
China resorts to wind for green power

by Xinhua writers Wang Aihua, Zhang Yunlong

HOHHOT, March 30 (Xinhua) -- Once confined to small, three-blade turbines that produced tiny volumes of electricity for remote cottages, wind power is again spreading across China's countryside.

In China's northern Inner Mongolia, legions of enormous white turbines stand high on the ground, capturing strong winds from the heartland of Mongolia and Siberia.

The Inner Mongolia Autonomous Regional Government says its installed capacity reached 3 million kilowatts by the end of 2008. This year that generating capacity is expected to rise by 50 percent.

Inner Mongolia's ambition was bolstered this month, when the Chinese government published a policy to boost development of alternative energies.

Wan Gang, Minister of Science and Technology, said at a forum in Beijing that China should "develop clean and environment-friendly new energy resources" as part of the plan to stimulate domestic demand and maintain high economic growth.

At the national annual session of China's top political advisory body, held in early March, officials with the State Energy Bureau under the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) voiced similar opinions.

Zhang Guobao, the bureau chief, said China should learn from past experience and put new energy development at "an important strategic position."

Wind power, as a main force of China's alternative energy reserve, had been developing rapidly in the 21st Century, Zhang said.

China's total wind power installed capacity increased from 400,000 kilowatts in 2001 to 6 million kilowatts in 2007, the fifth highest in the world, to 10 million kilowatts in 2008, according to the NDRC.

Yang Mingying, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said Monday that the fast development of wind power began as the government initiated incentive policies in 2007.

The NDRC drafted a long-term plan for renewable energy use in 2007 and promised that the government would provide incentives to companies that were involved in developing renewable energies.

"Government subsidies have helped wind-generated electricity compete

in the market," Yang said. "Normally, the price of wind power is higher than traditional power."

In a law passed in 2005 by the National People's Congress, China's legislature, the state set a goal to increase the proportion of renewable energy resources to 10 percent of total energy consumption by 2020.

"The competitive edge of wind power is highly dependant on oil prices," Yang said. The current low oil price and the world financial crisis could hold back the alternative energy industries.

Liu Zhiqiang, vice chairman of the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce, said, "China's development of new energy resources has just begun."

Experts point out that alternative energy industries, such as wind power, still have problems to solve and progress to make.

"As many new plants are built quickly, some have not been strict enough with quality supervision, such as checks on wind turbines and research on the feasibility of wind power generation at the site," Yang said.

The number of technicians who can operate and maintain the generators was still low.

"However, renewable energy resources can guarantee a sustainable energy supply, which is vital to the economy and society as a whole," Yang said.

Lin Li, deputy director of the Science and Technology Bureau in Inner Mongolia, said, "Wind power was only used by local herdsmen for cooking and lighting in the 1980s. Now it is a main force in China's new energy development cause."