

# Asean pushing to work closer on energy supply

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**CONCERNED** about the negative impact of prolonged high oil prices on growth in the region, Asean is pushing to create an open energy market in Southeast Asia.

Philippine President Gloria Arroyo said Asean would deepen energy co-operation, especially for key infrastructure projects, including the Asean power grid and trans-Asean gas pipeline.

Both projects, mooted at previous meetings, seek to ensure stable electricity and energy supply in the region through sharing of resources.

"We also stressed that Asean must improve energy efficiency and must diversify its energy supply by developing such alternative sources as biofuels and civilian nuclear power," she said yesterday.

The Philippines is hosting the 12th Asean Summit and related meetings, which end today. The theme for the summit is "One Caring and Sharing Community".

Arroyo said the Asean leaders meeting here agreed to pay greater attention to the security, environmental, health and safety dimensions of the energy sector.

"And we tasked our officials to look into a regional nuclear safety regime," she added.

Oil prices fell below US\$52 (RM182) a barrel last week, the lowest since May 2005.

Crude oil's decline follows an eight-year bull market, which saw the commodity surge from a low of US\$10.35 a barrel in 1998 to a record high above US\$78.

Meanwhile, in a separate statement on the stalled World Trade Organisation (WTO) talks, the Asean leaders said the impasse in negotiations must be broken.



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (left) and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe getting ready for a group photo prior to the start of the 10th Asean Japan Summit in Cebu yesterday. — AP picture

"WTO members, particularly the major players, must demonstrate flexibility by moving beyond their current positions in the key areas of the round.

"Asean member countries are prepared to make contributions to ensure an outcome to the negotiations that will allow our economies to develop and prosper," it said.

"We have no doubt that a successful Doha Round will spur economic growth, and offer a tangible means to reduce poverty globally, and in the Asean region."

On Asean's new mini-constitution, the task force drafting it is confident of completing its work within a shorter time frame than it was originally given. Malaysia's ambassador-at-large Tan Sri Ahmad Fuzi Abdul Razak said.

Ahmad Fuzi, who is part of the 10-member High-Level Task Force, said the draft Asean Charter should be ready before the 13th Asean Summit hosted by Singapore later this year.

The task force will draft the charter based on the Eminent Persons' Group (EPG) report,

as well as input from Asean leaders. It was supposed to start work last month, but was held up by the 12th Asean Summit postponement due to Typhoon Utor.

The group had its first meeting in Cebu yesterday, a day after the EPG presented its report to the Asean leaders as part of the re-scheduled Asean Summit held here.

At a Press conference on Saturday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said there was no major opposition to any of the proposed provisions in the EPG report.

The Asean Charter seeks to transform the grouping from its traditional informal consensus approach into a legal entity with binding rules similar to the European Union. These include sanctions against members for breaching Asean policy.

Asean leaders also held closed-door summits with their dialogue partners China, South Korea, India, and Japan yesterday.

So far, the leaders have signed a Convention on Counter-terrorism, as well as declarations on the Asean Charter blueprint, migrant workers and East Asian energy security.