



The Auto Project on Energy and Climate Change
汽车能源与气候变化—中国项目

MONTHLY NEWS BRIEFING

<http://www.autoproject.org.cn>

AUTO/ENERGY/POLLUTION

Volume V, Issue 1, January, 2008

*The APECC monthly newsletter is prepared by the
Innovation Center for Energy and Transportation (iCET)*



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General Energy Issues

Subsidies for energy-saving light bulbs

January 23 (China Daily) --The government launched a nationwide program yesterday to subsidize the use of 150 million energy-efficient lighting products, in a bid to reduce electricity consumption by 29 billion kWh by 2010.

The green drive was jointly launched by the Ministry of Finance and the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC).

A circular posted on the NDRC's website said the government will offer a 30 percent subsidy on wholesale purchases and a 50 percent subsidy on retail sales of energy-saving light bulbs.

It did not, however, specify the quantity of bulbs that will qualify for the subsidies.

The government said it will subsidize manufacturers who bid the lowest supply price for the program.

Wang Jianguo, deputy manager of Panasonic Lighting Products Co Ltd, told China Daily in Beijing yesterday: "With the government subsidy, we'd like to lower our price to attract more consumers."

Manufacturers of energy-efficient lighting products must comply with national energy-saving requirements and have well-established aftersales services, the NDRC said.

A list of approved manufacturers and the price of their products will be decided through an opening bidding process, it said.

Liu Qianguang, vice-director of the energy-saving and environmental protection center under the Beijing municipal commission of development and reform, said: "Beijing is taking the lead in this nationwide energy-saving campaign and will launch a program to promote the use of 5 million energy-efficient lighting products by 2010.

"In the past three years, Beijing has promoted the use of 1.8 million energy-efficient bulbs," he told China Daily yesterday.

"This has reduced power consumption by 39 million kW, a saving of 28 million yuan (\$3.9 million)."

Liu said the capital's energy-efficient lighting drive covered the subway network and all of the elementary and middle schools in urban areas.

The program will be launched in welfare institutions, universities, supermarkets and shopping malls this year, he said.

"As the next step, we intend to get more citizens involved," Liu said.

Beijing resident Wang Yeping said yesterday she had not bought any energy-efficient bulbs because they were too expensive.

"The energy-efficient bulbs are about 10 to 15 times more expensive than ordinary bulbs," she said.

But energy-efficient bulbs last for up to 12,000 hours, much longer than normal bulbs, a researcher surnamed Yang who works at the energy-saving and environmental protection center, said.

Transport, power are top priority

January 30 (Xinhua) -- Vast resources have been mobilized to combat the rare snow and sleet storms that have battered central, eastern and southern China since January 10.

At least 49 people have died because of the brutal weather, including 25 killed yesterday when a bus skidded off a slippery road in Zunyi, Guizhou province.

The top Party leadership has urged local authorities to make disaster relief the "most pressing task" and make "all-out efforts" to ensure a return to normalcy.

The call came after a Politburo meeting yesterday, chaired by President Hu Jintao, which studied the damage inflicted by icy rain and snowstorms and made plans for relief work.

Most parts of central and southern China are set to suffer more inclement weather in the next few days with some provinces facing snowstorms,

and transport and energy supplies thrown out of kilter.

"The top priority is to ensure electricity supply and smooth communications and transport by every possible means," the Politburo statement said, urging local authorities to strive to increase coal output and ensure supply to power plants.

"The people's interests should be put first to ensure a happy Spring Festival," the statement said."

"Dealing with the current disaster is more complicated than floods, because freezing weather has restricted the mobility of relief forces and most of the affected areas are in mountainous areas," said Wang Zhenyao, director of the disaster-relief department of the Ministry of Civil Affairs.

Hundreds of thousands of soldiers and armed police have been sent to the frontlines to help.

The pre-holiday traffic chaos continued to worsen yesterday, leaving hundreds of thousands stranded at railway stations and on ice-blocked roads.

Following the power cuts in parts of Hunan, Guizhou and Jiangxi provinces experienced several blackouts yesterday, threatening local rail transport, the Ministry of Railways said yesterday.

The power supply network in Hunan is still under repair, and the number of railway stations without electricity rose to 30 by yesterday afternoon, the ministry said.

Large numbers of passengers were stuck at railway stations along the southern part of the Beijing-Guangzhou trunk line in Hubei, Hunan and Guangdong provinces, the ministry said.

It has directed 279 passenger trains on the paralyzed trunk line to take other routes, helping 550,000 passengers reach their destinations.

That included some 400,000 passengers who boarded 199 trains that left the Guangzhou station by yesterday morning.

The ministry has stopped selling tickets for trains that leave before Feb 5 on the Beijing-Guangzhou line.

After being closed for four days in heavy snow, the Changsha airport finally opened yesterday, with two aircraft having taken off by yesterday afternoon. At least 9,000 passengers were grounded there at one time.

About 34,000 travelers stranded on the Guangdong section of Beijing-Zhuhai Expressway for six days are also expected to go home before 6 pm today.

The National Meteorological Center forecast that snowfall would stop in a few days, but sleet and snow would continue in southern China.

Warning to energy producers

January 16 (Xinhua) -- An energy watchdog yesterday warned power producers that China's possible economic slowdown due to a downturn in the US economy and the nation's industrial restructuring may decrease energy demand.

The official from the National Energy Leading Group forecast that China's economic growth would hit "the highest point" of the cycle in the second quarter of this year and slow down thereafter.

"Chinese energy companies should keep a close watch on the economic cycle and market demand to maintain stable supply," Zhou Xi'an, from the National Energy Leading Group, told China Daily yesterday. But he assured the companies that there was still a "steady demand" for energy as the economy may grow at over 9 percent this year.

"Our understanding is that the US authorities have concluded that the country has already slid into recession because of the subprime crisis," said Zhou.

Studies have found that China usually follows the US growth trend with a six-month time lag, Zhou said. "We should be well prepared for the impact of a US recession."

Zhou's office has long been involved in a study on the relationship between economic cycle and energy demand.

"The second quarter of this year should be a turning point. We have taken the period between

2002 and that quarter as one of an upward trend. From then on, growth will be downward or stable."

Zhou said China's economic slowdown during 1996-2001 brought down energy demand. "In some years during that phase, the energy demand decreased and even the pace of energy supply growth dropped below zero. These are the lessons energy companies should keep in mind."

Generally, China's energy consumption growth is slower than its economic growth, said Zhou. Last year, the country's coal output was estimated at 2.52 billion tons, up 5 percent from the previous year. But the economy is forecast to have grown at about 11 percent.

