

Viewing cable 06BUENOSAIRES477, MEDIA REACTION US, COLOMBIA SIGN FREE TRADE

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06BUENOSAIRES477	2006-02-28 20:56	2011-08-30 01:44	UNCLASSIFIED	Embassy Buenos Aires

VZCZCXYZ0008
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBU #0477/01 0592056
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 282056Z FEB 06
FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3646
INFO RHMFIUU/CDR USSOCOM MACDILL AFB FL//SCJ2//
RULGPIUA/USCOMSOLANT

UNCLAS BUENOS AIRES 000477

SIPDIS

STATE FOR INR/R/MR, I/GWHA, WHA, WHA/PDA, WHA/BSC,
WHA/EPSC
CDR USSOCOM FOR J-2 IAD/LAMA

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [KPAO OPRC KMDR PREL MEDIA REACTION](#)
SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION US, COLOMBIA SIGN FREE TRADE
AGREEMENT DISPUTE BETWEEN ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT AND
MONSANTO CORPORATION RUSSIAN-IRANIAN DEAL AVIAN FLU
02/28/06

1. SUMMARY STATEMENT

Today's leading international stories include a free trade agreement reached between the US and Colombia; a US Embassy press release asking for a fast solution of the dispute between the Argentine Government and Monsanto corporation; implications of the nuclear agreement between Russia and Iran; and the risks posed by the avian flue.

2. FRONT-PAGE HEADLINES ON US-COLOMBIAN FTA

- Business-financial, center-right "InfoBae" (02/28)
"Colombia signs an FTA with the US."
- Business-financial "El Cronista" (02/28) "Colombia and the US reach an FTA."

3. INSIDE-PAGE HEADLINES ON US-COLOMBIAN FTA

- Leading "Clarín" (02/28) "A free trade agreement is reached between Colombia and US."
- Daily-of-record "La Nación" (02/28) "Colombia strengthens its ties with the US." "Both countries sign a broad FTA."
- Business-financial "Ambito Financiero" (02/28) "US adds Colombia - s FTA is reached."
- Left-of-center "Página 12" (02/28) "Colombia reaches FTA with the US." "Uribe finishes homework with the US."
- Conservative "La Prensa" (02/28) "Colombia and US sign FTA."
- Liberal, English-language "Buenos Aires Herald" (02/28) "US, Colombia sign free-trade deal."

4. OPINION PIECES AND KEY STORIES

- "Colombia strengthens its ties with the US"

Daily-of-record "La Nación" reports (02/28)
"Yesterday, after almost two years of intense negotiations, the US and Colombia, its largest Latin American ally, reached a free trade deal having a strong political dimension - it includes safeguards for sensitive sectors of the Andean country in the name of Washington's regional 'strategy.'

"... Only three months away of Colombian presidential elections, in which President Alvaro Uribe will seek to be reelected, both countries will have to focus on obtaining congressional support for the ratification of the treaty..., which could take one year.

"... According to analysts, through this new FTA, Washington is making progress in its attempts to put a brake on Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez's regional influence... After Peru, Colombia is the second Andean country reaching an FTA with Washington. For its part, Ecuador still has not managed to do so and it should resume negotiations by mid-March."

- "Colombia and the US sign FTA"

Natalia Labruna, columnist of business-financial "InfoBae," writes (02/28) "According to Colombian negotiators, led by Trade Minister Jorge Humberto Botero, the FTA reached between the US and Colombia has three basic pillars - transparency, coordination with the private sector, and hope for the country.

"According to Botero, 'It is far more important for Colombia to access US markets than it is for the US to

access the Colombian market.'

"... For his part, USTR Robert Portman underscored that the new deal will also contribute to creating jobs in the US and increasing exports of the agricultural, industrial and service sectors."

- "US asks for quick solution of the dispute with

Monsanto"

Leading "Clarín" reports (02/28) "Through a subtle diplomatic language, the US Embassy in Buenos Aires asked for a quick solution of the conflict between the Argentine Government and US corporation Monsanto over the royalties on RR transgenic soy, for which Monsanto demands the collection of 'royalties' in spite of the fact that it never had IPR on said seed in the country.

"... It is absolutely unusual that the US Embassy in Buenos Aires speaks of a conflict between a private corporation and the country. However, the excuse for the communiqué was the need for correcting journalistic versions on alleged statements made by US Assistant Secretary of Agriculture John Peen. As a matter of fact, the US communiqué made it clear that the US is pleading for a 'fast' solution of this thorny royalty problem, which will let Argentina 'continue playing a leading role in biotechnology.'

"Argentine government sources made it clear that the Government will not yield to Monsanto's judicial pressure."

- "A measure whose extent is hard to assess"

Oscar Raul Cardoso, international analyst of leading "Clarín," writes (02/28) "... The agreement between Moscow and Tehran is for now no more than an ambitious draft. It is the design of a bi-national corporation that has not come into existence yet because the details of the project are still pending of negotiation...

"Actually, the Russian-Iranian agreement was reached at the same time some US intelligence sources (perhaps s deliberately) made public that Tehran is already enriching uranium in small amounts in its own facilities. It is not by chance that yesterday Adam Ereli, a spokesperson of the US Department of State doubted the efficiency of what Russian envoys to Iran obtained.

"Obviously enough, Washington would not happily receive the announcement. The US prefers that the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency)'s Board of

Governors decides to submit the Iranian case to the UN Security Council and political arm-wrestling starts in order to increase pressure on Iran...

"If Russia used this announcement to hinder, although temporarily, the inclusion of the issue in the UN Security Council's agenda, the Bush administration would be frustrated."

5. EDITORIALS

- "Preparation vis--vis the avian flu"

Leading "Clarín" editorializes (02/28) "The risk of a massive contagion of avian flu has put all sanitary systems on alert. So far, most cases of contagion have occurred in Asian countries...

"However, the pandemic may not acknowledge any borders whatsoever, and, thus, the risk of contagion has exponentially increased. On the other hand, existing vaccines have not proved effective vis--vis a mutation of the virus...

"In this way, everything indicates that we continue entering an increasing and irreversible zone of alert regarding one of the most serious threats to health and economy in the short run. The virus implies a sanitary and economic risk and, therefore, we should be prepared to put a brake on its spreading."

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