

Xi, Putin to 'harvest the fruits' of deepening ties

AFP, Beijing

Chinese President Xi Jinping and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin promised ever closer cooperation Sunday as they met for the 10th time in less than two years.

The two men, who held talks in Beijing, have increasingly stressed their shared outlooks which mirror their countries' converging trade, investment and geopolitical interests.

The two sides signed a series of agreements to step up their multi-billion-dollar natural resources collaboration.

"Together we have carefully taken care of the tree of Russian-Chinese relations," Xi told Putin at the Diaoyutai state guesthouse in Beijing.

"Now fall (autumn) has set in, it's harvest time, it's time to gather fruit," he said.

"No matter the changes on the global arena, we should stick to the chosen path to expand and strengthen our comprehensive mutually fruitful cooperation."

Russia and China have been brought together by mutual geopolitical concerns, among them wariness of the United States.

The two countries often vote as a pair on the UN Security Council, where both hold a veto, sometimes in opposition to Western powers on issues such as Syria.

The Russian president said that Russian-Chinese cooperation was "very important for keeping the world within the framework of international law, to make it more stable, more predictable".

"Me and you have done a lot for this and I am sure we will continue to work in this manner in the future," he added.

Moscow faces harsh Western criti-



Left, Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping stand during a signing ceremony at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing yesterday.

cism and sanctions over its seizure of Crimea and the conflict in eastern Ukraine, which could see Europe reduce its consumption of Russian gas.

Beijing also has tense relationships over territorial disputes with neighbours such as Japan, Vietnam and the Philippines.

At the same time, it is constantly on the lookout for resources to power its economic growth.

After a decade of negotiations, the countries signed a huge 30-year gas deal said to be worth \$400 billion during a visit to China by Putin in May.

On Sunday they stepped up the engagement, with Russia's Rosneft and

China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), both of them petroleum giants, signing an agreement for the Chinese firm to take a 10 percent stake in a huge Siberian energy project.

CNPC also signed deals on gas supplies and transport routes, with financial agreements also inked.

Putin is visiting China for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) summit, which starts on Monday and will also be attended by US President Barack Obama and Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, as well as other leaders.

The Apec region includes 40 percent of the world's population, nearly half its trade and more than half its GDP.

China's economic risks not that scary: president

AFP, Beijing

The financial risks China faces are "not that scary", President Xi Jinping said Sunday as leaders of the world's second-largest economy look to transition from decades of super-charged growth to more sustainable expansion.

China's gross domestic product (GDP) expanded at its slowest pace in five years in the third quarter, but Xi said the economy had entered a "new normal" that will be more beneficial to the country and the world in the long run.

"Some worry whether China's economic growth rate will fall further and whether it can overcome difficulties," he said in a speech opening an Asia-Pacific business meeting in Beijing.

"There are indeed risks but they are not that scary."

Xi said China's economy is becoming driven more by domestic consumer

demand, as long advocated by economists, and away from an unstable dependence on investment and foreign trade, avoiding "external risks".

Job creation and personal income are growing, he said, and inflation is under control.

But China's economy -- a key driver of global growth -- is suffering from a deflating property bubble, a crack-down on corruption blamed for curbing some business, and weak demand from Europe. Authorities have responded with limited stimulus measures to promote growth.

Xi was speaking at a gathering of business and political leaders from the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) region, which includes 40 percent of the world's population, almost half its trade and more than half its GDP.

"For the Asia-Pacific and the world at large, China's development will

generate huge opportunities and benefits and hold lasting and infinite promise," he said.

But he added: "We are also certainly aware that the new normal is accompanied by new challenges and new problems. In fact, some potential risks are already emerging." Xi did not elaborate.

Leaders from Apec's 21 member economies, including US President Barack Obama, will hold a two-day summit beginning on Monday.

Xi noted that it would be impossible for China's economy, now number two in the world after the United States, to continue growing at its previous pace, which regularly saw double-digit growth for about three decades.

The summit is expected to end with a joint communique on Tuesday reiterating regional commitments to work toward trade liberalisation in the vibrant Pacific Rim.

Indian finance minister pledges land, tax reforms

AFP, New Delhi

India will push ahead with tough land acquisition and tax reforms aimed at boosting investment and kickstarting the economy, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said on Sunday.

He added that changes were needed to existing legislation to speed up the process of buying land for industrial use, a contentious issue in India which has long delayed projects.

