

Tibet's airport able to accommodate large planes overnight



Konggar Airport in Tibet [File Photo]

Konggar Airport in Tibet, one of the highest-altitude airports in China, was able to accommodate a Tibet Airlines wide-body Airbus 330 aircraft overnight for the first time, the airline announced Wednesday.

The 3,600-meter-high airport in Lhasa was able to accommodate the plane after the airline's technicians solved the problem of re-starting the aircraft's engine in a low air pressure environment after an overnight stay.

A new oxygen diffusion device has been designed to increase air supply during the engine ignition process, the airline said.

High-altitude airports (over 2,438 meters above sea levels) pose safety issues for pilots as low air pressure affects flight performance. All five airports in Tibet are classified as such.

Public hospitals told to end drug

markups

All public hospitals have been told to end the longtime practice of drug price markups by the end of September as part of the ongoing healthcare reform, the top economic planner said on Wednesday.

Public hospitals' loss of revenue will be offset for the most part by an increase in the prices of patient services, and more government investment is expected, a National Development and Reform Commission statement said.

The markups, a key source of income for public hospitals, are a major but thorny issue in healthcare reform, which aims for universal coverage of basic healthcare services, according to the National Health and Family Planning Commission.

Since the 1950s, public hospitals have been selling drugs at a markup. The maximum is 15 percent. Although the policy helped make up for a lack of adequate government healthcare funding, "gradually it evolved into a way to reap profits, contributing to worsening problems like overprescribing, an excessive use of antibiotics by hospitals, and rising medical expenses", said Wang Hesheng, vice-minister of the health and family planning agency.

With the expected drop in revenues from drug sales, authorities will adjust the fees for medical services, the NDRC said on Wednesday.

Charges related to the expertise of medical staff, like those for diagnosis, surgery and rehabilitation, will rise, while those for tests requiring major medical equipment will drop, the commission said.

The commission also is requiring local price regulators to carry out other necessary reforms following the measure, including changing medical insurance payments so rising service fees are covered by insurance reimbursement. Also, attention must be given to meeting the basic healthcare needs of low-income people.

Many public hospitals in China had already abolished drug price markups before Wednesday's announcement.

In Beijing, more than 3,600 medical institutions, including all public ones, had abolished the practice starting Saturday.

The measure is expected to lower the cost of outpatient treatment by about 5 percent, but the cost for inpatient treatment, including surgery, will rise by about 2.5 percent, said Li Sufang, deputy director of the Beijing Commission of Development and Reform.

Drug sales accounted for a third of the income of public hospitals last year, according to the Beijing Commission for Health and Family Planning.

3 metro areas fail in pollution controls



A polluted river in Chongqing [File Photo]

The governments of three of China's most populous cities have been told they provided inadequate pollution controls and failed to meet some "green" targets, according to the results of top-level inspections.

Teams under the guidance of the State Council examined Beijing, Shanghai and Chongqing as part of the nation's second round of provincial inspections started in late November. The Ministry of Environmental Protection published the findings on Wednesday.

Although the problems exposed in each city varied, a common point in each report was that the municipal governments had not properly implemented some measures aimed at pollution control.

Among the severest violations was in Shanghai, where inspectors discovered local authorities had failed to meet a target to halt all illegal construction and close illegal factories by the end of last year.

In Fengcheng township alone, 976 unlicensed wood processing plants were still in production, as were 31 of the 46 illegal construction sites targeted at the start of 2016, according to the inspection report.

"Shanghai has seen some environment work growing slack and some standards

have fallen," the ministry said in a statement on Wednesday.

The city, an important business hub, has a population of about 24 million.

Beijing, with population around 21 million, also was found missing some reduction targets during the inspection.

It had been scheduled to finish treating 19 severely polluted rivers last year, but only one was finished by December, the statement said.

Its Shunyi district failed to reach the PM2.5 reduction goals for the second straight year.

The PM2.5 refers to the fine particulate matter with diameter less than 2.5 microns that is hazardous to human health.