An official report forecast China's oil demand will grow at an average pace of 4.5 percent in 2006-15, much lower than the planned average growth of around 8 percent.

The total oil consumption is projected to reach 515 million tons in 2015 from 346 million tons in 2006. By 2015, the country's oil dependence ratio is to reach 60 percent from the current 48 percent.

Zhou said economic slowdown may give China's energy sector a chance to restructure itself. In an earlier report, the National Development and Reform Commission said China will build six to eight large-scale coal enterprises, each with a capacity of 100 million tons, and eight to 10 coal enterprises with a capacity of 50 million tons each.

These large enterprises are expected to contribute more than half of China's coal output of 2.6 billion tons in 2010. China produced 2.4 billion tons of coal in 2006 but its 80,000 coal companies produced an average of just 30,000 tons.

Lin Yueqin, a researcher with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, echoed Zhou's views, saying China's industrial restructuring may also decrease energy demand.

Lin said the latest efforts are aimed at updating China's investment guidelines and phasing out resource-intensive industries in line with the nation's development policy.

The government is seeking public opinion on the revised 45-page guidelines, which include about 1,000 items. Outdated and small-scale coal mines, and power and iron and steel plants will be prohibited under the new guidelines.

Beijing pulls out all stops for success of Olympics

January 21 (China Daily) -- Cutting emissions and curbing pollution are among the Beijing municipal government's agenda this year as part of preparations for the Olympics, the acting mayor said yesterday.

The city will complete preparations for the Games and provide top-level services, Guo Jinlong said.

"But the task of controlling pollution and traffic congestion is arduous," Guo said while delivering a government work report to about 770 deputies to the municipal people's congress that started its annual session yesterday morning.

In response, he said, Beijing will enact the "strictest standards" for pollutant emissions and curb pollution by heavy trucks that ply at night.

He promised that less coal will be burned in the city and cooperation with neighboring provinces and cities would be intensified to protect the environment.

The major goals set for 2008 in the government report include:

Energy consumption per unit of gross domestic product (GDP) to fall 5 percent.

Emissions of sulfur dioxide (SO₂), a gauge of air pollution, to fall 4 percent, and chemical oxygen demand (COD), a key measure of water pollution, to drop by 10 percent.

"Blue sky" days - or days with fairly good air quality - to account for 70 percent of the total this year, or about 256 days, 10 days more than last year.

Guo also pledged to improve traffic and ensure the smooth running of sport venues.

He said the expansion of the Beijing Capital International Airport and the Beijing South Railway Station will be completed this year, in addition to the construction of a subway linking the airport to the downtown areas.

He also said that construction of the National Stadium, or the Bird's Nest, and other venues and facilities would be completed on schedule.

Jiang Xiaoyu, executive vice-president of the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Games of the XXIX Olympiad (BOCOG), who is also a deputy to the city's people's congress, said the goals are clear and practical.

"Hosting the Games and Paralympics is a great event for the country, the people and the Chinese nation," he said. "We must try our best to make it a success."

Jiang said holding the Olympics is not only an opportunity to showcase China to the world, but also a challenge to the city's management and services as millions of visitors will come to Beijing for the Games.

"In addition, about 21,600 registered reporters and more than 10,000 unregistered ones are coming, and they are going to cover every detail of Beijing," Jiang said.

BOCOG estimates that more than 1,000 cultural events would be held in Beijing during the Games, more than the 947 events during the Athens Games. "All these place high demands on the city's management and services," Jiang said.

In response to some concerns that Beijing's economy will decline after the Games, Zhang Gong, director of the municipal development and reform commission, said the government would strike a balance between investments before and after the Games, as investment is still the biggest factor driving economic growth.

Beijing plans economic growth of 9 percent per year in the next five years, with per capita GDP growing from the current \$7,000 to \$10,000 by 2012.

In the past five years, the city saw annual growth of 12 percent.

Cold weather adding to nation's power problem

January 24 (China Daily) -- Continuous heavy snowfall and freezing temperatures have exacerbated power gaps in many parts of China and added to the damage caused by snowstorms since the middle of the month, authorities said on Tuesday.

The State Electricity Regulatory Commission said the country's power shortage has reached 69.63 million kW, forcing 13 provinces and municipalities, including Hubei, Sichuan, Shaanxi, Yunnan and Guangdong, to ration supplies.

Coal reserves are also down more than 40 percent year-on-year, at 17.73 million tons, as of Sunday, which equates to just eight days' supply for the country's power plants, the Xinhua News Agency reported yesterday.

Commission chairman You Quan said in addition to the supply shortage, the increased use of heaters and disruptions to the transportation of coal have widened the power gap.

To help maintain reserves at major power plants, the Ministry of Railways said yesterday it will allocate resources for coal transportation, while at the same time adding hundreds of trains to cope with the Spring Festival exodus.

Shanghai is reportedly buying electricity from other provinces and adjusting power consumption for a peak in usage as the mercury drops.

After weeks of foggy and wet weather, temperatures in the city will drop to -3 C in suburban areas and zero downtown, the Shanghai meteorological bureau forecast.

On Tuesday morning, Shanghai recorded one of its heaviest power loads in winter, 18 million kW.

"It will be more than that today," Wang Changxing, an official with the Shanghai Municipal Electric Power Company, told China Daily yesterday.

"That's almost the city's maximum supply. Shanghai will try to buy more power from other provinces, but at this moment, most places in

central and east China are facing a similar shortage.

"In the event of an emergency, major power consuming companies will be asked to shift or limit their working hours."

The highest load appears between 10 and 11 am when office buildings turn on their heating.

"Companies that consume large amounts of power will be asked to avoid such consumption during this period," Wang said.

Since Jan 10, heavy snowfall has affected some 25 million people and caused losses of 3.11 billion yuan (\$430 million) in nine provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions, the Ministry of Civil Affairs said.

Nearly 22,000 houses have been felled by the snow, 155,000 people have been evacuated and 1.04 million hectares of farmland have been damaged, the ministry said yesterday on its website.

In Shaanxi province, 940 people have been injured in the past three days because of the heavy snow. Also, 180,000 people have had their drinking water supplies disrupted due to burst pipes, and more than 5,100 chickens have died as a result of coops collapsing.

As of Tuesday, the unusually heavy snowfall has claimed at least 17 lives and caused widespread traffic and power disruption, Xinhua reported.

The Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Civil Affairs have allocated 1.75 billion yuan to help disaster-hit areas.

The National Meteorological Center forecast yesterday that a new round of snowstorms is expected to hit parts of the country tomorrow.

