

Star BUSINESS

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SOUTH AMERICAN SUMMIT CONCLUDES

Regional energy use agreed upon

AFP, Cochabamba

A summit on energy use called by South American leaders opened here Friday, with some of the left-leaning allies of socialist Bolivian President Evo Morales among the key participants.

"Two things prompt us to unite South America: inequality, marginalization, exclusion, poverty, and second, policies imposed by some power, with the participation of international organizations," Morales said in his remarks opening the second Summit of South American Community of Nations.

The two-day summit ends Saturday with the signing of a Declaration of Cochabamba to promote equality and regional energy use.

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez arrived at the airport serving the Andean city of Cochabamba, saying, "Bolivia is an unbridled lover of liberty."

"Never have we enjoyed better conditions to integrate our continent and launch the next 200 years of history," he said, showered with flower petals thrown by crowds.

Economic "neoliberalism is the road to hell," said the typically blunt Chavez.

He answered questions about local unrest, saying, "It reminds me of what happened in Venezuela in 2001 and 2002," when a coup removed him from offices for two days.

"Democracy interests the oligarchy when it is convenient."

Native groups met each arriving president with garlands of flowers.

Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said on arrival: "Let us show the world that we are a united continent."

Brazil has been one of the major promoters of South American economic union, through Mercosur, a free-trade area comprising Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela, with Bolivia and Chile as associate members.

Chile's Socialist President Michelle Bachelet was also expected to attend, itself a giant step for the only two countries without diplomatic relations, since 1978, over an 1879 war in which Chile took Bolivia's outlet to the Pacific.

While Bachelet and Morales will meet, their secretaries did not say whether the territory would be discussed.

And Peruvian President Alan

Garcia agreed to attend, either in spite of, or to patch up with, Chavez, after a brutal presidential campaign earlier this year in which he said his opponent would go down the questionable path blazed by Chavez.

Other leaders who confirmed their attendance were President Nicanor Duarte of Paraguay, Tabare Vazquez of Uruguay and president elect of Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega.

Meanwhile, in Santa Cruz, unknown gunmen fired on a Roman Catholic Church, the office of Public Works and the home of an influential man in the country's wealthiest, industrial province.

Ruben Costas, governor of Santa Cruz, also launched a hunger strike Monday against a series of constitutional reforms Morales followers are trying to push through a constitutional assembly after changing the voting rules in their favor.

About 400 people inside the governor's offices and in a main square of Santa Cruz capital have also stopped eating in support of Costas' protest, as have the governors of northern Beni and Pando provinces.

On Wednesday, Morales follow-

ers broke into the studios of two television stations in La Paz they claim were supporting the "oligarchy," while in Santa Cruz a human rights activist was called an "Indian lover" and beaten up by a some right-wing students.

The unrest has also spilled over to Congress where lawmakers have split into two groups, with members of Morales' majority Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) and opposition party members meeting in separate halls.

Confrontation already reached the boiling point on November 28, when Morales signed into law a sweeping agrarian reform bill that distributes land to the poor, setting off anger among landowners.

As Bolivia's first indigenous president, Morales has moved swiftly after taking office in January to make good on campaign promises to improve social justice in a society long dominated by the legacy of European colonialism.

The summit will gather an estimated 3,000 people and all heads of government from the region except Colombia's President Alvaro Uribe.

Vietnam hails US vote to normalise trade ties

AFP, Hanoi

The communist government of Vietnam on Saturday welcomed the normalisation of trade ties with its former enemy the United States, agreed in a late-night vote of the outgoing US Congress.

"The event is of major significance for the ties between Vietnam and the US, marking the full normalisation of the bilateral relationship, especially in the economic and trade fields," said foreign ministry spokesman Le Dung.

He thanked President George W. Bush for supporting the bill, which would help build a "friendly relationship, constructive partnership and comprehensive cooperation on the basis of equality, mutual respect and benefits."

