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## Seoul demo

SsangYong Motor Company workers take part in a huge anti-government rally in Seoul Wednesday. The protesters mourned the suicide death of ex-president Roh Moo-hyun while denouncing the current South Korean administration.



GETTY IMAGES

## Trail fix

Tim Walters works on a U.S. government-funded stimulus project repairing the South Kaibab Trail in Grand Canyon National Park. It's the biggest trail reconstruction project in the Grand Canyon since the 1960s.



REUTERS

## Good on gas

A man rides a moto-taxi – called "reksha" – through traffic in Kandahar City, capital of the Afghan province where Canadian soldiers are based. With a population of about 325,000, it is Afghanistan's second largest city.

# BRAZIL, LULA IN BIG LEAGUES

## CHARM AND DRIVE KEY TO PRESIDENT'S SUCCESS AS ONCE-UNDERACHIEVING COUNTRY'S STAR RISES

STUART GRUDGINGS  
REUTERS

**R**IO DE JANEIRO – When a former peanut vendor and radical union leader with little schooling became Brazil's president in 2003, many believed Latin America's underperforming giant had shot itself in the foot once again.

Brazil's financial markets had plunged over the previous year at the thought of Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva leading the economy, and Wall St. experts feared there could be worse to come. Lula's response was to remind investors in his trademark folksy style that not everyone with scruffy facial hair is a communist.

"They forget that Jesus Christ had a beard," he said.

Seven years on, Lula takes his place at a summit of top emerging powers in Russia next week with few disputing his role as a saviour for Brazil's economy and its global standing.

At home, his conservative economic policies long ago won over panicky investors while social programs that helped lift around 19 million people out of poverty have ensured approval ratings above 80 per cent.

A five-year economic boom fuelled by commodities exports, skillful diplomacy and Lula's gruff charm that plays as well at world summits as in Rio de Janeiro slums have helped Brazil become a diplomatic heavyweight and a developing-world leader.

In an interview Wednesday, Lula reeled off a list of countries he had been the first Brazilian leader to visit since the 19th century, saying the goal of his active diplomacy is to find opportunities for Brazilian businesses.

"In business, we have to find new partners and find opportunities that exist. We've been doing this for six years already and the result has been extraordinary," he said.

Unburdened by major security concerns, unlike fellow "BRIC" emerging powers Russia, India and China, the 63-year-old Lula has expanded Brazil's role seemingly without making enemies. U.S. President Barack Obama recently called Lula "my man," even as fellow developing countries increasingly look to Brazil to represent their interests against the United States and other rich countries in world trade and economic summits.

"He took every opportunity that was going," said Richard Bourne, a senior research fellow at London's Institute of Commonwealth Studies and the author of a book on Lula. "He has come to be seen as a serious player, but not just him – Brazil has come to be seen as a serious player."

It is a far cry from 2002, when some economists and fund managers said Lula would be disastrous for the economy and his opponents warned his lack of education and English language skills would be ruinous for Brazil's diplomatic stature.



RICARDO STUCKERT REUTERS

Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, at play, takes his place at a summit of emerging powers next week, but the Brazilian president must step down next year.

The big question then was whether Brazil would go the same way as Argentina, which was in a deep economic crisis after defaulting on its debt.

By 2006, Brazil had paid off its International Monetary Fund loans early and last week it pledged to lend the IMF \$10 billion U.S. Lula's orthodox policies have alienated some of his Workers' Party colleagues but clearly guaranteed economic stability.

Brazil last year won coveted investment grade ratings and it has escaped the worst of the world financial crisis.

Lula has also used his magnetism, drive and compelling life story – the seventh child of a poor, broken family who lost a finger in a factory lathe and became Brazil's first working-class leader.

"Brazil's problem in the past had always been – even when it was performing well – it was such an unequal country and had no moral underpinnings for its desire for some level of international influence," said Peter Hakim, president of the Inter-American Dialogue in Washington. "Lula's election and his ability to govern showed the vibrancy of Brazil."