Chen Lijuan, from the National Climate Center, said the extreme conditions had been influenced by the La Nina weather phenomenon, which refers to the extensive cooling in areas of the Pacific Ocean.

Coal-to-oil project approved

January 11(China Daily) -- China's top coal company Yankuang Group has won initial

governmental approval to build a 10 billion yuan coal-to-oil project in Shaanxi Province.

Several technical experts sent by the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) have finished assessing the project in Yulin in the Northwest China province, Zhang Minglin, deputy general manager of Yankuang, told Bloomberg yesterday.

The NDRC hasn't yet given its final permission to start building the venture, he said.

The capacity of the project will reach 1 million tons of oil products a year, a source with Yankuang had told China Daily earlier.

Yankuang's Hong Kong-listed unit, Yanzhou Coal Mining Co Ltd, will take a stake in the project, Zhang said, without elaborating.

Yankuang may spend a further 50 billion yuan to expand the venture to 5 million tons a year by 2013, according to Zhang.

By 2020, coal-to-oil projects under Yanzhou Coal Mining Co will have the capacity of 10 million tons per year, said the company's website.

Coal already meets up to 70 percent of China's energy needs, mostly for the power and steel sectors. Oil imports have been increased to fuel China's booming economy, spurring the nation to look for technologies that can turn some of its coal reserves into fuel and other chemicals.

China's first direct coal-to-oil plant will start operation this year, according to China's largest coal producer Shenhua.

The project is based in Erdos in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region. Its annual output capacity is 1.08 million tons, and will consume 3.45 million tons of coal.

Shenhua launched the project in 2004. The company has joined forces with South Africa-based Sasol to set up two indirect coal-to-oil plants using Sasol's technology.

Experts estimate that by 2020, coupled with an annual capacity of 20 million tons of bio-oil, China's coal industry would be able to produce

50 million tons of oil products every year to help reduce the nation's oil imports.

But the government raised the threshold for coal-to-liquid fuel projects last year for fear that excessive development of the fossil fuel would pollute the environment and strain water supply.

Industry calls for clean energy incentives, support

January 10 (China Daily) -- The government should provide incentives and support to push cooperation on clean energy between private local companies and their foreign counterparts.

So said Yao Wenping, vice-president of the China Chamber of Commerce for the Import and Export of Machinery and Electronic Products.

Yao said incentives and support should be part of the nation's overall strategy, which emphasizes renewable energy and cleaner development.

"Policy incentives, financial subsidies and information services are vital to help Chinese companies find more opportunities to cooperate with foreign partners on clean energy," Yao told China Daily.

She said the United States, the world's leading player in clean-energy technology, has shown it's willing to cooperate with China in the sector. "The cooperation climate is sound and the government should take this opportunity to push cleaner technologies."

In December, during the two countries' strategic economic dialogue, the Minister of the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) Ma Kai asked the United States to cooperate with China on energy efficiency and clean energy.

"The US government hasn't prevented exports of wind, solar and other clean-energy technologies to China - it's a good time to strengthen cooperation," said Yao.

China plans to put clean and renewable energy at the top of its development agenda. Last month, the government emphasized that strategy in its first energy white paper. It will

focus on developing hydropower, biomass energy, wind power and solar power in the future, according to a medium and long-term plan for renewable energy. The NDRC has already listed the area as a development priority in its revised industry catalogue for foreign investment.

Most clean energy operations in China are currently run by private companies. "Business development in the area is fledgling and chaotic," said Yao.

She said the government needs to draw up a detailed plan to bolster foreign cooperation with firms that have advanced technologies.

Last month, the central government said it had created guidelines for cooperation in power generation, coal, petroleum and natural gas, renewable energy, energy conservation and environmental protection, in a bid to boost joint energy development.

"Joint energy development between the two countries would be mutually beneficial," Yao said, adding it would not only help China improve its energy consumption structure, reduce greenhouse emissions and cut pollutant discharges, but could also bring commercial benefits to the US side.

"The development will bring a lot of green jobs for the US," said Yao.

The commission said China would lift the proportion of renewable energy consumption to about 10 percent by 2010, and to 20 percent by 2020.

Automobile and Transportation

Transport problems set to spur further price rises

January 29 (China Daily) -- Widespread snowstorms buffeting the country may further drive up consumer prices if disrupted travel on roads and rail is not restored soon, economists have said.

The disruption has caused a shortage of food and agricultural products, the Ministry of Commerce said on its website, while the Ministry of Agriculture said the wholesale price index of agricultural products surged to 174.8 points yesterday, up from 155 points on Jan 1.

"These developments will likely push up near-term CPI inflation," Liang Hong, an economist with Goldman Sachs in Hong Kong, said.

The consumer price index (CPI) rose 4.8 percent last year, the highest rise in more than a decade. Food, which accounts for a third of the CPI basket, was a main driver of the inflation. Recently, the government has introduced several measures, including a temporary price freeze on some products, to prevent the price hikes evolving into overall inflation.

"Prices will rise further if transportation is not restored quickly," Chen Jijun, an analyst with CITIC Securities, said.

The Ministry of Commerce said this week that local authorities can deploy food reserves to deal with intense market fluctuations.

Local suppliers have also been urged to increase production of cooking oil, meat, eggs and vegetables.

New fuel standards take effect in Beijing

January 1 (Xinhua) -- Beijing introduced new vehicle fuel standards on Tuesday, which represent another way to ensure the "green Olympics" that China has promised.

Under the new standard, gasoline and diesel sold at all outlets in the capital city must meet the new China IV standards, which are equivalent to the European Union's Euro IV standards, according to Du Shaozhong, deputy director of the Beijing Environment Protection Bureau.

The China III standards, equivalent to their EU counterparts, have reduced sulphur dioxide emissions from automobiles by 2,480 tons annually since they took effect at the end of 2005, according to official statistics.

The new standards would cut sulphur dioxide emissions by another 1,840 tons, said Feng Yuqiao, the head of the motor vehicle department of the Beijing Environment Protection Bureau.

Feng noted that several thousand of Beijing's nearly 20,000 buses had begun using the cleaner fuels in 2007.

The quality of refined oil of the city is satisfactory. An inspection in the fourth quarter of last year found that 97 percent of the refined oil supplied by automobile distributors met the national standard.

There are an estimated 3.1 million motor vehicles in Beijing with about 1,000 to 1,200 vehicles added to the city's congested roads every day.

Beijing faces tremendous pressure to improve its air quality ahead of the 2008 Olympic Games. Under the Olympic host city's ambitious "blue sky" plan, it must have 70 percent of the days in 2008 up to standard.

In 2007, Beijing narrowly achieved the goal of 245 "blue sky" days.

