

## International Business News

## Big four emerging economies meet for first summit

AFP, Yekaterinburg, Russia

Leaders from the world's leading emerging powers met Tuesday to show their unity amid the economic crisis and coordinate strategy for increasing their influence.

Presidents Dmitry Medvedev of Russia, Hu Jintao of China, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva of Brazil and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh were in the Russian city of Yekaterinburg for their first official four-way meeting.

Dubbed the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China), the group will be seeking to show that their ambitions for growth to rival established economic powers like the United States remained intact despite the global crisis.

Russian Deputy Foreign minister Sergei Ryabkov said the group would seek at the meeting to formulate principles to further develop global financial architecture.

"A baby has just been born, essentially it's only in a crib yet," commented.

In an apparent reference to the United States, he added the forum was not aimed against any other nation and was "not an attempt to compete with anybody."

The idea for the BRIC grouping was spawned after research by US investment bank Goldman Sachs suggested the four economies were developing at such pace they could be amongst the world's strongest by 2050.

It remains to be seen whether the quartet will agree to create a more official format for the grouping, an idea that was never anticipated when the original research was undertaken.

## Broadband gains traction despite economic crisis

AFP, Singapore

More people worldwide are subscribing to high-speed Internet connections, despite the economic downturn, with China and other Asian countries among the growth leaders, a study showed Tuesday.

A report released at the CommunicAsia 2009 trade fair in Singapore showed that the number of broadband lines grew by 16.6 million globally in the last quarter alone to more than 429 million.

It said broadband penetration in 20 countries grew by 10 percent or more in the first quarter from the previous three months, with the biggest rise of 13.4 percent coming from India.

Broadband lines in China rose 5.66 percent quarter-on-quarter to 88.09 million, surpassing the United States, which had 71.03 million lines, said the report prepared for industry group Broadband Forum by analysts Point Topic.

Australia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and the Philippines also had growth rates above the global average of 4.0 percent, according to the report.

"It's now getting to a point where broadband is seen much more as a necessity rather than a luxury," said Robin Mersh, chief operating officer of the Broadband Forum.



AFP

An Indian mechanic works at the Cama Signature in Ahmedabad yesterday. Cama Motors, which is the oldest motor vehicle dealership in India, launched Cama Signature, a special division of Cama Motors, which would facilitate hassle-free import of new luxury cars at an unbeatable price and within a reasonably short span of time.

## China wants stimulus to favour local firms

AFP, Beijing

China has ordered local governments to favour domestic companies when carrying out projects that are part of a massive anti-crisis stimulus package, state media reported Tuesday.

The call for preferential treatment for Chinese firms follows claims by local businesses that a large part of Beijing's stimulus money has gone into foreign pockets, the China Daily newspaper said.

"For government procurement, apart from cases where products and services are not available domestically or cannot be acquired on reasonable commercial terms, domestic products should be purchased," the National Development and Reform Commission said.

The commission, the nation's top economic planner, issued the call in a notice published with eight other ministries in early June.

While the notice was issued at the start of the month, the bulk of the Chinese media only reported it this week. There was no explanation for the delay.

China unveiled a four-trillion-yuan (580-billion-dollar) package in late 2008 aimed at revitalising the economy, which has been hit by the global meltdown.

## Boeing shut out of orders race at Paris Air Show

AP, Le Bourget, France

Airbus edged into the lead Tuesday in a muted race with Boeing for plane orders at the Paris Air Show, which has been hobbled this year by recession, tight credit markets and plane crash concerns.

Planemakers at the world's biggest air show are trying to coax airlines and governments to open their pocket-books and buy more aircraft despite plunging passenger loads and revenues. Airbus CEO Tom Enders said Tuesday's sunny skies - after pelting rain on Monday's opening day -- boded well for business and promised more orders later in the day.

Boeing Co executives said the industry's prospects were robust, yet the Chicago-based aviation giant has reported no new orders so far. Airbus announced just one Monday, from Qatar Airways for 24 jets from the A320 family worth \$1.9 billion.

## ENERGY

## Solar power leads green revolution

AFP, Nayeb Ali Bazar

Like all rural Bangladeshis, Saidul Islam knows the hardships of summer, when his tin-roofed house turns into a furnace with not enough electricity to power even a fan.

For the 100 million Bangladeshis -- most of them farmers -- who live in the countryside, the notion of electricity supply is little more than an empty promise bandied about by politicians at election time.