"Some changes may be necessary (to the Land Acquisition Act)," Jaitley said at an economic forum in New Delhi.

"We will first try to reach a consensus and if that is not possible we will go ahead and take the decision," he said.

Although the right-wing govern-

ment has introduced smaller initiatives since taking power in May, critics say it has lacked the boldness needed to eliminate regulatory hurdles to doing business as it seeks to attract crucial investment.

The comments came as Prime Minister Narendra Modi expanded his government on Sunday, appointing 21 new ministers, in a bid to step up the pace of promised economic reforms.

Jaitley, who suffers from ill health, is expected to lose the defence portfolio in Sunday's reshuffle, allowing him to concentrate on the tougher reforms. The portfolios will be announced late Sunday or early Monday.

The Indian economy expanded last year by a near-decade low of 4.7 percent -

half the scorching pace seen during the country's boom a few years back.

Land acquisition is a politically charged issue, which has delayed many projects, sometimes for years, including construction of a \$12-billion plant by South Korean steel giant POSCO in eastern India.

The law, passed last year by the previous Congress government, seeks to compensate farmers and tribals who sell their land for industrial projects, but business claims it has made the task more difficult.

Any changes will have to go through parliament where the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) lacks a majority in the upper house and must rely on support from allies.



A woman leaves an HSBC bank branch in Brasilia. Layoffs by HSBC bank in Brazil will likely top 1,000 this week, the workers' union said Saturday, after employees staged angry protests against job cuts by the London-based firm. HSBC slashed 4.5 percent of its workforce across the South American giant, according to the Contraf-CUT bank workers' union.

AFP

Struggling in India, Toyota asks Daihatsu minicar unit to help

REUTERS, Japan/New Delhi

Toyota Motor Corp is struggling to crack the affordable end of India's car market and has called on mini-car affiliate Daihatsu for help - a tacit admission that the Japanese autos giant doesn't always get it right in emerging markets.

A similar partnership between Toyota and 51 percent-owned Daihatsu Motor Co has proved successful for years in Indonesia, Southeast Asia's biggest car market - though that crown may be slipping now.

Toyota Executive Vice President Yasumori Ihara asked Daihatsu management earlier this year to help design affordable small cars suited to buyers in India, where Toyota models tend to come with a relatively high price tag, said four Daihatsu executives and a Toyota executive with knowledge of the matter.

The request could see Daihatsu take the lead in developing no-frills cars that would be sold under the Toyota name and through Toyota's sales channels in India. Unlike in Indonesia, Daihatsu currently doesn't sell cars in India.

"Toyota is struggling big time in India" largely because it uses relatively "high-quality, high-spec" components for its cars there and failed to make use of cheaper parts available from indigenous local suppliers, a senior Daihatsu executive told Reuters.

In contrast, rivals such as Suzuki have set up comprehensive local supply chains for low-cost parts in India.

"We're currently looking extensively into why a strategic no-frills car like (Toyota's) Etios doesn't sell well in India ... as part of an effort to ready ourselves in case we're asked (to develop low-cost cars) formally by Toyota," another senior Daihatsu executive said. The executives didn't want to be named as they are not authorized to talk to the media.

They gave no specific details of how Daihatsu would help Toyota's India effort, but said Indonesia



Daihatsu Motor Co President Masanori Mitsui walks past the company's new compact car 'Axia' during a news conference on the company's financial results, in Tokyo.

REUTERS/FILE

would likely serve as a model. There, several models including the most affordable minicar, the Agya, which Toyota markets, are supplied by Daihatsu, which also competes in the market.

"We always look at various options, including collaboration with Daihatsu. However, no decisions have been made," said Ryo Sakai, a Tokyo-based Toyota spokesman, declining to elaborate.

Daihatsu spokesman Kazuki Inoue said: "We have been discussing ways to quickly realize an expansion of our business cooperation with Toyota beyond Indonesia and Malaysia for some time, but nothing specific has been decided at this point."

Daihatsu already sells cars that start from \$7,000-\$8,000 and aims to come up with even cheaper models to drive its business in emerging markets.

Toyota has struggled to ignite demand for its cars in China and other emerging markets, and India - which consultant IHS Automotive predicts will overtake Japan as the world's third biggest auto market by as early as 2019 - has proved particularly tough.