Motor vehicle exhaust is among the top pollution causes. Earlier reports suggested that about 40 percent to 50 percent of the major pollutants in Beijing's air -- nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide and particulate matter -- come from vehicle exhaust emissions.

Numerous measures have been undertaken to get Beijing residents out of their cars and into public transport, including boosting the availability of public transportation with a new North-South subway line and slashing fares.

China auto maker to develop hydrous ethanol engines

January 1 (Xinhua) -- Dongfeng Motor Corporation, one of China's largest auto makers, has completed its initial research of using hydrous ethanol in automobiles.

The new technology could produce combustible gas, mainly hydrogen, from hydrous ethanol that contained 65 percent ethanol. The present

ethanol-fueled vehicles needed pure ethanol blended with gas, the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers said.

Experts said producing 65 percent ethanol could save up to 60 percent of energy compared with producing the same amount of pure ethanol, as dehydration was energy-consuming.

The use of hydrous ethanol, unlike some synthetic fuels that required adapted engines, only needed an additional device to be fixed on present engines. Thus, it was more likely to be accepted by consumers.

The company planned to set up an ethanol-fueled car production plant by the end of 2008. This included a design and test center, as well as an assembly plant for ethanol engines.

The plant was expected to produce a small amount of ethanol cars by year-end.

Auto production, sales hit record 8.8m units

January 13 (China Daily) -- Auto production and sales in China both surged more than 20 percent to a record 8.8 million units in 2007, despite slackening sales in global markets, an industry group said Sunday.

China's automakers rolled out 8.88 million motor vehicles last year, up 22.02 percent from a year earlier, according to the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers.

Total vehicle sales jumped 21.84 percent year-on-year to 8.79 million units in the world's second largest car market after the United States, twice the figure in 2003.

Both the output and sales beat the prediction of 8.5 million made at the beginning of last year.

Sales of sedans, or passenger vehicles excluding sport utility vehicles and minivans, accounted for 53.76 percent of the total sales.

China auto imports predicted to grow 20% in 2008

January 22 (Xinhua) -- China's imports of automobiles was likely to surpass 360,000 in 2008, up 20 percent year-on-year, the China Trading Center for Automobile Import (CTCAI) forecast in Beijing.

The center ascribed the robust growth to the country's stable economic growth, releasing of new auto models, and upgrading of automobile consumption in the domestic market.

A report released by the CTCAI showed that Sports Utility Vehicles (SUVs) would continue to be the most popular imported cars in the domestic market.

Official figures showed that from January to November in 2007, the number of imported SUVs rose 65 percent year on year to 126,659.

Japan, Germany, the Republic of Korea and the US were the major sources for China's imported cars. A total of 42 percent of sedans were imported from Germany and 48 percent of SUVs were imported from Japan.

Customs statistics showed that in the first 11 months in 2007, the number of imported vehicles stood at 277,093 units, up 37.6 percent.

Chinese auto sales are likely to hit or surpass 10 million units in 2008, Cai Weici, vice chairman of China Machinery Industry Federation (CMIF) forecast on Monday.

Official figures revealed that the country turned out 8.88 million automobiles in 2007, 22.02 percent more than the previous year, surpassing the eight million prediction made at the beginning of 2007.

Statistics showed that sedans of domestic brands had taken one fourth of the Chinese market.

Chery targets 26% rise in 2008 sales

January 16 (Xinhua) -- Chinese car maker Chery Automobile is targeting a 26 percent rise in sales this year, faster than the 2007 growth, as it

continues to roll out new models and expand overseas.

Vehicle sales are forecast to reach a record 480,000 units this year, after rising 24.8 percent year on year to 381,000 units in 2007. The company remained the country's fourth largest automobile seller in 2007, it said.

Its subcompact model QQ, known as the "Chinese Beetle", will launch three new models this year.

The 11-year-old company, based in the eastern city of Wuhu, Anhui Province, plans to raise its annual output to one million vehicles by 2010.

Its exports, which jumped 132 percent to 119,800 units in 2007, were expected to rise to 180,000 this year.

The flag-bearer of Chinese indigenous brands has accelerated its expansion overseas in recent years, with its exports topping all other domestic rivals for five consecutive years.

The company currently has more than a seven percent share of the domestic market, while it sells cars to 50 countries, including Russia, South America, the Middle East and South Africa.

It operates seven plants in six foreign countries, such as Russia, Uruguay, Indonesia and Egypt, and aims to build another 14 overseas plants by 2010.

In July, Chery signed a deal with the Chrysler Group that will help the Chinese auto maker sell compact cars under US company's brands in North America and Europe.

It has also established ties with Fiat to supply 100,000 engines annually for the Italian giant's cars made in China and abroad.

SAIC Motor ranks 1st in domestic vehicle sales

January 29 (Xinhua) -- China's Shanghai Automobile Industry Corporation (SAIC) sold more than 1.69 million motor vehicles in 2007, a growth of 25.8 percent over the previous year, company sources said on Wednesday.

The figure placed the Shanghai-based company, which has a joint venture with Volkswagen of Germany and another with General Motors of the United States, first among auto makers nationwide.

The Shanghai-listed company's total sales included 1.14 million passenger vehicles, up 24.3 percent, the sources said.

Last year, Shanghai GM sold more than 500,000 motor vehicles to remain the country's top passenger vehicle manufacturer. Shanghai Volkswagen's vehicle sales exceeded 456,000 units.

In March, SAIC Motor introduced a luxury model under its own brand name, Roewe, which recorded sales of more than 16,000 units in 2007.

Company sources added SAIC Motor also sold 553,000 commercial vehicles last year, up 29 percent.

Oil and Gas

Forum urges country to reduce dependence on fossil fuels

January 26 (China Daily) -- SHANGHAI: China should impose a gradual restriction on burning fossil fuels to combat climate change and environmental degradation, a legislative official said on Friday.

Sun Youhai, a senior official with the National People's Congress (NPC), said his proposal should be written into the draft of the Energy Law to stress the need for conservation and environmental protection.

"We should have special stipulations in the law to reflect the new trends in energy, the environment and climate change," Sun, a department director under the NPC's environment and resources protection committee, told an international forum set up to discuss the draft law.

The draft is likely to be read and voted on next year.

Sun said China should gradually decrease using coal, oil and natural gas, which are not only limited but also cause severe damage to the environment.

"But I am stressing this is a trend and we should take gradual steps, as China is still a developing country."

Sun said more should be done within the legislative framework to encourage the use of renewable energy.

Last year, China consumed about 2.5 billion tons of coal, up 5 percent on 2006.

"Once the law has stipulated the restriction, China can set up a national carbon trading market," Sun said.