Inspectors also noted weak pollution control management in the three cities.

In Shanghai, inadequate law enforcement was found, with fines too light to deter polluters and about 800 companies that were ordered to shut down due to their pollution output were still in operation.

In Beijing, about 10,000 small companies cited as polluters were still in operation in Daxing district, ranking the city as having the worst air pollution in 2016.

And Chongqing, with a population of 30 million, has 100,000 farms, of which the majority were not listed in the improvement plan to reduce pollution. About 28 million metric tons of waste from the farms were discharged untreated annually, the statement said.

In addition, inspection teams have found water pollution worsening in some areas in the three cities.

In total, the three governments have dealt with all 6,063 cases involving violations cited by inspectors.

Some 3,542 polluting companies were required to correct their pollution problems and 61 people responsible for the problems were detained in the three cities.

The high-level environmental inspections conducted last year have helped control some pollution, Environment Minister Chen Jining said in March, adding the 15 remaining provincial regions will have inspections this year. Last year, China conducted a pilot and two rounds of inspections covering the 16 provincial regions.

Contrite Metro diners write apology letter

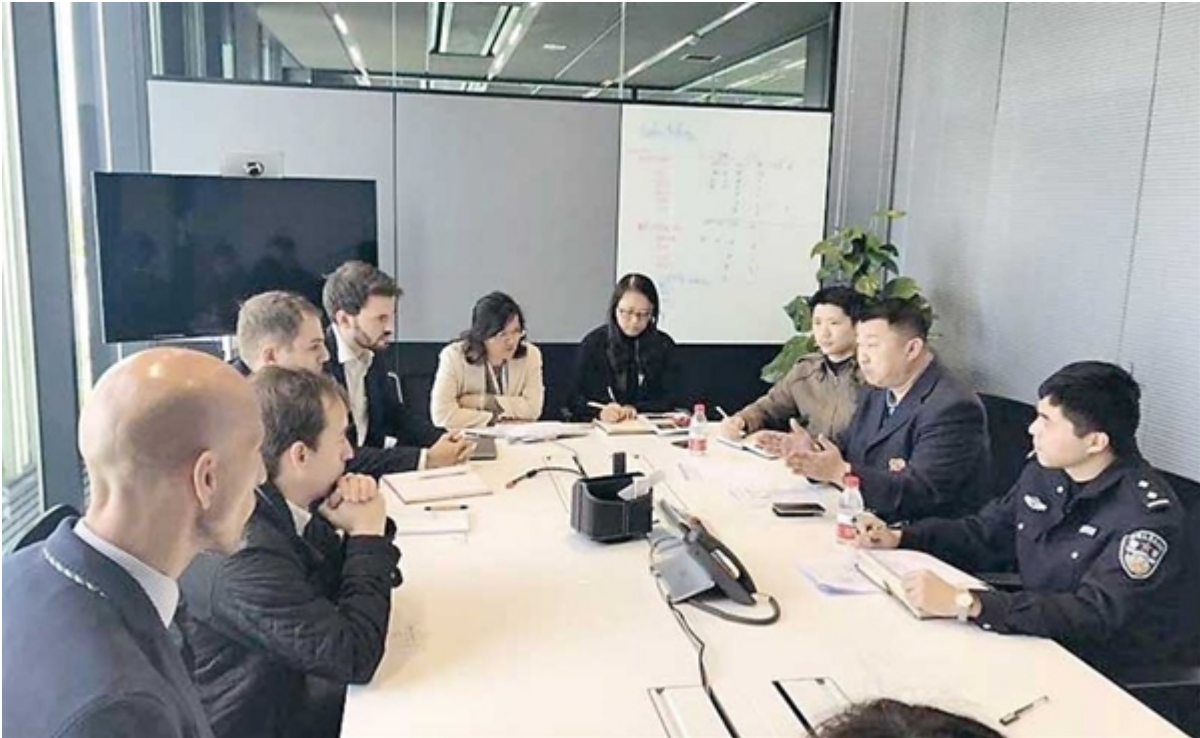


Photo from Metro police's Weibo account shows four foreigners who dined on a Metro train yesterday attend an "education" meeting with police and the Metro operator. [Shanghai Daily]

Four foreigners who set up a table and dined on a Metro Line 11 train last Friday in Shanghai wrote an apology letter yesterday.

