

# Star BUSINESS

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## China hosts first energy summit, urges oil consumers to unite

REUTERS, Beijing

China, hosting its first major energy summit on Saturday, urged top oil consumers to join together in the face of resurgent producer power and sought to paper over differences on how best to achieve energy security.

Ministers from the United States, India, Japan and South Korea — nations that consume nearly half the world's oil — gathered in Beijing for the meeting, which marked a rare move by China to take a leadership role on global energy issues.

"We want to send out an important, positive message, which is: the world's key energy consuming countries plan to strengthen mutual cooperation," China's top energy policy maker Ma Kai said.

"(We will) promote conservation of oil, improvement of energy efficiency, strong development of oil alternatives, and reduce reliance on oil," he added in prepared remarks to the closed forum.

The call to action may reflect a growing desire by China to engage with other key energy users, some of whom have criticised its secretive approach, price controls and a strategy favoring Chinese ownership of resources over spot buying of oil.

It may also reflect shared concern over increasingly nationalistic

policies in major oil and gas producers that threaten to stymie investment and limit new supplies.

In addition, producer cartel Opec will see its power expand when new member Angola joins next year.

Ma emphasized that the five countries had common problems and could benefit from a joint approach to tackling them — but shied away from touching on the different approaches to security that have complicated some relationships.

Among bilateral deals finalized on the summit sidelines was a multi-billion dollar agreement for U.S.-based Westinghouse Electric Co. to build four nuclear plants in China.

The contract could help smooth a relationship dented last year when a bid by China's CNOOC Ltd for U.S. producer Unocal was withdrawn in the face of fierce Congressional opposition.

PRICE, EQUITY ISSUES

Ma's U.S. counterpart, Energy Secretary Sam Bodman, echoed calls for greater cooperation, but also highlighted U.S. concerns about subsidized prices and a global race for assets.

Although Bodman avoided mentioning any country by name, Beijing's caps on fuel costs and its rush to buy up oil and gas fields worldwide have been top of the

agenda in previous bilateral meetings between the two countries.

"I believe our mutual long term economic goals will be best served by relying on global markets to set prices, in both the upstream and the downstream and both internationally and domestically," he added.

The United States has also tried to discourage Beijing's pursuit of equity stakes in energy projects overseas, and Bodman repeated the U.S. position that well-functioning markets were a better guarantee of smooth supplies than owning oilfields.

"It seems as though there is a growing trend to equate energy security with ownership of energy reserves, rather than broad access to reserves," he said, according to a copy of his remarks.

"Even under the best circumstances, in my view, only a fraction of any nation's projected needs can be met through direct ownership of reserves," he added.

Ma also reiterated Beijing's core energy policy of self-sufficiency, a source of concern for environmentalists as China's number one fuel resource is dirty-burning coal.

However Beijing is pouring money and expertise into programs designed to exploit its coal in cleaner ways, from liquefaction to chemicals production and zero-emissions projects.

## Equity Partners, German firm sign co-op deal

DEG, a German investment and development company, has recently entered into a cooperation agreement with one of the Bangladesh's leading merchant banks, Equity Partners Limited (EPL), according to a press release.

The agreement is aimed at broadening DEG's presence in Bangladesh and providing the DEG regional office in Thailand a greater reach in sourcing financing opportunities in this rapidly growing emerging economy.

Dr. Herbert Baumgartner, director of DEG's Representative Office in Thailand said, "The signing of the agreement signals our commitment to this country and our desire to invest further in its economic development."

Andrew Fraser, chairman of EPL, said, "We have confidence in Bangladesh's continued economic growth, and intend to work closely with DEG in furthering its development goals through economic empowerment of local businesses and their workforce."

DEG, member of Germany's KfW banking group, promotes private enterprise structures in developing and emerging market countries as a contribution to sustainable economic growth and a lasting improvement in the living conditions of the local population.

The cooperation agreement between DEG and EPL comes at a crucial point at which foreign investors' interests in Bangladesh are steadily rising as socio-economic factors are aligning for sustainable upward momentum in the country's growth rate, the release added.



PHOTO: IMPACT PR

DEG, a German investment and development company, and Equity Partners Ltd (EPL), a merchant bank of Bangladesh, recently entered into a cooperation agreement on sourcing financing opportunities. (Sitting from left to right) Dr Herbert Baumgartner, director of DEG Representative Office (Thailand), Saiful Islam, executive director of the EPL, Bernd Parting, outgoing director of DEG Representative Office (Thailand), (L-R) Andrew Fraser, chairman, and Mark Reinecke, managing director of EPL, are seen at the signing ceremony.



PHOTO: NATIONAL TELECOM

National Telecom Ltd, a private sector PSTN (public switched telephone network) operator, signed an agreement with Malaysia-based BEL Constructions SDN BHD recently. Under the deal, BEL Constructions will set up tower for the phone company. Asghar Quadri, executive director of National Telecom, and Md Ekramul Haque, managing director of the construction company, signed the deal on behalf of their companies.