"The trading system will provide an incentive to stop using polluting energies."

Yang Fuqiang, vice-president of the US-based Energy Foundation told China Daily: "It's an excellent proposal, reflecting the trend and determination of China to take effective measures to curb carbon emissions."

The government had earlier set a target to reduce polluting emissions by 10 percent between 2006 and 2010. Sulfur dioxide, the main cause of acid rain, is included on the list of emissions, but carbon is not.

Other experts said the law should put more emphasis on providing incentives for developing alternatives to fossil fuels.

Daniel Dudek, chief economist of the US-based Environmental Defense Fund, said: "The first step is to level the playing field by ensuring all environmental costs are included in the price of each energy source."

"If the price of fossil fuels included the cost of controlling emissions, including carbon, at levels that are not harmful to the environment, green alternatives would look much more attractive."

Sinopec processes 6.3% more crude oil

January 26 (China Daily) -- Sinopec Corp, Asia's largest refiner, processed 6.3 percent

more crude oil last year, after the government called for local plants to boost production.

The Beijing-based company processed 155.6 million tons of crude in 2007, about 3.13 million barrels a day, Sinopec said in a statement on its website yesterday.

The company's crude oil output rose 2.3 percent to 291.7 million barrels last year. Its natural gas production increased 10.3 percent to 283 billion cubic feet, the statement said.

The government in November ordered the country's refiners to run their plants at full capacity to increase supplies. The country's two leading oil companies PetroChina and Sinopec have been urged to boost fuel imports to improve supply.

Sinopec imported over 400,000 tons of diesel in December and around 300,000 tons in November. China's diesel imports in December increased more than fourfold from a year earlier.

But faced with a high crude oil price and government controls on refined oil product prices, analysts said Sinopec's oil refining business would see several billion yuan in losses for the fourth quarter of 2007.

"We predict the company's refining business will see a loss of 8 billion yuan for 2007," said Liu Gu, an analyst with Guotai Junan Securities in Shenzhen.

Sinopec's net profit in the first half of 2007 rose 65.3 percent to 34.9 billion yuan. The company set a new record in both oil and gas production, with 144 million barrels of crude oil and 140 billion cubic feet of natural gas produced.

Sinopec processed 76.25 million tons of crude oil in the first six months, an increase of 6.38 percent.

China's crude oil production may increase 1.5 percent for last year, according to the China Petroleum and Chemical Industry Association. Oil output may climb to 186 million tons for 2007, and increase to 189 million tons this year.

China's natural gas output may rise 14 percent to 58.55 billion cu m in 2007 and increase to 76 billion cu m in 2008. The nation's gas production will be 90 billion cu m in 2010, the association said.

Oil producer closes in on small plants

January 8 (China Daily) -- China National Offshore Oil Corp (CNOOC), the nation's third largest oil producer, plans to buy small refineries in Shandong province to expand its oil processing business.

The company has signed a framework agreement with the Shandong provincial government, company spokesman Liu Junshan told China Daily yesterday.

"CNOOC will cooperate further with the refineries in the province and boost its investment there," said Liu, without disclosing details.

The company also signed cooperation agreements with other provinces such as Hebei and Liaoning, he said, adding that it will focus on the coastal areas.

Analysts said the move is part of CNOOC's efforts to widen its focus on offshore oil and gas exploration to become an integrated oil firm with a strong presence in the downstream sector.

Now is a good time for State-owned companies to buy so-called teapot refineries, said Han Xiaoping, senior vice-president of Beijing Falcon Pioneer Technology Co Ltd. Shandong and Guangdong provinces are home to many teapot refineries that account for around 10 percent of the country's total refining capacity.

These refineries are losing money from record-high crude costs, as the price of refined oil products is controlled by the government.

According to company officials, CNOOC's first oil refinery is on track to start operating in October and it plans to add more refining facilities to meet fast-growing demand for fuel.

The plant, located in Huizhou in Guangdong province, is key to CNOOC's plans to become a fully integrated oil firm. The 21.8-billion-yuan project has an annual refining capacity of 12 million tons of crude oil.

Other Chinese oil companies have also quickened their pace in Shandong. China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC), the nation's

largest oil producer, plans to build a refinery in the province to boost its capacity.

The company has signed an agreement with the provincial government. "CNPC will have all-round cooperation with Shandong on large projects and an oil and natural gas sales network," the company said.

CNPC will build the Shandong project in the coastal city of Weihai, a company source earlier told China Daily.

The CNPC source said that apart from Shandong, it recently signed cooperation agreements with other provinces such as Shandong, Henan and Gansu.

The company's listed arm, PetroChina, is poised to increase its oil refining volume by nearly 12 percent in 2007, reaching some 120 million tons, Liu Hongbin with PetroChina told China Daily earlier.

China's largest refiner Sinopec Group is also building a 12.5 billion yuan refinery in Shandong's Qingdao. The project is designed to process 10 million tons of crude annually. It will produce 7.6 million tons of refined oil per year, a source with Sinopec said.

The plant's annual sales revenue is expected to exceed 30 billion yuan, the source said.

Back-up oil facility to be ready by 2009

January 3 (China Daily) -- SHANGHAI: The city's first storage facility for refined oil products will be ready in early 2009 to provide a back-up energy supply.

The foundation was completed late last year at the Shanghai Chemical Industry Park, the Shanghai Securities News reported yesterday.

The project received a 520 million yuan investment from the listed arm of Shanghai's leading retailer Bailian Group.

The project will be able to store 200,000 cubic meters of refined oil products, including an emergency reserve of 30,000 tons of diesel - enough to cover a shortage for up to a week.

Experts said the move will help offset oil price fluctuations caused by ups and downs on the international market and will benefit companies in Shanghai and other areas in the Yangtze River Delta.

China is the world's second largest oil consumer after the United States. But many parts of the country are facing severe fuel shortages, with demand outpacing supply from refiners squeezed by soaring crude oil prices.

In Shanghai, fuel supply has been up and down in recent years due to rising global crude oil prices and temporary shutdowns of domestic refineries for maintenance checks.

Bailian Group and the industry park signed agreements in April last year on investment in and land use rights at the storage facility.

The project comprises 18 oil tanks of different sizes, and is backed by the Shanghai Fuel Co. It will include four zones - an oil storage area, deliveries and loading station, subsidiary production area and an administrative zone.

Covering fuel oil, diesel and gasoline, the reserve will circulate 3 to 4 million cubic meters of oil products every year - a steady and reliable supply for companies in the chemical industry park.

The company said the reserve would ease the seasonal fuel supply disruption.