Lula has taken every advantage of the goodwill with a hyperactive foreign policy that has seen him visit 75 countries and open 33 embassies, 14 of them in Africa as he pushes a "south-south" agenda. He has spearheaded developing countries' efforts to get rich countries to dismantle farm subsidies, engaged more in global climate talks, and taken a lead role in demanding more developing-country clout in the wake of the financial crisis.

World-class companies like oil firm Petrobras and miner Vale have flour-

ished under Lula, helping spread Brazilian investments and influence in Latin America and beyond.

An equally hectic schedule in Brazil, be it visiting slums, opening public works projects or giving his weekly radio broadcast, has helped maintain his popularity.

"His charisma and his ability to mobilize the poor have been remarkable," said Kenneth Maxwell, director of the Brazil Studies Program at the Centre for Latin American Studies at Harvard University.

Maxwell said Lula and his team came to power fully expecting another financial meltdown given Brazil's recent history of crises, leading them to avoid grandiose projects and to stockpile foreign reserves. That left his government in good stead when a global crisis finally came last year.

After a stuttering start, when he said the crisis would arrive in Brazil only as a "ripple," Lula has since shown his ability to turn an unpromising situation to his advantage.

He has used it to take a stand against the global economic status quo, backing moves to boost the role of the broad G20 group and pushing for next week's first BRIC summit.

Critics point to Lula's failure to tackle long-standing problems that hamper Brazil such as its stifling bureaucracy, inefficient public spending, and the corruption that rocked his own government in a major scandal in 2005.

But one measure of Lula's success is that now it is the prospect of him leaving power that causes jitters. He can't run for a third term in October 2010 elections, and his likely successors appear unable to match his broad appeal.

## the right chemistry

### SILK MIGHT PREVENT NIGHTTIME FROM BECOMING MITE TIME

I've long had a special appreciation for silk, going back to the days when I first started practising magic as a hobby.

One of the first effects any amateur magician learns is to "vanish" a silk kerchief by stuffing it into an apparently bare hand. From this you progress to magically changing the colour of a silk kerchief and, if you are really devoted, to making it dance in your hand.

Actually, to be honest, these days we use polyester instead of silk. It's a matter of cost, but nobody refers to the vanish of a "polyester." It is always a "silk."

Because of my special relationship with silk, my ears immediately perked up when a friend asked for my opinion about SmartSilk.

It sounded like some new magic trick but, it turned out, SmartSilk offered a different type of magic. It was the trade name for a line of mattress covers, pillowcases and comforters that were advertised to reduce the risk of allergies and asthma triggered by various allergens commonly found in bedding. There was more. The special wicking properties of the machine-washable silk were said to transfer heat and humidity from sleeping people, making for a more comfortable sleep – especially for menopausal women plagued by night sweats.

When I asked the Montreal company that had developed SmartSilk for more informa-

*"Less moisture for dust mites means more comfort."*

tion, I sure got it. Reams of it. And I got a bonus – a full set of SmartSilk bedding to try.

Since I had never slept with silk before, I was game.

So what are these allergens in bedding that have spawned a host of protective products such as SmartSilk?

Well, here's the yucky tale: The fact is, you never sleep alone. You sleep with bugs. Lots of them. In fact, probably several hundred thousand. They're called dust mites, and they just love mattresses and pillows.

Why? Because here in the comfort of a warm and humid environment they can dine on a buffet of dust mite delights. Human skin flakes are a particular delicacy.

And they're sloughed off in large quantities, especially when there is hectic activity on top of the sheets. Animal dander is also appreciated. Sleeping with a cat or dog can turn your mattress into a luxury resort for mites.

Now, don't go looking for the bugs unless you are equipped with a magnifying glass. And you will probably not like what you see, unless, of course, you enjoy watching tiny eight-legged arachnids cavorting with reckless abandon. They're eating, mating (likely far more often than their meal source on top of the sheets), laying eggs and, worst of all, defecating.

And therein lies the real problem. Dust mite excreta are loaded with allergens that can cause human misery. To digest the organic detritus with which we so abundantly supply them, the bugs produce digestive enzymes, remnants of which find their way into their poop. The microscopic droppings readily es-



JOE SCHWARCZ

cape from bedding to torment the roughly 20 per cent of the population sensitive to mite enzymes.