PHOTO: UNITREND

The 'Distributors' Conference-2006' of Nestlé Bangladesh Ltd was held on Thursday in Dhaka. Carlo Cifiello, managing director of Nestlé Bangladesh, and Mohsin Uddin Ahmed, sales director of the company, among others, were present at the conference.

## India's growth prospects strong Says WB

ANN/ THE STATESMAN

Globalisation could spur faster growth in average incomes over the next 25 years than during 1980-2005, with developing countries playing a central role, a World Bank report has said. However, unless managed carefully, this could be accompanied by growing income inequality and potentially severe environmental pressures, predicts the World Bank report 'Global Economic Prospects 2007: Managing the Next Wave of Globalisation'.

Releasing the report, the minister of state for planning, M V Rajasekharan, made it amply

clear that the UPA government and specially India would not allow the labour force to suffer the next face of globalisation by imparting adequate technical education to adapt them face the new economic realities.

According to the report, growth in developing countries would reach a near record seven per cent this year. "In 2007 and 2008, the growth would probably slow down, but still likely to exceed six per cent, more than twice the rate in high income countries, which is expected to be 2.6 per cent," one of the authors of the report, Dominique Van Der Mensbrugghe, said.

## WTO COMMITMENTS China regrets US assessment

AFP, Beijing

China's commerce ministry on Friday expressed regret over the United States' harsh assessment of its compliance with its WTO promises, saying the criticisms were not objective.

The ministry issued the statement shortly after the close of the high-level two-day Sino-US strategic economic talks in Beijing.

The trade representative's report is mandated by Congress and is Washington's fullest annual examination of how China is faring on market-opening commitments.

China's Ministry of Commerce hit back at the US government report in a statement on its website Friday.

"China has noticed that the United States (has) many criticisms over China's implementation of WTO agreements in the fields of intellectual property rights, industrial policies and the services trade," it said.

"China believes that many of the US criticisms were not objective, complete or in line with the facts."

"China expresses regret over this and urge(s) the United States to handle bilateral trade relations with an objective and pragmatic

attitude," the statement said.

But the statement also said it appreciated Washington's affirmation of its efforts in meeting its WTO promises and said the two countries should solve their trade disputes through dialogue.

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## Hyundai may build plants in S America, SE Asia

ANN/ THE KOREA HERALD

Hyundai Motor Co, which is currently developing low-priced vehicles targeting Southeast Asian and South American markets, may build production plants there, the automaker's vice chairman Kim Dong-jin said Friday.

Hyundai, which sells three quarters of its cars abroad, has suffered declining export profits as the Korean won had continued to strengthen.



PHOTO: GRAMEENPHONE

Frank Fodstad, deputy managing director of Grameenphone Ltd, and Md Abdul Jalil, secretary to Bangladesh Power Development Board (PDB), pose for photographs at an agreement signing ceremony recently. Under the deal, people having PDB electricity connection will be able to pay their bill at any GP authorised 'BillPay' centre.

## Indian Bank IPO likely soon

ANN/ THE STATESMAN

Indian Bank is likely to hit the capital market with its 85,950,000 shares by January-end after necessary approvals from the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi).

"We have filed the Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP) with the Sebi on 1 December and the public issue is expected next month," Indian Bank chairman and managing director, Mr KC Chakrabarty said here yesterday.

The bank has proposed to reserve 8,595,000 equity shares for allotment to employees and the balance 77,355,000 equity shares would constitute the net offer to public. Post IPO, the government's stake in the bank would be reduced to 80 per cent.

Speaking about mergers and acquisitions of banks in the current scenario, Mr Chakrabarty said that consolidation is a must for financial survival but Indian Bank would start thinking of mergers post 2010.

Regarding the National Pilot Project for Financial Inclusion, launched last December in Puducherry, Mr Chakrabarty said that every individual there has been provided with a bank account. The project, launched in Burdwan district in West Bengal a few months ago has been successful in providing the entire population of 20 villages with bank accounts. The project is under implementation in West Midnapore, Hooghly and Siliguri.

## Kuwait revenues jump 17pc

AFP, Kuwait City

Kuwait's revenues in the first eight months of the current fiscal year topped 37 billion dollars, a 17-percent increase over the same period last year, on the back of high oil prices, a report said Saturday.

Al-Shall Economic Consultants said total revenues at the end of November, the eighth month of the 2006/2007 fiscal year, reached 37.2 billion dollars against 31.8 billion dollars posted in the same period the previous year.

The figure is up 26.1 percent on the 29.5 billion dollars projected for the whole fiscal year which began in April, said the report, quoting finance ministry figures.

Oil revenues accounted for 35.4 billion dollars, up 17.6 percent on 30.1 billion dollars posted in the same period last fiscal year and 32.1 percent higher than the 26.8 billion dollars forecast for the entire year.

The increase came despite a sharp drop in oil revenues, which make up 95 percent of total income, in October and November when oil prices moderated after hitting an all-time high in August.