The government started a strategic oil reserve base program in 2004 to offset oil supply risks and reduce the impact of fluctuating global energy prices, which impact the domestic market for refined oil.

The bases are designed to maintain strategic oil reserves equivalent to 30 days of imports, or about 10 million tons.

CNOOC to up output by 15-16%

January 30 (China Daily) -- HONG KONG: China's largest offshore oil producer CNOOC Ltd plans to raise its oil and gas output by 15 to 16 percent to somewhere between 195 million and 199 million barrels of oil equivalent (BOE) in 2008.

That will compare to 169 million to 171 million BOE in 2007, Yang Hua, CNOOC's chief financial officer, told reporters in Hong Kong yesterday.

To fuel the growth, the company will earmark \$5.24 billion as capital expenditure for 2008, increasing 43.7 percent compared with 2007. The capital expenditure for exploration and development activities is expected to increase to \$1.04 billion and \$4.15 billion respectively.

"CNOOC will embrace a period featuring high output growth," Chairman Fu Chengyu said.

The company expects to achieve a replacement ratio of over 100 percent in 2008, meaning it would discover enough reserves to replace all of its output.

"During the year, 10 new projects are expected to come on stream, including major offshore projects such as platform B, D, E of Penglai 19-3 phase II and Wenchang oilfields and Xijiang 23-1," the company said in a statement.

Yang is sure the company will maintain a high growth rate and will achieve a 7 to 11 percent compound annual growth rate from 2006 to 2010.

On the international oil price rise and a gloomy US economy, Yang said they would not considerably affect domestic crude prices since only 30 percent of the mainland's oil supply is imported.

Regarding the upcoming challenges, Yang said the company faces many difficulties such as increasing production cost, weakening greenback, rising taxes and deficiency of services.

He elaborated that the central government will implement many new taxes such as resources tax from this year, which would make the industrial environment tougher.

Mainland oilfields currently constitute over 80 percent of the company's total output. The remaining output comes from countries such as Indonesia.

Ricky Tam, chairman of Hong Kong Institute of Investors, said CNOOC would outperform the other two State-owned oil and petrochemical counterparts - PetroChina and Sinopec.

High time to save oil

January 4 (China Daily) -- Crude oil briefly hit \$100 a barrel for the first time on the first trading day of the new year, rapidly fulfilling one of the most widely-expected prophecies about the world economy.

Record high oil prices are a loud warning that entails global energy-saving actions.

Soaring oil prices will considerably add to uncertainties in global growth prospects, especially as the United States, the world's largest economy, has already been struggling to avoid recession in the face of a credit squeeze and a housing slide.

At present, it is far from sure if the oil price will continue to surge significantly before tipping the US economy into recession or the ongoing US slowdown will quickly ease demand and lead to a sharp fall in oil prices.

However, in spite of such divergency in the short to middle-term trend of oil prices, it has become all too clear that countries around the world must do their best to save every drop of oil now.

Even if production of oil can be further boosted through new investment and technology, it will be impossible to prevent global demand from outstripping supplies if worldwide efforts are not concerted to raise energy efficiency.

Various countries should make differential contributions in line with their conditions in the global campaign to save energy. In a sense, the ever-rising oil prices can be deemed as the drum the market beats for such actions.

For China, energy conservation has been made an unequivocal priority in its latest development strategy.

As the world's fastest-growing major economy, the country is fully aware of the potential impact of its expanding appetite for energy on the global market as well as the necessity to aggressively raise its energy efficiency to sustain economic growth.

In a bid to expedite change to the country's extensive growth model, the Chinese government has made it a top goal to cut energy consumption per unit of GDP by 20 percent between 2006 and 2010.

It is believed that the ongoing rise in international oil prices will eventually play into the hands of Chinese policymakers who are eager to goad domestic producers and consumers to use energy in a more efficient way.

A strict government control over energy prices has so far prevented hikes in international oil prices from swiftly inflating the domestic cost of production. To encourage energy conservation and punish those dragging their feet on raising their energy efficiency, it is urgent for the country to introduce a market-oriented energy pricing system.

During the course to relax control over energy prices, policymakers should carefully identify those underprivileged groups who are hit hard by rising energy costs and subsidize them properly and promptly.

Wanted: More oil futures products

January 4 (China Daily) -- SHANGHAI: The continuous surge of crude oil prices in the international market is posing an urgent need for China to establish a comprehensive energy futures market to help domestic downstream enterprises minimize risks arising from frequent price swings.

Analysts said the introduction of more oil futures products is of particular importance at a time when global economic uncertainties have exacerbated the fluctuations in crude prices at unprecedented high levels.

"There is clearly an urgent need to expand the scope of the domestic oil futures market by introducing new oil futures products, including futures contracts on crude, gasoline and diesel," said Lin Hui, an analyst at Orient Securities Futures.

"The development of oil futures market is conducive to increasing China's influence in

global energy pricing and ensure the country's economic security."

Industry analysts said the trading of fuel oil futures contracts on Shanghai Futures Exchange, SHFE, since 2004 has paved the way for more oil futures products.

Trading in fuel oil futures contracts has become increasingly active over the past three years. The turnover of fuel oil futures contracts on SHFE last year totaled 849.6 billion yuan, up 51.1 percent from 2005.

Analysts said what many Chinese downstream enterprises need most is a transparent and effective oil futures market to hedge against risks resulting from sharp swings in international oil prices.

Officials at SHFE have expressed their desire to launch oil futures products to develop the energy-related futures market. The exchange stepped up its research in developing oil futures contracts two years ago.

In September, SHFE signed a memorandum of cooperation with China University of Petroleum in Beijing to jointly set up an institute of research on energy finance and pricing risks.

Yang Maijun, general manager of SHFE, had said at the signing ceremony that the cooperation would enable the exchange to expand the team of experts on energy economy and quicken the pace of introducing oil futures products.

Analysts said an efficient oil futures market can make it possible for prices to reflect the true supply and demand conditions.

"Only when market forces dictate oil prices can the futures market truly reflect the supply and demand conditions in the industry," said Zhou Jie, an analyst at China International Futures (Shanghai) Co. "Small and medium-sized downstream enterprises can benefit from the energy financial market then."

Climate Change and Air Pollution

Neighbors will stand together

January 29 (China Daily) -- China and Japan should smash the trammels of old ideas and establish a relationship that enables the two to combat common challenges and face Asia and the world together, policy consultants from both sides said yesterday.

"China and Japan both shoulder important responsibilities and have broad common interests in the fields of peace and development," Zheng Bijian, the chief Chinese member of the seventh meeting of the 21st Century Committee for China-Japan Friendship, said at its closing ceremony.