"India is a key market for the next decade. All major automakers will have to figure out how to compete in this market effectively," said James Chao, IHS Automotive's Asia-Pacific director.

Toyota launched the Etios for the Indian market in late 2010 and sold 50,157 of them in the year to March 2012. But sales of the compact model, which starts at 570,000 rupees (\$9,280), fell 23 percent the following year and 19 percent to 31,137, in the latest year to end-March. Sales of the Etios Liva hatchback, a 480,000 rupee (\$7,813) model launched in 2011, declined nearly a third in the year to March compared with two years ago, to 22,201 cars.

Toyota's overall India sales for the year to March fell 22 percent to 128,811 vehicles, dwarfed by market leader Maruti Suzuki India Ltd's 1.05 million vehicles sold. To put the Japanese giant's Indian business in context, Toyota expects to sell a total of 9.05 million vehicles worldwide in the year to March 2015.

IHS Automotive forecasts sales in India of so-called light vehicles - below 6 tons - will increase just 0.2 percent this year to 3.14 million.

From earphones to jet engines, 3D printing takes off

AFP, New York

Many manufacturers are at an early stage of discovering the benefits of 3D printing, but one of the clearest strengths is customization.

At Normal, consumers can use a mobile app to photograph their ear, transmit the shots to the New York startup's 3D printing facility and then receive customized earphones within 48 hours.

The process marries today's click-and-go speed with a made-to-order ethos that recalls the days of visiting the tailor or the cobbler. The company's motto: "Normal: one size fits none."

After three decades in relative obscurity, 3D printing, which employs lasers to "print" objects from metals or plastics according to a digital design, has suddenly become one of the hottest areas of technology.

Computer giant Hewlett-Packard is plunging into the business, recently announcing it would put its own ultra-fast 3D printer on the market by 2016, "empowering people to create, interact and inspire like never before".

General Electric chief executive Jeff Immelt has said 3D printing can help make manufacturing "sexy again", and President Barack Obama has praised it for having "the potential to revolutionize the way we make almost everything".

"It's a little bit confusing and the excitement is very big," said David Reis, chief executive at Israeli-US 3D printer manufacturer Stratasys.

"There's a lot of venture capital money coming into the market."

ogy is widespread, some companies see it as more of a long-term prospect than a current game changer.

Boeing does not expect to make major metal parts with 3D printing for at least 20 years, though company officials say that time frame could be accelerated.

3D printing "is definitely on the radar screen," said Dave Dietrich, technical leader for additive metals at the aerospace giant.

"The systems need to become larger, more repeatable, that sort of thing," he said. "We want to make sure we have an appropriate amount of testing and confidence in that process".

3D printing has its roots in the 1980s when inventor Chuck Hull began experimenting with liquid plastics that would harden when they were exposed to ultraviolet light.

Hull ultimately discovered that thousands of these plastic sheets could be layered, or "printed," on top of each other and shaped into a three-dimensional object.

He co-founded 3D Systems, with the company developing software to do 3D printing from computer images and building 3D printers.

Even so, Hull in May told the Quartz website that some of the talk about 3D printing "is definitely hype and won't happen".

The recent surge in interest follows the embrace of 3D printing technology by the "maker" community -- the new technology do-it-yourself creative movement -- said Pete Basiliere, research vice president at Gartner.

People can now buy their own 3D printers for less than \$1,000, and enterprise-sized machines begin at an inexpensive \$2,500.

Funding for Uber could push value past \$30b

AFP, New York

The popular car-sharing startup Uber could see its value top \$30 billion after a new round of funding, The Wall Street Journal reported Saturday.

The San Francisco-based firm, which lets customers hail and pay for taxis or private vehicles via smartphones, has told investors it is planning a new round of financing that could total up to \$2 billion, the Journal reported, citing people briefed on the matter.

The newspaper said Uber could raise as much as \$2 billion, and the new round of financing could push the company's value past \$30 billion. Discussions are still in the preliminary stage and no investors have so far committed. By comparison, Wall Street-listed Twitter currently has a market value of just under \$25 billion.

Uber already raised \$1.2 billion during an initial round of funding in June, and was valued at the time at \$17 billion. The Journal said the business may not need fresh capital, but wants to make the most of low capital costs and build its war chest.

Founded in 2009, Uber is now present in more than 200 cities and in 45 countries. Its chief executive Travis Kalanick has said revenues are doubling every six months.