

Rain, wind to disperse smog in Beijing

Air quality in Beijing is expected to improve on Tuesday as rain and a northerly wind are forecast in the city to disperse recent smog.

Air pollution began last Tuesday and the quality of air worsened Saturday morning, local environmental protection authorities said Saturday.

At 10 a.m. Saturday, the PM 2.5 density in the city reached 176 micrograms per cubic meter of air, indicating heavy air pollution, according to data from Beijing Municipal Environmental Protection Monitoring Center.

Sulfate has been confirmed as the primary pollutant, accounting for 15 percent of PM 2.5, according to the center. Sulfur dioxide, which comes from coal firing, is a major source of sulfate.

Beijing's coal consumption is low, however, monitoring has shown the air pollution has come into the city from neighboring areas.

The smog is not expected to disperse until Tuesday, when rain and a northerly wind are forecast in the city.

PLA Navy commissions new supply ship

An advanced supply vessel joined the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy Friday in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou.

Hulun Nur 965 is the first of a new type of comprehensive supply vessel independently developed by China using globally advanced technologies, according to military sources.

It is capable replenishing an aircraft carrier group or other navy fleet on the high sea, the source said said.

Shen Jinlong, commander of the PLA Navy, conferred the military flag and presented a certificate to the new ship.

China gets new social security cards

Distribution of third-generation social security cards began in China on

Friday, with the new cards supporting direct settlement of trans-provincial medical expenses.

The new cards have more functions, are more secure and better support direct settlement of medical expenses, said Huang Huabo, deputy director of Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security social security center in Wuhan, capital of central China's Hubei province.

The cards will replace the old cards as a national reimbursement network for inpatient services is built. The network will allow any patient enrolled in the public medical insurance system to be reimbursed for inpatient expenses, no matter where they are treated, said the ministry.

The first group of ten cards were handed out at Zhongnan Hospital, Wuhan University.

Before the network was set up, inpatients had to return to the locality where they were enrolled to be reimbursed. Currently, 1.34 billion Chinese people are enrolled in various public medical insurance systems, 98.8 percent of the population.

In 2016, the government spent 1.3 trillion yuan on medical and health care, a 10-percent increase from 2015.

Chinese Muslims celebrate annual Corban festival

At around 8:30 a.m. on Friday, hundreds of Muslims performed a prayer ritual at a mosque in Yinchuan, capital of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, to observe Eid al-Adha, known in China as Corban Festival, one of Islam's most important holidays.

They shook hands and wished each other well. After the prayers, some rushed to home to prepare the feast, while others visited markets around the mosque, buying deserts and fruit.

Corban Festival is a feast of sacrifice during which people slay livestock to share with their family or visit relatives and friends to send best wishes.

In Ningxia, Ma Tiangui, 65, an ethnic Hui, purchased a lamb a few days ago.

"My children and grandchildren return home for the festival, so I must prepare various delicacies for them," said Ma.

In the city of Kashgar, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, Guzelnir Memet received lamb from the residential community and made stewed mutton.

In order to help poor families celebrate the festival, the local government has allocated more than 3 million yuan (around 460,000 U.S. dollars) to provide each of the city's 18,025 households living below the poverty line with 3 kg of lamb.

The festival is also celebrated by Muslims in other northwestern provinces such as Gansu, Qinghai and Shaanxi. China has more than 20 million Muslims, mainly Uygur, Hui, Kazakh, Uzbek and Tajik ethnic minorities, living in various regions.

Muslims in Ningxia, Xinjiang and Gansu enjoy a five-day holiday for the festival.

During the holiday, vehicles with seven or less seats are exempt from highway tolls in Ningxia.

Ma Xiaolong, a resident of Zhangjiachuan Hui Autonomous County in Gansu, slaughtered a lamb and offered it to poor elderly neighbours.

"I plan to travel with my family to Beijing by high speed train this year," said Ma. "They had never taken this new form of transport."

China increases environmental inspections

A new round of central environmental inspections primarily aimed at improving air quality, began in cities around Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei Friday.

The on-site inspections until March 29, 2018, will root out problems with emissions and pollution control equipment, according to a press briefing by the Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) on Friday.

"Local officials will be held accountable if cities fail to meet environmental protection targets", said Liu Changgen, a senior MEP official.

The MEP released a plan last week for 28 northern cities to lower a major air pollution this coming winter. Between October and March 2018, the level of PM 2.5 pollution must be reduced by at least 15 percent in cities around the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region.

The ministry will increase air quality monitoring and deal with unauthorized operations or those which fail to meet emission standards, while controlling coal consumption in the region.

A coordination body will be set up to oversee inspections in the region before the end of September.

Density of PM2.5 nationwide dropped 6.9 percent year on year in July, while Beijing reported an average PM2.5 density of 64 micrograms per cubic meter in the first seven months of 2017, down 34.7 percent from the same period in 2013.