"We should make efforts to develop Sino-Japanese relations with a global perspective, so as to face issues such as climate change together, jointly promote East Asia cooperation and contribute to stability, peace and prosperity in the region and the world at large," Zheng said.

Established in 2003, the committee is a policy consultation organization for the two governments. Its goal is to bring together intellectuals from both sides to study relations from a broad political, economic, cultural, scientific and technological perspective, and make proposals to the two governments.

During the two-day meeting, 14 consultants discussed how to ensure a successful Japan visit for President Hu Jintao this spring and implement the consensus reached during Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda's visit to China last month, Zheng said.

Beijing said during Fukuda's visit that President Hu would pay a State visit to Japan in the "cherry blossom season".

The consultants also discussed ways to boost mutual trust, enlarge common interest and handle sensitive issues, as well as suggesting the establishment of a mechanism for long-term and stable development of bilateral ties.

After the meeting, Bai Yansong, a CCTV news anchor and committee member, told China Daily he viewed Fukuda's frequent mentioning of "we" and "community of interests" during his speech at Peking University an important change.

"For Sino-Japanese relations, it is no longer the question of 'You' and 'I'. Now we are a community of interests with our feet in Asia and facing the world together," said Bai, who last

year produced a TV series entitled Japan in Yan's Eyes to introduce the politics, economy and culture of Japan to a Chinese audience.

Yotaro Kobayashi, Japan's chief committee member, agreed with Bai and suggested maintaining the use of "We" in future bilateral exchanges.

Both Premier Wen Jiabao and Fukuda sent letters of congratulations to the meeting.

The group's final meeting will be held at the end of the year in Japan.

It will yield a final report and mark the end of the consultants' five-year tenure.

Climate change monitoring station opens

January 8 (Xinhua) -- LHASA: An ozone measurement observatory on the world's highest plateau in the Tibet Autonomous Region has gone into operation, officials from the local meteorological administration have said.

Work on the 1.52 million yuan (\$209,000) observatory began last month. Located 3,650 m above sea level in Lhasa, the regional capital, it is equipped with a state-of-the-art Brewer ozone spectrophotometer, which alone cost 1.4 million yuan.

Zhang Yong, a senior engineer with the Lhasa meteorological bureau, said: "The Qinghai-Tibet Plateau is a hot spot for monitoring international climate change.

"By comparing data from the new high-altitude observatory with those recorded at the one in Qinghai Province, we can measure changes in the ozone layer across the plateau."

Zhang said the observatory will provide precise information on the amount of ozone and ultraviolet B (UVB) radiation in the atmosphere.

"The observatory will regularly transmit information to meteorological departments across the country for analysis, and this can also be forwarded to the World Ozone and Ultraviolet Radiation Data Center in Canada so it can be used by scientists around the world," he said.

Lhasa is situated in the low-level ozone layer region of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. Chinese scientists have found the ozone layer there is thinner in the summer than it is in other parts of the world on the same latitude.

Ozone is one of the gases forming the Earth's atmosphere and is the major shield against UVB radiation, absorbing about 90 percent of solar UVB.

Excessive exposure to UVB can cause skin cancer and is a major contributor to glacial melting.

China has installed five Brewer-equipped ozone observatories, including one in the Zhongshan Station in Antarctica.

Weather forecasts

January 2 (China Daily) -- A total of 1.2 billion text message warnings about extreme weather changes sent by meteorological departments at various levels to relevant working units or residents in the past year suggests how meteorological workers are adopting a people-centered approach in providing as convenient a service as possible.

Weather forecasts are something which many harbor mixed feelings about - they cannot live without it but they quite often feel annoyed when inaccurate or wrong predictions lead to inconvenience or even great trouble.

When it comes to the reduction of possible losses from natural calamities, the importance of timely and accurate weather forecasts can never be overestimated.

That such a forecast of a rainstorm in Central China's Hubei Province, along with preparations for the evacuation of residents in July last year, averted a fatal disaster for thousands of local residents, signifies the irreplaceable role of meteorological services in reducing the impact of natural disasters.

Undoubtedly, the use of meteorological satellites and state-of-the-art technologies in the observation and analysis of weather conditions have considerably raised the accuracy and timeliness of weather forecasts. The weather can be capricious and it is unrealistic for

meteorological workers to give 100 percent accurate forecasts. But the way they make unremitting efforts to keep tracking the constant change does make a difference.

That may explain why the authorities of the China Meteorological Administration has set strict demands on its workers that they must make 100 percent efforts although the forecasts can never be expected to be 100 percent accurate. It is the efforts of weather people to accurately forecast the eight typhoons that contributed considerably to the successful evacuation of residents and preparations to avert possible damage that could have been caused by typhoons along coastal regions in 2007.

Climate change caused by global warming poses a challenge to meteorological work while the increased frequency of extreme weather conditions has projected its even more important supporting role for economic development and social progress.

China sets agenda to curb pollution for green Olympics

January 23 (Xinhua) -- BEIJING -- China is aiming to cut its air and water pollution by at least 5 percent in 2008 comparing with 2005 figures to ensure a green Olympics, said Zhou Shengxian, head of the country's environmental watchdog.

Zhou said Tuesday on a work conference of the State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA) that the country plans to cut its sulfur dioxide and chemical oxygen demand (COD), two major pollutants emissions in China, by 6 and 5 percent respectively in 2008 from 2005 levels.

The plan means the country will cut up to 2.3 million tons of sulfur dioxide (SO₂) emissions and 1.3 million tons of chemical oxygen demand (COD) this year.

By 2010, the plan is to reduce both levels by 10 percent based on 2005 levels.

"Industrial restructuring will play a fundamental role in curbing pollution," China Daily quoted Zhou.

Use of sulfur scrubbers to clean emissions will be emphasized to curb air pollution, according to the plan.

New thermal power generation units with a combined capacity of 30 gigawatts will be installed with sulfur removal capabilities, which is expected to reduce SO₂ emissions by 1.5 million tons.

Zhou also revealed that more high energy consuming and high polluting power plants will be shut down this year.

The shut-down plan includes a number of small thermal power plants with a combined output of 13 gigawatts, steel plants with a total capacity of 6 million tons, cement plants with a combined output of 50 million tons, iron production facilities with a total capacity of 14 million tons, and papermaking factories producing a combined 1 million tons.

"If achieved by the end of this year, the plan will help China reduce its emissions of SO₂ by 600,000 tons and cut the COD by 400,000 tons," Zhou said.

Key eco-friendly projects will also be implemented, Zhou said.

The country's urban wastewater treatment capacity is to be increased by 12 million tons a day, which will cut COD by 600,000 tons.

