

Chinese power plant becomes world's largest fossil fuel power plant

Togtoh Power Plant in China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region officially became the world's largest operating fossil fuel power plant after two of its 660MW ultra-supercritical units were put into service, said China Datang Corporation, parent company of the power plant.

Currently, the plant has a total capacity of 6,720MW.

Located near a major coal field, the plant is able to convert about 17 million tons of coal into clean energy each year. The plant generated 339 billion kWh during 2016, or 30 percent of the total energy demand in Beijing.

Thanks to an increased focus on environmental protection, the company has successfully achieved ultra-low emissions. Ten of the plant's generating units had been denitrated by July 2014, cutting 40,200 tons of nitrogen dioxide emissions. In addition, the plant plans to perform denitration on 10 more units in the future.

China removes age deadline for primary school entrance

China's central education authorities have cancelled a deadline for determining children's ages when applying for primary school entrance. The move has now given provincial authorities the flexibility to decide the date to determine children's ages for primary school entrance.

September 1 was set as the first day of a school year in 1992. The Law on Compulsory Education stipulated that all children who are six years old before August 31 should go to primary school on September 1 of the year.

Many insiders believe the cancellation of the August 31 deadline will not matter a lot since the age to receive compulsory education has remained the same.

Xiong Bingqi, deputy dean at the 21st Century Education Research Institute, suggested the introduction of a flexible age for primary school entrance, as children in other countries can start school between the ages of five and seven based on their intelligence and family situations.

Officials in Lijiang suspended over Weibo posts

Two officials in the Old Town of Lijiang in Yunnan province have been suspended over comments made on Sina Weibo on Sunday, which appeared to attack users of China's Twitter-like social media platform.

The deputy head of the publicity department in Gucheng district, where the scenic spot is located, and the head of the district's international communication office have been suspended from their duties, while the publicity department has been urged to examine its actions, the district government said in a statement on Sina Weibo on Monday.

The Old Town of Lijiang is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a national 5-A scenic spot.

However, in recent years, there have been many reports of tourists being overcharged or being forced to shop in the city. In one incident, a tourist lost her purse and was disfigured after being beaten by a dozen people at a restaurant.

For its failure to maintain services and facilities akin to a top-rated scenic spot, the town was given a warning by the China National Tourism Administration on Saturday and told to rectify issues within six months.

Gucheng's publicity department posted a statement on Weibo on Sunday, saying it was willing to accept punishment and work to resolve issues with the services it provides.

However, when a user commented, "I will never go to Lijiang", the official account replied, saying: "You'd better not come to Lijiang! We don't need you!"

Another comment read, "Is there any risk of being beaten in Lijiang?", to which the official account replied, "It takes two to quarrel."

The replies were deleted soon after being posted, with the publicity department denying knowledge of them and promising an investigation into the case.

The replies triggered a flood of criticism among netizens, with many questioning whether the scenic spot has any desire to improve its services.

Court corrects dozens of wrongful convictions

Chinese courts have corrected 34 major miscarriages of justice in the past four years in order to build the public's confidence in the justice system, according to the Supreme People's Court.

Moreover, the courts have declared 3,718 defendants innocent from 2013 to 2016 to protect their human rights and other legitimate rights, the top court said in a white paper on judicial reform released on Monday.

Last year alone, 11 such cases involving 17 people were redressed by the courts.

"Correcting false charges has rebuilt the judicial protection of human rights, maintaining a fair and just image to boost people's confidence in the justice system," the court said in the white paper.

In recent years, miscarriages of justice due to the use of torture to force suspects to make confessions have aroused heated debate about the justice system.

The top court has worked with other authorities to reform the criminal justice system and determine a fundamental role for trials, as well as avoiding the use of torture and other illegal means to obtain evidence.

The guideline stipulated that defendants in cases where there is a lack of evidence should be found innocent.

In December, Nie Shubin, a villager in Hebei province who was executed in 1995, was exonerated by the top court due to a lack of evidence for his conviction of murder and rape.

In February 2016, Chen Man, a farmer in Hainan province who was wrongfully imprisoned for 23 years for homicide and arson, was declared innocent by the top court due to a lack of evidence.

Last year, the top court launched pilot projects in 18 cities to offer lenient punishment to defendants who confess to prevent long detentions over minor crimes.

According to the SPC, they will intensify efforts to exclude illegal evidence and prevent wrongful trials to protect defendants' human rights.

"It's necessary to have timely and proper judicial reform, which will focus on collecting high-quality and persuasive evidence to ensure justice," said Li Wei, a lawyer from the Beijing Lawyers Association.

Incentives for second child considered



China is mulling financial incentives to encourage couples to have a second child, as surveys show many are reluctant to expand their families due to economic constraints.[Wang Biao/For China Daily]

China is mulling financial incentives to encourage couples to have a second child, as surveys show many are reluctant to expand their families due to economic constraints.

Wang Pei'an, vice-minister of the National Health and Family Planning Commission, revealed the potential move at a social welfare conference on Saturday.

Top decision-makers last year relaxed the more than four-decade-old family planning policy to allow, if not encourage, all Chinese couples to have a second child.

Nationwide, the change led to 17.8 million births in 2016, an increase of more than 1.3 million compared with the previous year and the biggest annual increase in 20 years.

“That fully met the expectations, but barriers still exist and must be addressed,” Wang told the conference. “To have a second child is the right of each family in China, but affordability has become a bottleneck that undermines the decision.”

A survey by the commission in 2015 found that 60 percent of families polled

expressed reluctance to have a second baby largely due to economic constraints.

To address that, Wang said, the government is considering introducing supporting measures including “birth rewards and subsidies” to encourage people to have another child.

It is the first time that the top population authority has suggested such a move to boost the birthrate, according to Yuan Xin, a professor at Nankai University in Tianjin.

The Hunan provincial statistics authority also suggested in a recent report that the local government give subsidies to couples having a second baby to help reverse falling fertility rates.

“It’s not easy, and a ‘baby bonus’ plan should be applied evenly nationwide as all government policies should be transparent and fair for all,” he said, adding that the population authority alone cannot handle such a plan as it requires consensus and cooperation among all authorities.

In some low-fertility countries like Japan, baby incentives such as cash subsidies, prolonged maternity leave, tax breaks, and child and healthcare benefits have been introduced by the government to boost the population.

China, however, is a different case, according to Yuan, who explained that the nation still faces challenges from a huge population base and limited natural and public resources to sustain population development.

“It’s not the right time to introduce any financial incentive plans,” he said.

Also, “the second-child policy is a choice by the top decision-makers facing a dilemma of the existing challenges and structural population problems like rapid aging and a shrinking workforce”, he said.

After all, having one or two children should be a decision made by the families themselves, Yuan said.

A mother of a 3-year-old girl in Beijing said: “I don’t expect cash from the government for a second child. Sound social public policies to help working parents raise the children are needed more.”

The woman, surnamed Bai, referred to prolonged maternity leave, equal working opportunities for mothers, easy access to quality education resources for children and a well-functioning social welfare system.