Only villages close to highways or large farms with irrigation pumps have access to the national grid, and even then for an average of just one hour in four.

Fed up with promises of a connection that never came, Islam took matters into his own hands, and four years ago scraped together 335 dollars to buy a solar panel for the roof of his modest mudbrick-and-tin home.

"My family and friends thought I was stupid, but I knew it would be worth it even though the price was eight months of income," said Islam, who lives in the village of Nayeb Ali Bazar, 80 kilometres (50 miles) north of Dhaka.

The investment has more than paid off for the 40-year-old tailor, who used to finish work when the sun set.

Now most days he sews until midnight, thanks to five hours of power from the solar panel, and his income has doubled.

For the 70 percent of Bangladesh's 144 million people who have little or no access to electricity, alternative energy sources are the only option.

Years of under-investment means state-owned power plants generate only 3,500 megawatts of electricity a day, whereas demand is 6,000 megawatts and growing by 500 megawatts a year due to increasing industrialisation.

The government, elected in December, has promised to boost power supply but says improvements are at least three years off.

In the meantime, figures show that Bangladeshis are doing it for themselves. In the past year alone, the number of solar-powered household systems has doubled to



A woman stands at the entrance to her home with a solar panel on the roof in Nayeb Ali Bazar on the outskirts of Dhaka. For nearly two-thirds of the population there is no electricity supply because the national grid has not yet reached rural areas. Some families in rural areas have taken matters into their own hands and installed solar panels in their gardens or on the roofs of their mudbrick-and-tin homes.

300,000, delivering electricity to 2.5 million people.

Leading the rapid expansion is Grameen Shakti, a sister concern of Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus's micro credit giant Grameen Bank.

The charity, along with 14 other smaller organisations, extends loans with generous conditions to enable the poor to purchase the wherewithal to produce solar energy.

"Solar systems are selling so fast in rural areas that we're struggling to keep up with demand," said Dipal Barua, Grameen Shakti's head.

Growth also means new employment opportunities.

"We have created some 20,000 green jobs, some 2,000 of them employing rural women who earn a decent income of 100 dollars a month," Barua said.

"Our goal is to get half of the country's rural households using solar energy by 2015 and create jobs for 100,000 women."

Energy expert Shahidul Islam, from the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, said the rapid expansion of solar energy had helped bring the cost of panels down.

"What we are witnessing in

rural areas is nothing short of a green revolution," he said. "It is changing the face of rural Bangladesh, which has until now been in the dark."

Local company Rahimafrooz, which produces batteries to store the solar energy, has tripled output this year to meet demand.

"The renewable energy business in Bangladesh is the fastest growing green industry in the world," said company CEO Niaz Rahim.

"It will be a billion-dollar industry within the next six years. Every solar accessory except the panels is now produced in Bangladesh

which means we are going to be self-sufficient very soon to keep driving the growth."

In Bhutuli, north of Dhaka, greengrocer Nurul Islam jokes that his village was once renowned for producing jackfruit, but is now better known for the number of solar panels sprouting from its roofs.

"The best thing about having solar energy is coming home at 10pm from work and seeing my three sons reading their books," he said.

"We never had the opportunity to do this in the past. It's changing our country's fate."

## CAREER

## Layoff fear motivating many workers

AP

Her job description says Madeline Adams is a social worker. But lately she's begun volunteering for tasks she never had before at the St. Louis marriage counseling agency where she works: planning events, ordering supplies, stocking shelves. She estimates she's put in hundreds of hours of unpaid overtime work.

Adams isn't gunning for a promotion. She just wants to keep her job.

Bosses around the country these days are discovering it's not too much ask for a little extra help around the office.

More employees seem to be showing up early, forgoing vacation time, taking on extra projects and doing it all with a smile (whether real or otherwise).

It's hard to say just how widespread the phenomenon is. But Labor Department figures show workers have sharply boosted their productivity over the past year as layoffs mounted. Workers' output-per-hour jumped 2.7 percent during 2008 -- nearly double the increase during 2007 and triple the increase in 2006.

Not all that extra productivity has been voluntary. Some workers are simply forced to do more as co-workers leave, notes Steve Davis, an economist with the American Enterprise Institute.

