

China builds base to tap deep-sea energy: state media

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Traffic passes below power lines in Beijing. China will build a multi-million-dollar research base in the coastal city of Qingdao, in Shandong province, as it steps up its efforts to search for energy sources and rare earths on the ocean floor, state media said.

China will build a multi-million-dollar research base on its east coast as it steps up its efforts to search for energy sources and rare earths on the ocean floor, state media said Friday.

Engineers have started to design the base, which will cost an estimated 495 million yuan (72.8 million dollars) for the initial construction, the

Xinhua news agency reported.

The base in the coastal city of Qingdao in Shandong province will cover 26 hectares (64.2 acres) and serve as a support station for the deep-diving manned submersible vessel "Jiaolong", the report said.

China's ambitious [ocean exploration](#) programme began in 2002 as the country's appetite for energy resources expanded rapidly with its fast economic growth.

Scientists believe sea beds at a depth of 4,000-6,000 metres (13,200-19,800 feet) hold abundant deposits of rare metals and [methane hydrate](#), a solidified form of natural gas bound in ice that could serve as a new energy source.

"Jiaolong" -- the name of a mythical sea dragon in Chinese -- is designed to dive to a depth of 7,000 metres and managed to reach 3,759 metres in test runs conducted in May and June, Xinhua said.

China is the fifth country in the world to have conducted a manned dive to more than 3,500 metres below the sea level, after the United States, France, Russia and Japan, it said.

The International Energy Agency recently announced that China had surpassed the United States last year to become the world's top [energy](#) consumer -- a dubious distinction rejected by Beijing, which called the data "unreliable".

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