

China premier pledges: 'We will make our skies blue again'

March 5 2017, by Louise Watt



Clouds move across the sky over the Great Hall of the People in Beijing during the opening session of China's annual National People's Congress in Beijing's Great Hall of the People, Sunday, March 5, 2017. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang pledged during his address at the session to make the country's skies blue again and "work faster" to address pollution caused by coal burning. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein)

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang pledged Sunday to make the country's

smoggy skies blue again and "work faster" to address pollution caused by the burning of coal for heat and electricity.

His words to delegates at the opening of the annual National People's Congress highlight how public discontent has made reducing smog, the most visible of China's environment problems, a priority for the leadership. The 10-day event got underway under a sunny blue sky, thanks to heavy gusts from the north that cleared away the unhealthy gray from the day before.

Protests have increasingly broken out in cities where residents oppose the building of chemical plants and garbage incinerators, as China's middle class grows increasingly vocal in awareness of the dangers of pollution.

In a report to China's ceremonial legislature, Li said that "people are desperately hoping for" faster progress to improve air quality. "We will make our skies blue again," he declared to almost 3,000 delegates in the Great Hall of the People.

He said the government intends over the next year to step up work to upgrade [coal-fired power plants](#) to achieve ultra-low emissions and energy conservation, and prioritize the integration of [renewable energy sources](#) into the electricity grid.



Minority delegates arrive to the Great Hall of the People to attend the opening session of the annual National People's Congress in Beijing, Sunday, March 5, 2017. China's top leadership as well as thousands of delegates from around the country are gathered at the Chinese capital for the annual legislature meetings. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)

Integration problems have arisen because China has added wind and solar power at a faster rate than the grid has expanded. That capacity is then wasted when grid operators choose to use traditional energy sources, including coal, over renewables.

Despite China's lingering dependence on coal plants, its consumption of the energy source fell in 2016 for a third year in a row. Coal now makes up 62 percent of China's total energy consumption mix.

Building on publicly available real-time and hourly readings from coal plants and other factories, Li said: "All key sources of industrial

pollution will be placed under round-the-clock online monitoring."



Local and foreign journalists line up to enter the Great Hall of the People to cover the opening session of the annual National People's Congress in Beijing, Sunday, March 5, 2017. China's top leadership as well as thousands of delegates from around the country are gathered at the Chinese capital for the annual legislature meetings. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)

Environmental groups welcome the disclosure of such data because it allows the public to directly supervise the emissions of plants in their areas.

Lauri Myllyvirta, senior coal campaigner for Greenpeace, said they had expected the government to announce a speeding up of measures because air pollution is supposed to hit targets this year that were laid down in 2013. They include a 25-percent reduction in the density of [fine](#)

[particulate matter](#)—a gauge of air pollution—in Beijing and the surrounding region from 2012 levels.

"It will require very dramatic steps to achieve those targets for this year," Myllyvirta said.



Delegates leave the Great Hall of the People after attending the opening session of the annual National People's Congress in Beijing, Sunday, March 5, 2017. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang pledged Sunday to make the country's smoggy skies blue again and "work faster" to address pollution caused by the burning of coal for heat and electricity. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)

Li also said the government would ramp up efforts to deal with vehicle emissions by working faster to take old vehicles off the roads and encourage the use of clean-energy cars.

Environmental laws and regulations would be strictly enforced and officials who failed to do so would be held "fully accountable," he said, without giving details. Local officials have often been lax at enforcing regulations on companies that contribute to economic growth in their areas.

Li said that this year sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide emissions—gasses produced by burning fossil fuels that can cause respiratory problems—would both be cut by 3 percent, and the density of fine particulate matter known as PM2.5 would fall "markedly" in key areas.

Official data show an improvement in China's air quality since 2013, when the government brought out its air pollution action plan. However, cities including Beijing still regularly register levels of pollution several times higher than the recommended safe limit, prompting residents to resort to masks, air filters and apps to monitor air quality.



Bus ushers pose for photographs in front of the Great Hall of the People during the opening session of the annual National People's Congress in Beijing, Sunday, March 5, 2017. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang pledged Sunday to make the country's smoggy skies blue again and "work faster" to address pollution caused by the burning of coal for heat and electricity. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)

© 2017 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: China premier pledges: 'We will make our skies blue again' (2017, March 5) retrieved 29 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-03-china-premier-pledges-blue.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.