

China blasts through wind energy target

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Kunming, 15 January: China more than doubled its wind power capacity in 2008, installing 4.66GW of additional capacity and passing the government's 10GW target two years ahead of schedule.

China's wind power industry, dominated by the 'big five' state-owned electric power companies, increased the country's total installed wind power capacity to approximately 12.8GW by the end of 2008, according to a 5 January report from industry group China Electricity Council (CEC), a 127% increase over 2007.

The explosive growth, widely projected by observers, was driven by an 88.10% year-on-year increase in capital investment, said the report.

The increase reflects the success of China's policies to promote renewable energy, which include the mandated target of 10GW by 2010 and a renewable portfolio standard that requires "non-hydro renewables" to account for 3% of the installed capacity of large power companies by 2010, and 8% by 2020.

China's central economic planning body, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), has also set a target for 30GW of wind power capacity by 2020. But last year's growth has observers projecting the industry outstripping the 2020 mark a decade sooner.

Ma Lingjun, deputy general manager of the Chinese Renewable Energy Industries Association, said the group unofficially projects that 25-30GW of wind power capacity will be installed by the end of 2010.

However, Ma said, it was unlikely that the government would increase the 2020 target, as it did the 2010 target last year, because, "there is some concern by NDRC that wind power is growing too fast, so maybe they will use the [low target] as a way to emphasise the sustainable development [of the sector] and quality control."

Rapid growth has led to high incidence of wind turbine unreliability and underperforming installations, a problem the industry is addressing, she said, "by doing more and more innovation and testing before installation".

"But since this industry is still in the early stage it is not a surprise we are having problems," she added.

Last year also saw increased investment in China's electrical power grid, according to the CEC report, with 50.5% of capital invested in the power sector devoted to grid improvements, expansion and repair.

Despite this investment, Ma estimated that 20% of installed wind power capacity is not currently connected to the grid.

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