The pressure mounted Friday, when the government said employers cut 345,000 jobs in May, and the nation's jobless rate hit a quarter-century high of 9.4 percent. Fear of being the next layoff is pushing some workers to fight harder to cling to their jobs, said Bruce Tulgan, founder of New Haven, Conn.-based Rainmaker Thinking Inc., workplace consultants.

Often, the efforts amount to common sense. People dress better and show up early. They say nice -- OK, flattering -- things to the boss. And they try to look busy.

"I've started to see a sea change," Tulgan said. "A growing number of people are saying: I've



Graphic designer Chris Kirkman poses near his firm in San Diego recently. Kirkman said he learned the hard way that it pays to hold on to vacation days. He was laid off earlier this year and was paid for accrued vacation time, which helped him pay bills before he landed a new job this spring.

got to roll my sleeves up and do something now. They're finding ways they can identify problems before they happen."

Some workers are aiming for the "halo effect," said Bernie Sparks, founder of the 21st Century Leadership workplace consulting: When managers decide who goes and who stays, those seen as having a halo over their heads stand a better chance of surviving.

That's what Chris Kirkman is thinking. A graphic designer in San Diego, Kirkman plans to scrap the weeklong summer vacation he and his wife usually take. They'll

instead take off a Friday and go on a long weekend road trip.

Kirkman says he thinks avoiding absences can help an employee build a reputation as especially dedicated to the company.

"It kind of pays to hold on to your vacation days," Kirkman said. "It not only helps when you get laid off, but it helps you work a little bit harder for your management to see."

Tulgan says forgoing vacation time isn't likely to save anyone's job. Managers tend to calculate the overall value each worker brings, regardless of how much or

how little vacation they take.

"But on the other hand, if you disappear on a long vacation and nobody really misses you, then you might be putting ideas in a manager's head," he said.

And it's hardly guaranteed that anyone's sudden boost in productivity or attitude can avert a layoff. Bosses tend to see through behavior that amounts to, well, sucking up, said Gary Walstrom, founder of Culture Index Inc. consulting firm in Kansas City, Mo.

Walstrom helps companies decide whom to let go. He urges them to focus on hard data -- shedding the salesmen who generate the lowest revenue or the customer service staffer with the most unresolved complaints.

Someone who starts showing up early once the economy sours isn't necessarily worth keeping.

Kathie Martin treats each workday as an eight-hour job interview. At 59, she has more than 30 years' experience in marketing and public relations. But she isn't counting on it to assure her job at Alabama Public Television in Birmingham.

In January, Martin was told her public relations position would be eliminated in two months. Then she got a break: A co-worker left his job in the non-profit station's fundraising department, creating an opening.

Martin had never done fundraising. But her boss offered her a deal: She could stay at the station if she spent most of her time on fundraising. She leapt at the chance.

She feels today's tight economy doesn't provide the luxury to turn down any job, even if it's not in your field of expertise.

"You can't just rely on what you already know; you have to keep learning," she said. "The more you know, the more valuable to the company you are."

Learning how to solicit money has demanded new skills, Martin said. So she's working longer hours -- and not complaining about it.

Some unionized workers have

decided to accept pay cuts or sacrifice benefits to save their jobs. In Multnomah County, Ore., county workers voluntarily agreed to surrender their usual cost-of-living pay raises to save the county money.

Union president Ken Allen said his members realized that sinking tax revenue could eventually force layoffs. The concessions are temporary, he said. Workers will wait until revenue rises to ask for the raises back.

Companies can use the recession as a motivating force, said Peter Cappelli, professor of management at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business.

"It's possible that you can scare people into performing better," Cappelli said. "It is also possible you might be able to engage the employee in some sort of improved performance if there is this view that: 'If we all pull together, we might get through this.'"

Not that things always work out smoothly.

"Workers in a downturn can also get so nervous that they just freeze up and aren't able to do good work, especially if they're afraid of being laid off and it's not clear what the standards are," Cappelli said.

That's why some employees are pushing for more face time with the boss.

Luke Walters, an engineering construction consultant in Chicago, grew fearful last year as construction projects slowed. His firm still had work. But he'd heard of engineers being laid off at other firms.

He met with his manager.

"I said: Look, is the economic downturn going to affect me and my position?"

His manager said it eventually could. But he agreed to notify Walters if job cuts might be looming. Meantime, Walters can focus on his work and keep his productivity up, without feeling the need to send out résumés to potential employers.