The vote on permanent normal trade relations (PNTR) came weeks before Vietnam joins the World Trade Organisation (WTO), opening its small but fast-growing economy to foreign companies while securing export markets.

The American Chamber of Commerce in Vietnam applauded the vote as "the final step in full economic normalization between the United States and Vietnam," said the group's chairman, David Knapp.

"Passage of PNTR ensures that American companies will now be able to take full advantage of Vietnam's WTO accession," he said.



PHOTO: BANGLALINK

Mobile phone operator Banglalink opened a 'Banglalink Point' at Traffic Point in Sunamganj recently. Officials of the regional team of the company, among others, were present at the inauguration.

5.3pc inflation in India

PTI, New Delhi

Indian inflation declined to 5.30 percent for the weekend November 25 from 5.45 percent in the previous week, mainly due to fall in the prices of food items.

The wholesale price based inflation stood at 4.48 percent during the corresponding week last year.

The Wholesale Price Index (WPI) for all commodities fell by 0.1 percent to 208.6 points and it was 198.1 points a year ago.

The government revised the final inflation figure to 5.41 percent from provisional 5.16 percent for the week ended September 30, while the WPI stood corrected at 208.3 points as against the earlier estimate of 207.8 points.



PHOTO: DHAKA BANK

Senior officials of Dhaka Bank Ltd pose for photographs with the participants in a training course at the opening ceremony of the programme held recently in the capital.

World won't wait forever for China's currency reform

Warns US treasury secy

AFP, Washington

US Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson warned Friday that world trading partners will not wait forever for China to reform its currency regime and so rebalance global commerce.

Paulson, who next week will lead a high-powered US delegation to launch a new "strategic economic dialogue" in Beijing, said the talks were aimed "to deal with the most pressing issues and to manage them on a long-term basis."

"And a big part of the dialogue is to persuade the Chinese to accelerate the pace of their reform," he said in an interview with financial news network CNBC.

Paulson outlined several reasons for China to let the yuan's exchange rate appreciate, a pressing demand of many US politicians who argue the Chinese currency is woefully undervalued.

"First of all, they are not going to get where they need to get in terms of moving up the value-added chain, being able to have market-driven economies allocate capital efficiently," he said.

"And number two, the rest of the world is not going to tolerate China taking too long to make the sorts of adjustments in the currency that need to be made."

Paulson will be accompanied to Beijing by top US officials including Federal Reserve chairman Ben Bernanke, Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez, Energy Secretary Sam Bodman and US Trade Representative Susan Schwab.

He said the strategic dialogue was designed "to concentrate on the longer-term issues where we can make a real difference, and to do a better job of coordinating among ourselves and making sure that

we're not being silenced".

The Chinese must recognise that faster reforms are required because an administrative, rather than market-driven, approach to economic management "will get them nowhere", Paulson added.

"It might be easier for them to say we're in transition, give us more time, but they're a global economic leader and the rest of the world isn't going to give them a lot more time."

Myanmar steps up cracking down on smuggled goods

XINHUA, Yangon

Myanmar is stepping up cracking down on smuggled or untaxed goods on a highway between Yangon and Myawaddy in Kayin state as part of the government's measure to expose tax evasion and raise state revenue, according to local merchants here Saturday.

The Yangon-Myawaddy highway stands a key road of bringing in smuggled or untaxed commodities from neighbouring Thailand, they said, adding that strict check is being carried out on goods-loading vehicles playing on the section of road.

Tax evasion has become critical and widespread in Myanmar, forcing the government to have to take such measure as setting all food items on sale in the super markets, stores and bazaars to bear stickers that identify they have already been taxed starting early next year, earlier local media reported.



PHOTO: JAMUNA BANK

Jamuna Bank Ltd has been rated 5A2 by US-based credit information reporting firm—Dun & Bradstreet (D&B). Saikat Poddar, regional manager of D&B from Dubai, handed over the rating certificate to M Nazrul Islam, managing director of the bank, at a function recently. The D&B rating is given to the businesses that are financially sound and have competitive trading record.