

## Beijing budgets billions of yuan in effort to clean up air



A worker hangs ornaments at the Ming Dynasty City Wall Ruins Park under a blue sky in Beijing this month. [Liu Ping/China Daily]

Beijing will expand funding to reduce air pollution in 2017, including phasing out hundreds of thousands of automobiles and replacing coal furnaces in hundreds of villages, the municipal government said.

So far in March, more than 10 days of clear, blue skies have been recorded. There were 198 such days last year and 186 in 2015, according to the Beijing Environmental Protection Bureau.

In addition, the number of days with severe air pollution mainly due to a high concentration of PM2.5—particulate matter of 2.5 microns deemed dangerous to human health—fell to 39 last year, down from 46 in 2015, 47 in 2014 and 58 in 2013.

PM2.5 is used as a major index to record the concentration of the six major airborne pollutants.

“Beijing saw its average PM2.5 level lowered to 73 micrograms per cubic meter in 2016, a year-on-year decrease of 9.9 percent,” said the capital’s mayor, Cai Qi, giving credit to existing measures such as reducing coal consumption and the number of vehicles.

Data from the environmental protection bureau showed the capital cut PM2.5 levels by 19 percent from 2013 to 2016, said Zhang Dawei, director of the Beijing Environmental Monitoring Center.

Beijing will take tougher measures in 2017.

“We will crack down on air pollution with an iron fist ... to meet the public expectation of blue skies,” Cai said.

Among those measures are subsidizing drivers, as about 300,000 old vehicles with excessive exhaust will be banned from the roads; and helping 700 villages replace coal-fired boilers with clean energy such as electricity and gas, which would eliminate coal consumption in the downtown districts and southern regions.

In winter, coal consumption for heating in rural areas was a major source of air pollution, Zhang said.

“In 2017, Beijing will lower its coal consumption (including for industrial production and heating) by 30 percent, with the total amount falling to less than 7 million metric tons,” Cai said.

The Action Plan on Air Pollution Control and Prevention stipulated that the capital should lower its PM2.5 concentration to 60 micrograms per cubic meter by the end of this year.

The municipal government plans to spend up to 18.2 billion yuan (\$2.6 billion) this year on stronger pollution-control measures, the Beijing Finance Bureau said. In 2014, the special allocation for air pollution was 12.9 billion yuan.

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## [News story: £23 million boost for hydrogen-powered vehicles and infrastructure](#)

A new £23 million fund to accelerate the take up of hydrogen vehicles and roll out more cutting-edge infrastructure has been announced by the government today (18 March 2017).

Hydrogen fuel providers will be able to bid for funding in partnership with organisations that produce hydrogen vehicles to help build high-tech infrastructure, including fuel stations. The funding will boost the creation of hydrogen fuel infrastructure and uptake of hydrogen-powered vehicles.

A competition will be launched this summer, and will invite proposals from public organisations, businesses and hydrogen operators. The government will provide match funding for successful bidders as part of its plans to cut carbon emissions, improve air quality and deliver economic opportunities for the UK.

Transport Minister John Hayes said:

The transition to zero emission road transport is both inevitable and desirable as it will improve air quality in many of our towns and cities. Hydrogen fuel cell electric vehicles can play a vital role alongside battery electric vehicles to help us cut harmful emissions.

We know availability of hydrogen refuelling infrastructure can be a potential obstacle to the take up of hydrogen fuel cell electric vehicles. That's why we're providing support to give interested parties the confidence to continue to invest in this new emerging technology to help us achieve our ambition for almost all new cars and vans to be zero emission by 2040.

Hydrogen vehicles can be quickly refuelled using a pump like a conventional petrol or diesel car, but instead use gas. They produce only water as a by-product and have a range of around 300 miles per tank, like conventional vehicles.

The government is working closely with industry on the future direction of the UK automotive sector and has allocated over £600 million for low emission vehicles over the course of this Parliament with an additional £390 million announced at last year's [Autumn Statement](#) for ultra low emission vehicles and driverless cars.

Paul Van der Burgh, President and Managing Director of Toyota (GB), said:

Toyota believes hydrogen fuel cell electric vehicles can play an important role in the transition to a low carbon, low emissions society. We chose the UK as one of the first international markets for our Mirai hydrogen fuel cell car and are pleased that the government is investing in this programme to encourage the further development of refuelling infrastructure and the wider uptake of fuel cell vehicles.

We will continue to work with the government, organisations and industry partners to help the UK realise the significant potential of hydrogen as a clean and sustainable source of power.

Today's announcement builds on the launch of the [Industrial Strategy green paper](#) published in January which outlined plans to fund new high-value economic infrastructure and reaffirmed government commitment to investing in energy innovation and to tackling the causes of climate change.

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# Speech: “Central African Republic needs more than just plans and pledges”

I would like to begin by welcoming President Touadera to the Council and thanking him for his briefing, as well as the other briefers for theirs.

It has been a significant twelve months for the Central African Republic. The peaceful and credible elections that saw you, Mr President, elected were a welcome moment of hope for a country that has endured crisis for far too long. And the National Plan for Recovery and Peacebuilding, agreed in November, sets out a clear pathway forward. It will move the country on and away from the cycle of conflict.

In that effort the Central African Republic will have the international community's support, including \$44 million from the United Kingdom.

But the Central African Republic needs more than just plans and pledges. What it really needs is implementation delivery, both by the Government and by us in the international community.

Because as the past twelve months have sadly shown, progress is fragile. The hope of March 2016 risks being replaced by the violence, displacement, humanitarian urgency, and fear of the past. Having come so far, the risk of reversal, the risk of deterioration, a return to the chaos of the past, is now a painful reality that we must confront. In response, we see four steps.