The incident sparked an online uproar, with the foreigners accused of displaying bad manners.

The Metro operator and police officers have summoned and talked to the foreigners, whose nationalities and names were not released, about their behavior and they apologized in the office of Shanghai Shentong Metro Group.

Metro police said a total of six foreigners were involved, all of them working for the same company. As two of them were on a business trip, the remaining four attended the meeting, which was held yesterday.

Eating and drinking on the Metro is not illegal but is discouraged in Shanghai. However, setting up a table in the middle of a train carriage could be dangerous as it might block movement of commuters or injure others, which could mean a 50 yuan (US\$7.25) fine, according to the Metro operator.

Police said they did not punish the foreigners because after checking surveillance footage, "the table was small, not as big as it looked in the photo (initially published on the Internet), and there were not many people in the carriage."

Whether to ban eating or drinking on the Metro has long been a controversial subject in many Chinese cities, including Shanghai and Beijing.

In Hong Kong, it is illegal. People there can be fined HK\$2,000 (US\$257) if found eating or drinking on Metro trains or platforms.

Eating and drinking are also banned on Singapore's subway. But there is no such rule in New York.

Guidelines to help fix national healthcare

China will press to strengthen medical partnerships and arrange closer ties between top-tier hospitals and grassroots medical services to provide better health management and care for urban and rural residents.

A set of measures was approved during the State Council's executive meeting on Wednesday, presided over by Premier Li Keqiang.

"The goal for the medical partnerships is to make quality medical care more accessible to the wider public, especially in less-developed areas," Li said. "We've managed to set up nationwide medical insurance coverage and increased medical competence in grassroots medical institutions. The coverage is among the highest in the world. What we mostly need now are medical professionals."

People are demanding more and better healthcare, and the allocation of medical resources is a tough balancing act.

The idea of building partnerships across medical institutions providing different levels of care would help bridge the gap of resources. According to the National Health and Family Planning Commission, by 2016 medical partnerships had been set up in 205 cities across China.

"Currently, high quality medical resources are mostly in big cities. These should further trickle down to lower tiers so that wider demand will be met," Li said. "We must encourage joint partnerships of city level hospitals and grassroots institutions, while imposing expense reimbursements."

Wednesday's meeting yielded new measures.

Administrative fragmentation between regions, fiscal expenses, insurance payouts and human resources will be resolved. More diversified forms of medical partnerships will be encouraged, with top-tier hospitals taking on leading roles. The guidelines encourage an internet-based medical information platform to help better diagnose and prescribe treatments for rural patients.

More will be done to allocate high quality medical resources to wider

regions. To do this, teams of medical professionals will be sent to less developed areas with enhanced sharing of health and medical services.

China will accelerate building a cascaded medical system and will introduce demand-oriented and contract-based family doctors. The government plans to cover all impoverished regions with such services this year while inviting private healthcare institutions to participate.

The guidelines stress better coordination systems and policies in new medical partnerships, allowing a more balanced allocation of resources across different levels of medical centers. The government will encourage diverse forms of payments and performance at grassroots levels will be included in evaluations of medical practitioners, who often can work at any organization within the partnership.

“The government needs to have well-designed, concrete guidelines to build medical consortia, taking local conditions in different regions into consideration,” Li stressed. “Local governments are encouraged to have their own ideas in exploring systematic innovation.”

Wang Chen, president of the China-Japan Friendship Hospital, said strengthening medical partnerships is the best approach available to improve the nation’s health system.

He said medical resources remain limited, fragmented and unevenly distributed. Also medical doctors’ abilities vary.

“As it’s hard and time-consuming to train quality physicians, medical partnerships is the most feasible way to systemize and optimize resources available now,” he said.