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TRADE

China's president meets U.S. business leaders

Chinese President Hu Jintao tried to soothe trade tensions with the United States as he met with the leaders of Boeing and Microsoft.

By Elizabeth M. Gillespie

Associated Press

EVERETT, Wash. - Chinese President Hu Jintao called Wednesday for fewer trade barriers and closer ties between his country and the United States, while defending China's heavily criticized policies on trade, currency and energy.

The meaty speech followed a warm welcome at Boeing, where Hu sought to soothe tensions over the U.S.-China trade deficit, telling workers his country would need thousands of new airplanes in the coming years.

Speaking to an audience of Washington state business and political leaders including Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates, Hu said his country does not seek a big trade surplus with the United States. He also reaffirmed his government's commitment to crack down on software piracy, which should increase Microsoft's sales in China.

"Strong business ties meet the fundamental interests of our two countries and peoples and will continue to play an important role in stabilizing our relations," Hu said through a translator. He flew to Washington D.C. shortly after the speech.

China's rapid growth and development will increase demand for American products and expertise in areas such as technology, Hu said. "I hope the American businesses will seize the opportunities."

The comments came just ahead of a summit with President Bush, where the two sides plan to tackle thorny issues including trade.

Visiting Boeing's wide-body jet assembly plant earlier, he called his country's long-running relationship with Boeing an example of the potential of China-U.S. trade.

"Boeing's cooperation with China is a living example of the mutually beneficial cooperation and win-win outcome that China and the United States have achieved from trade with each other," Hu said.

He estimated that demand for new aircraft in China will reach 2,000 planes in the next 15 years.

Hu's speech at the company's massive Everett plant came just days after Chinese officials confirmed a commitment to order 80 Boeing 737 jets, in a deal valued at \$5.2 billion at list prices. The order has yet to be finalized, and airlines typically negotiate discounts.



ELAINE THOMPSON/AP

IS GOOD DOING BUSINESS: Chinese President Hu Jintao, left, hugs Boeing Co. employee Paul Dernier after Dernier presented him with a company baseball cap at the company's production facility, on Wednesday, in Everett, Wash.