These poor souls itch, their eyes water, their noses run, they develop eczema, and they sneeze. As congestion builds up, they may even snore.

They need help.

Mites really frolic in a moist environment, so keeping the relative humidity under 50 per cent is desirable, but this may not be easy to do.

The best bet is to encase the comforter, mattress and pillows in mite-proof covers making mite entry and exit difficult.

Vinyl is very effective, but not comfortable to sleep on. Tightly woven blends of cotton and polyester work well, but cotton and silk may be even better, given that silk does not store moisture effectively.

A silk comforter will, like down, wick moisture from a sleeper. But unlike down, it will dissipate it into the surrounding air instead of retaining it.

Less moisture for dust mites means more comfort for people. Producers of silk products also suggest that dust mites actually find silk an inhospitable environment and that the bugs are less likely to set up housekeeping inside a comforter made with silk fibre, however, I can't find any study that corroborates this.

Of course, dust mites are not the only source of allergens in bedding.

Moulds, dyes, flame retardants and processing chemicals like formaldehyde can also trigger reactions in sensitive people. The only way to know if bedding is a source of any of these allergens is to run a battery of tests.

That is exactly what Allergy Standards Limited, an Irish company, does. If a product meets its standards, it certifies it to be "asthma and allergy friendly."

Apparently, SmartSilk is the first natural silk bedding product to receive such certification.

This does not imply a 100-per-cent guarantee against allergic reactions, but it does mean that the product is made from materials that have a low potential to irritate or provoke allergic misery.

Since I'm not bothered by nighttime allergies or menopausal symptoms, I can't relay any personal experience about their alleviation.

But there is something I can vouch for – the comfort of the silk comforter. It's light and the fill doesn't bunch up. I can't quite explain it scientifically, but somehow it keeps you warm and dry while staying cool to the touch.

And now that I'm equipped with SmartSilk, I mite even sleep better.

Joe Schwarcz is director of McGill University's Office for Science and Society (www.OSS.McGill.ca). He can be heard every Sunday from 3-4 p.m. on CJAD. joe.schwarcz@mcgill.ca

## PUBS Building remains, shuttered and forlorn

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Villagers have lobbied the Toby Jug's owner to reopen it, to no avail. They hold a candlelit vigil for their dearly departed tavern every Christmas Eve, out of a sense of mourning and hope, but the building remains shuttered and forlorn, its white walls dingy from neglect, its quaint old sign missing.

"When you used to walk down there when the lights were on, on a cold winter's night, and there was a roaring fire on, that was a lovely feeling," says Meek, 34. "When you see it now, it just looks like a grey shell, and it's quite sad."

Bickington's fate is precisely what Mike Scales sought to avert in Kentisbeare when he rallied his neighbours to help save the Wyndham Arms last summer.

By then, the tavern was ailing, no longer as well frequented as it once was, which residents attribute to poor management by the man who ran it until he gave up last July. The threat of losing the place altogether galvanized 80 volunteers from the village who spent eight weeks scrubbing, stripping, painting, hammering, wiring and redecorating the former farmhouse, whose wooden rafters were erected when their grandfathers' grandfathers hadn't been born.

"We had people in here seven days a week, on different shifts, from 8 o'clock in the morning till sunset," says Scales, a genial 61-year-old who has been involved in the pub industry, mostly as an auditor, since leaving the navy 35 years ago.

"I was probably one of the few that kept coming, and that's why I didn't want to see it go," he says of the Wyn-

dham Arms, which is named after the family that at one time virtually owned Kentisbeare. "It's the centre of the village."

Enterprise Inns, the company that owns the tavern, was so impressed by the community's efforts that it agreed to throw in \$165,000 to overhaul the roof and the heating system.

Scales is now busy putting in a new kitchen. He knows the battle for survival isn't over. To remain a viable concern, the alehouse has to keep customers coming back, which is why it serves better food, welcomes children and dogs, and, as its latest innovation, offers Wi-Fi.

"People need to talk to each other. They need to communicate. They need to feel as though they belong to a community," Scales says. "If I've done nothing in my miserable life, this is perhaps one good thing."