

Chavez Unveils China Oil Plan

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BEIJING, China (AP) -- Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez has said his country plans to export 500,000 barrels of oil a day to China within five years, as he prepared for a meeting Thursday with the Chinese president during a tour to boost energy ties.

Chavez arrived in the Chinese capital on Wednesday with plans to sign agreements to boost China's investment in oil-rich Venezuela with joint projects in petroleum, telecommunications, farming and railways.

He also proposed an ambitious target plan under which Venezuela -- the world's No. 5 oil exporter -- will almost quadruple its sales to China, which wants access to Latin American energy supplies to fuel its booming economy.

"Within five years we'll arrive at half a million barrels (a day) to China. We are currently exporting close to 150,000 barrels (a day), and next year we will double that," Chavez said.

"The oil issue is of utmost importance because we are diversifying the petroleum business. We are moving toward a new petroleum model," said Chavez, speaking on Venezuelan state television from China. "It's one step more in a strategic alliance."

He was scheduled to meet with President Hu Jintao on Thursday and with China's No. 2 leader, Wu Bangguo, and Premier Wen Jiabao on Friday, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said.

Chavez will also talk with Chinese executives this week about developing his country's coal and gold resources, Dow Jones Newswires said Wednesday.

The Venezuelan leader plans to visit the eastern city of Jinan to meet with coal and gold mining companies, Dow Jones said, citing an unidentified official accompanying him.

Saul Ameliach, president of the state-run Pequiven petrochemical firm, said officials from both countries would also sign an agreement for Chinese help in building a petrochemical plant within the massive Amuay oil refinery located in western Venezuela.

"China is very advanced in the petrochemical refining area," Ameliach said in a statement.

Chavez is likely to meet with executives from Shandong Gold Group and Yankuang Group Corp., two companies in a joint venture to develop a gold mine in Venezuela, Dow Jones said.

The left-leaning Chavez has strengthened ties with Beijing since taking office in 1999. He said last week that he will buy Chinese-made oil tankers and seal an oil exploration deal.

The United States is the No. 1 buyer of Venezuelan crude, but Chavez's government has sought to sell more to other countries.

Chavez said his government would create joint ventures with two Chinese state-owned oil companies to produce and export crude from Venezuela's petroleum-rich Orinoco River basin as part of a larger energy cooperation plan.

He said agreements would be signed Thursday with China National Petroleum Corp. and China Petroleum and Chemical Corp.

Chavez said Venezuela's growing relations with China are part of his government's efforts to create a "multipolar" world to counter U.S. hegemony. He accuses Washington of using its might to bully countries like Venezuela from developing military technology.