First, the Government of the Central African Republic, with support from MINUSCA, must secure an agreement with armed groups to cease attacks on civilians as well as for their disarmament and demobilisation. They can't be allowed to derail progress in pursuit of their own short term self interest.

Second, more effort needs to be made on disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration of ex-Seleka faction and anti-Balaka groups. We welcome the President's Consultative Committee as the formal framework for DDR with all armed groups represented, as we heard today. Efforts to support mediation, in particular the Angola-led African Initiative, are all welcome. Any initiative must support the President's authority, be in coordination with the UN, and respect the will of the Central African Republic people to end impunity as demonstrated at the Bangui Forum.

Third, for long term stability, it's essential that the Central African Republic's own armed forces can provide the security and stability that the people deserve. That means reform of the armed forces. And we stand ready to support the country in that effort.

Fourth, and finally, if the Central African Republic is to move beyond the violence, there must be accountability. Not only will that bring justice for

those who have suffered but it will also send a clear message to armed groups that they cannot kill and maim with impunity. This Council has given our support for the development of a Special Criminal Court and we've mandated MINUSCA to help make it happen. And now we need to see implementation.

In conclusion, the Central African Republic is at a critical juncture. There is a possibility for sustainable peace, but that possibility narrows as the security situation deteriorates. Having endured conflict and chaos for so long, having stepped away from the brink of genocide in 2014, the people of the Central African Republic deserve a peaceful future, not a return to a hateful past. Mr President of the Republic, we stand ready to support you so that the Central African Republic can finally break the cycle of conflict.

Thank you.

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## [News story: Army's future is secure in Brecon](#)

Sir Michael confirmed that the Brecon Infantry Battle School will remain open, providing world-class training to 3,500 infantry soldiers each year who are preparing to become future Army leaders.

During the visit he also announced that the Regimental Museum of The Royal Welsh is likely to remain in its current location for at least a decade as the Ministry of Defence discusses a long-term lease for the site.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

Brecon has a long Army history. The Infantry Battle School and Sennybridge Training Area will stay and continue to be a vital location for training and exercises for thousands of soldiers every year.

Today was an opportunity to review our plans for the Barracks and Regimental Museum with Chris Davies and others to ensure that we help attract jobs and investment when we leave the Barracks by 2027

With a brigade headquarters and combat units continuing to be based in Wales, Wales' long term future as a key defence location is secure.

The Armed Forces has a strong connection to Wales, and the Defence Secretary also revealed figures showing that Defence spent £870 million with Welsh industry in 2015/16, amounting to around £280 per person and supporting 5,250 jobs. Wales is also home to one of the Army's major UK training areas at

Sennybridge, which is used for various exercises throughout the year.

As part of the MOD's Better Defence Estate strategy, Brecon Barracks will be released, opening up a prime town centre site for redevelopment with the potential to bring economic opportunities and job creation to the area. By selling sites such as these, the MOD is investing £4 billion over 10 years to provide accommodation and facilities better suited to our modern Armed Forces and their families.

160 Brigade will continue to be based out of Wales, as well as the RAF's fast jet pilot training school at RAF Valley. Around 2180 regulars are based across the country plus a thousand of MOD civilian staff, demonstrating Defence's continued long-term commitment to Wales.

Sir Michael's announcements came as he met Rangers and Riflemen from 160th Infantry Brigade and presented two members of the Royal Irish Regiment with St Patrick's Day shamrocks.

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## **Press release: Environment Agency shortlisted for UK River Prize 2017**

The Environment Agency has been praised for an ambitious restoration project on Hampshire's famous River Avon.

The agency's 'whole river approach' to restoration and natural flood management impressed judges who voted it the best entry in the 'catchment category' of the 2017 UK River Prize, a national competition that celebrates the most innovative and successful river projects across England, Scotland and Wales.

As category winner, the Hampshire Avon project automatically qualifies as a finalist. The Environment Agency is up against three other finalists – each winners of separate categories – vying for the top UK River Prize. The overall winner will be announced at a special ceremony in Brighton next month and presented with a trophy and cash prize.

Russell Spencer for the Environment Agency:

This is well earned recognition for the efforts of many people and organisations working together to help realise the vision for the Avon catchment – and a great springboard for the next phase of the programme, where we would like many more to be involved.

The River Avon Restoration Project was set up to restore the River Avon Special Area of Conservation (SAC) to a natural river system supporting chalk

stream habitats and wildlife to meet the government's obligations under the EU Water Framework and Habitats Directive.

The aim of the project was to restore reaches of the river most damaged in the past by man-made physical changes including the straightening or dredging of the river channel and construction of weirs and sluices. Various methods have been used to improve habitats and restore natural flows and functions including the removal, modification and bypassing of structures and re-alignment of the river to more natural positions in the floodplain.

Led by the Environment Agency, the project is supported by a number of organisations including Natural England, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, Wessex Chalk Streams and Rivers Trust, Wessex Water, Wiltshire Fishery Association, National Farmers Union and Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust.

The restoration started in 2012 and will culminate in the completion of Phase 1 of the project later this year. Further work is needed to restore the remaining 185km of river and enable the catchment to respond and adapt to climate change.

Notes to Editor:

The UK River Prize celebrates the achievements of individuals and organisations who improve the health of our rivers and catchments and recognise the importance of healthy rivers and the benefits they bring to society. It is run by the The River Restoration Centre who will announce the overall winner of the UK River Prize at its annual dinner and conference in Brighton on April 4.

In 2009, the need for a strategic approach to catchment river restoration was identified by the European LIFE funded Strategic Restoration and Management (STREAM) partnership. This led to the creation of the River Avon Restoration Programme (RARP).