

We're Sure Paying Attention to the U.S., Says Brazil's Foreign Minister

Contributed by Benedito Mendonça
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In a hearing before Brazil's Foreign Relations and National Defense Commission, the Brazilian Minister of Foreign Relations, Celso Amorim, rebutted press reports that Brazil is not paying attention to the United States.

"That is totally false. Over the last two years our exports to the US have risen 40%. If that is little attention, it is a surprise to me," said the Minister.

Amorim's comments were part of a report on the country's foreign relations over the 32 months of the Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva administration in which he rebuffed media criticism of the Foreign Ministry and its performance.

The Minister pointed out that ten of the thirty-one countries where Brazil exported most over the last six months were developing countries.

Those countries were: India, in first place, followed by Russia and Nigeria; there were five South American countries on the list: Venezuela, Peru, Ecuador and Colombia (all members of the Andean Community), and Argentina; the list ends with Thailand and South Africa.

"What this shows is that our policy of strengthening ties with developing nations has been a success," declared Amorim.

He added that just with Nigeria, where the two countries deal with petroleum, bilateral trade reached US\$ 170 million (400 million reais) in the first half and could easily reach US\$ 424 million (1 billion reais) soon.

As for Arab countries, which have gotten special attention, including a Lula visit, Brazilian exports rose 45% in 2004, compared to 2003, and are up over 20% so far this year.

Exports included 700 buses to Qatar and 15 Embraer aircraft to Saudi Arabia, which Amorim said were results of the Latin America-Arab Summit in Brasília this year.

"The importance of these exports is that commercial decisions in these countries are political decisions," said the minister.

With regard to lack of success, Amorim said he was pleased to have the opportunity to "speak of failures," explaining that the decision to present a Brazilian candidate to head the World Trade Organization was seriously thought out and his defeat did not affect Brazil's international prestige.

Concerning Brazil's vote in the Human Rights Commission of the UN in favor of not censuring Cuba for human rights violations, Amorim pointed out that the Lula administration seeks "operational partnerships with other developing nations that effectively improve the ideals of democracy, social reform and liberty for all."

He explained that whereas Brazil had always abstained in the past on the Cuba vote, this time it voted jointly with an increasing number of South American countries.

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