trade talks that have stalled since last July over demands by Brazil and India that the Doha Round should focus on agriculture with safeguards for developing countries manufacturers.

But Jagdeo, whose country hands over the chairmanship of the Rio Group to the Dominican Republic at the end of the summit, cautioned negotiators that "no agreement is worse than any agreement."

"The experience thus far has shown that the more powerful states are concerned only with preserving their interests. Their triumph once again would be a calamity for developing countries such as ours," he added.

Jagdeo recommended that the Rio Group establish a quasi-cabinet

with specific presidential responsibilities aimed at ensuring "optimal and sustained representation."

The working session begins Saturday morning, by which time Dominican Republic's President, Leonel Fernandez; the President of Honduras, Manuel Zelaya and Panama's President, Martin Torrijos are expected to arrive.

The opening session was shortened because Fernandez or his representative was not here to deliver remarks, but the Argentine Foreign Minister, Jorge Taiana, called on delegates to ensure that the Rio Group to "avoid this mechanism being turned into a simple witness" and avoid duplication with other organisations.

New forum to promote bio fuel

PTI, United Nations

Five major fossil fuel consumers of the world including India have joined hands to develop, produce and promote the use of bio-fuel which will help cut down greenhouse gases besides increasing fuel security of nations.

India, the United States, China, Brazil, South Africa and the European Commission are partners in the initiative named "International Bio-fuels Forum" which will meet regularly for one year leading to a major international bio-fuel conference in Brazil in 2008.

The forum would also aim to redress trade imbalances and free up resources for investment in health, education and other social sectors in developing countries.

"But the Forum is not a closed club and others can join it," the participants said when asked about absence of Russia and the Middle Eastern countries which are major producers of oil.

Robust future seen for China's ICT sector

ANN/ CHINA DAILY

China's booming information industry is expected to maintain its robust health in the coming years, according to a senior government official.

The added value generated by the information industry is forecast to hit 2.6 trillion yuan (\$333 billion) by 2010, accounting for 10 percent of the country's GDP (gross domestic product), according to Lou Qinjian, deputy chief of the Ministry of Information Industry (MI).

That compares to 7.2 percent in 2005 and 4 percent in 2000.

"The information industry has become a pillar industry of China's national economy," Lou said, adding that a continued boom in the coming years would lay the foundations for China to become an information and communications technology (ICT)

powerhouse.

According to a blueprint jointly issued by the MI and the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), revenues from the country's ICT industry are expected to grow by 17.6 percent annually to reach 10 trillion yuan (\$1.28 trillion) by 2010.

The telecoms industry is expected to play a vital role in maintaining the rapid growth of the overall information industry.

The blueprint forecast that the country would have 1 billion telephone users by 2010, including 400 million fixed-line telephone subscribers and 600 million mobile phone users.

According to statistics released by the MI yesterday, China had 369 million fixed-line users and 467 million mobile phone subscribers by the end of January.

The growth in the number of fixed-line subscriptions is apparently slowing due to the increasingly mobile lifestyle in the country.

In January, the country's fixed-line operators signed up 1.03 million users, while there were 6.32 million newly added mobile phone subscribers.

With voice services increasingly going mobile, the government is expected to soon award fixed-line telephone operators China Telecom and China Netcom with licenses to move into the mobile telecoms market, which should boost mobile phone penetration in the country, industry analysts said.

Global stocks hit by more losses

AFP, New York

Volatile global stock markets suffered more losses Friday, with Wall Street hit by heavy selling as edgy investors retrenched ahead of the weekend with other bourses still skittish from this week's turmoil.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average slid 120.24 points (0.98 percent) to 12,114.10, as selling accelerated late in the day. It closed out the worst week for the blue-chip index in nearly four years, with a loss of 4.2 percent.

The tech-rich Nasdaq composite meanwhile slumped 1.51 percent for the day to 2,368.00, while the broad-market Standard and Poor's 500 index lost 1.14 percent to 1,387.17.

Market participants said a rising yen was feeding fears of a squeeze on hedge funds which have borrowed the Japanese currency at rock-bottom interest rates to fund higher-yielding investments elsewhere.

Concerns also resurfaced about the US housing sector after one

major lender reported delinquencies surged 19 percent last year while US regulators demanded tougher standards for certain mortgages.

Andrew Busch at BMO Capital Markets said investor confidence has been hammered, making a recovery difficult.

"When you have the upheaval we did, it's almost impossible for investors to feel confident to do anything but reduce risk," he said.

European and Asian markets were mainly lower. The London FTSE 100 was flat, showing a fractional gain of 0.2 points at 6,116.20. In Paris the CAC 40 fell 0.62 percent to 5,424.70 and in Frankfurt the Dax shed 0.56 percent to 6,603.32.

In Canada, Toronto's TSX composite slipped 0.91 percent for the day.

In Tokyo, the benchmark Nikkei 225 index closed down 1.35 percent, dropping for a fourth straight day to extend its losses to 5.3 percent over the week.



PHOTO: STAR

Arshad Haque, general manager (Marketing) of Transcom Electronics, distributes prizes among the company's best sales representatives in Rajshahi division at a function in Bogra on Friday .

US hails 'open skies' deal with EU

AFP, Washington

The United States on Friday hailed an "open skies" agreement with the European Union, saying the deal would boost economic activity and help lower air fares.

US Transportation Secretary Mary Peters said the tentative deal, announced earlier in Brussels, would be beneficial to all sides.

"The US and the EU have come together today to open our skies and expand the freedom of air travel between the world's two largest aviation markets," Peters said in a statement.



PHOTO: DBBL

Dutch-Bangla Bank Ltd (DBBL) recently installed 50 shallow tube-wells for supplying arsenic-free drinking water and set up 460 sanitary latrines for the underprivileged people living in Angarpota-Dahgram enclave in Lalmanirhat. Additional Managing Director of the bank AHM Nazmul Quadir is seen visiting the sanitation project.



PHOTO: JAYSON PHARMACEUTICALS

The Annual Marketing & Sales Conference-2007 of Jayson Pharmaceuticals Ltd was held recently in Dhaka. Md Salimullah, managing director of the company and chairman of Jayson Group of Companies, presided over the meeting, which was also attended by directors and other senior officials.

Cellphones changing lives of young Japanese

AFP, Tokyo

Almost all young Japanese say mobile phones have changed their lifestyles, with nearly one-third of them confessing to spending three hours or more a day on their mobile, a survey says.

Japan is the pioneer of third-generation telephones, which allow advanced functions such as Internet browsing and online shopping.

Of Japanese aged 20 to 40,

some 16 percent say they spend three to five hours a day on their mobiles. Nine percent use their phones for five to 10 hours -- and four percent spend even more than 10 hours a day.

The recent survey by technical solutions provider Nepro IT Co. Ltd. found that mobile usage has gone up from even a year ago, when one in four young Japanese said they spent more than three hours on their phones.

Ninety percent of participants

in the latest survey said that mobile phones have changed their lives in some way.

Nearly 70 percent admit they write fewer letters and postcards and 11 percent say their real-life interaction has also gone down, according to the study, which polled 3,750 people.

A mere 16 percent of young Japanese say they only use their mobile phones for the "old-fashioned" functions of chatting and sending text messages.