In addition, industries will be required to strengthen their wastewater treatment capacities and will be expected to decrease COD by 200,000 tons a year.

Measures taken by the central government and environmental agencies last year also saw progress being made in the green battle.

The density of COD in water resources was 6.5 milligram per liter, down 7 percent on 2006.

A reduction in SO₂ emissions also saw the area of land affected by acid rain shrink by 100,000 square kilometers.

The number of blue-sky days with good air quality was also up on the previous year.

However, China's fight against pollution is far from over, Zhou said.

The country ranked first in sulfur dioxide emission in the world in 2005.

SEPA figures also showed that last year, the quality of more than 26 percent of water runoff was worse than grade V - a level unfit for human contact.

Beijing's neighboring province reports more blue sky days

January 10 (Xinhua) -- SHIJIAZHUANG -- All 11 major cities in Hebei Province, which surrounds the Olympic host city of Beijing, reported more "blue sky" days -- or days with fairly good air quality -- in 2007 than the previous year, latest government statistics show.

"Blue sky" days in these cities averaged 313 last year, 14 more than in 2006 and 141 more than five years ago, figures from the Hebei Provincial Environmental Protection Bureau show.

Major indices of air pollution decreased last year in the cities, said Yang Zhiming, deputy director of the bureau.

The provincial capital, Shijiazhuang, registered 289 "blue sky" days last year, two more than in 2006.

The other 10 cities all saw more than 300 such days, with the highest measured at 354 in the seaside city of Qinhuangdao, 36 more than in 2006. Qinhuangdao, about 280 kilometers east of Beijing, is one of the five football venues for the August 8-24 Olympic Games.

Yang attributed the increase of "blue skies" mainly to the government's efforts to cut pollution and protect the environment in the past year, in addition to more windy and rainy days, which are favorable for diffusion of atmospheric pollutants.

Experts say under certain weather conditions, pollutants from Beijing's neighboring regions will spread to the capital, and vice versa.

The local governments of Hebei, Shandong and Shanxi provinces, Tianjin Municipality and Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region have drawn up measures to improve air quality during the high-profile international sports event, such as

installing air-quality monitoring networks focused on heavily-polluting businesses.

In Hebei, efforts to keep pollutants out of the capital include the installation of 34 desulphurization systems in power plants, construction of 23 central heating facilities that would help cut coal use, and 56 anti-pollution projects in the province's chemical industries, said Ji Zhenhai, director of the provincial environment bureau. The projects could reduce Hebei's annual emissions of about 550,000 tons of sulphur dioxide, he said.

Meanwhile, Hebei has started to build air-quality monitoring stations in six major cities near Beijing -- Langfang, Baoding, Tangshan, Zhangjiakou, Shijiazhuang and Chengde -- to collect data on emissions of sulphur dioxide, nitrogen monoxide, carbon monoxide and other chemicals.

Air quality warnings for Lanzhou

January 9 (China Daily) -- The government of Lanzhou, capital of Gansu province, has issued an emergency plan to control air pollution during the winter.

According to an official from the Lanzhou environmental protection bureau, the plan has specific and stringent measures, including the closing down of barbecued food businesses that emit smoke and the suspension of construction in urban areas when air pollution is at its highest, or red, level.

Air quality warnings will be graded as red, orange and yellow, according to the level of pollution, Kang Mingke, deputy director of the bureau's legal department, said.

The degree of pollution will be determined by the concentration of inhalable particles in the air, he said.

Lanzhou is considered one of the most polluted cities in China.

In recent years, the local government has introduced several measures, including closing down heavy industrial projects, restricting smoke and dust emissions and controlling car exhaust

emissions, in a bid to improve the city's environment.

Kang said that between Saturday and yesterday, Lanzhou had the worst pollution in the country.

Under the new plan, once the air quality reaches the yellow alert level, the local government will place limits on the operation of small- and medium-sized coal boilers and adopt dust suppression measures, such as covering places where dust is produced and sprinkling them with water, Kang said.

If the air quality reaches the red alert level, the provincial and municipal governments can order heavy polluting companies to limit or stop production, and will also restrict the number of vehicles in urban areas.

Surrounded by mountains, Lanzhou has long suffered from serious air pollution, especially during winter.

Yi Dong, deputy chief engineer of the Gansu provincial bureau of meteorology, said that because it lacks strong winds during the winter, Lanzhou is often blanketed by smog, which is hard to disperse.

According to the Lanzhou meteorological center, between late Saturday and Sunday afternoon, the air pollution index reached a high of 419.

"It was the worst pollution the city has seen this winter," Yi said.

"On December 8, the air pollution index was 302."

Wu Jide, the city's deputy mayor said the local government will try "every way" to control dust and air pollution to provide residents with a better environment.

Beijing still needs nature's help for clean sky

January 4 (China Daily) -- Gusting winds helped Beijing officials meet and beat their quota of 245 "blue-sky" days for 2007 just two days ahead of the New Year, thus keeping their earlier promise to the International Olympic Committee.

On December 30, strong winds cleared the heavy smog that often casts a pall over the city and residents were treated to a starry, starry night on New Year's Eve.

The relatively clement weather at the final stretch meant 246 days where Beijing's air quality dropped below 100 on the Air Pollution Index (API) -- a level that some critics say still fails to meet acceptable world standards.

Beijing officials were just happy to have met the tough quota.

"It has been very dramatic. At times we had our hearts in our throats," Du Shaozhong, deputy director of Beijing's environmental bureau, told local media recently. "We are happy, but we've got more work to do."

There were five more "blue-sky" days in 2007 than 2006, and only a quarter as many "heavily polluted" days, when the API hit 300 (three days instead of 13). Looking back to when Beijing started its clean-up project a decade ago, there were a meager 100 clear days in the first year.

For 2008, the year of the Beijing Games, the host city plans to increase the quota by another 11 days. Typically humid August should be cleaner than ever, with athletes and coaches the world over getting to experience the best conditions China can offer -- on land, sea and air.

To this end, Beijing will almost definitely remove more vehicles from the streets and suspend coal-burning plants in suburban areas and neighboring provinces for about two months starting just prior to the opening ceremony of the Games.

Beijing also adopted stricter fuel emissions from Tuesday to ensure its cars now meet the EURO IV standard. Power plants in Beijing will replace nitrogen oxide-reduction systems and the city is retrofitting its 1,400 gas stations to curb petroleum vaporization.

The government should enlist NGOs to help clean the air before the Games, said Yang Fuqiang, chief representative of the US-based Energy Foundation in Beijing. Du said he hopes

Mother Nature pitches in to assist city officials with their Herculean task.