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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.