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BRAZIL

Bush to press free trade plan

President Bush headed from the Summit of the Americas to Brazil to meet with leaders to discuss his free-trade proposal.

By Stan Lehman

Associated Press

BRASILIA - President Bush arrived here Saturday for a brief visit during which he is expected to discuss with his Brazilian counterpart ways to revive talks aimed at creating a free-trade zone in the Western Hemisphere.

Marco Aurelio García, the special advisor for international affairs in Brazil's presidency, has said bilateral issues, such as ones involving trade, health, technology and the environment, will top the presidents' agenda. Analysts here, however, say the stalled project to create the Free Trade Area of the Americas, is likely to dominate the talks.

U.S. National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley said in a news briefing earlier this week in Washington that the slow progress of the FTAA will be one of the issues Bush will discuss with Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. "It has not moved as quickly as we would have liked," Hadley said.

The FTAA was scheduled to be finalized at the beginning of 2005, but has stalled mainly over Brazil's protests that the United States would not open markets to key Brazilian exports, such as orange juice, sugar and iron ore. But Brazilians were encouraged by recent U.S. criticism of European agricultural subsidies and customs barriers in the Doha round of the World Trade Organization.

The United States accounts for nearly 20 percent of all Brazilian exports. Last year Brazil shipped about \$31 billion worth of goods to the United States. In the first nine months of this year, exports reached \$26 billion.

Speaking on the sidelines of the 34-nation Summit of the Americas, which Bush also attended, Lula da Silva said the FTAA talks should wait until after next month's WTO negotiations in Hong Kong. Ongoing WTO talks aim at slashing tariffs around the world and boosting the planet's economy.

Several anti-Bush protests were held around the country by trade unions, student organizations and leftist groups ahead of the American president's visit.

In the hours preceding Bush's arrival, in Sao Paulo, Brazil's largest city and its industrial and financial center, about 1,000 demonstrators protested in front of an American bank.

Meanwhile, the capital city was calm with no outward signs of what local media have described as the largest security operation ever mounted in the country's history.

According to a federal police statement, close to 500 police agents are mobilized to protect Bush, including snipers, antibomb squads and sniffer dogs.

A navy patrol boat will also be deployed on the artificial Paranoa Lake in front of the hotel where Bush is expected to stay.