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Explosions in Beijing cut off power supply

Shanghai. (Interfax-China) - While the northern United States and southern Canada were trying to restore power after the worst blackouts in their history, China's capital, Beijing, was experiencing its own electricity problems. On August 16, the city suffered serious damage to its power facilities following an explosion, resulting in power cuts in certain areas for as long as 23 hours.

On August 15, an explosion occurred at a waste dump, situated just under the power lines connecting the Shijingshan power plant in northwestern Beijing's Fengtai District to the Lucun Conversion Substation. The accident, which left three people injured, was thought to have been caused by a local oil delivery tanker. Around one o'clock the next day, the dump caught fire and blew up for the second time, five hours after fire fighters had put out the first one.

A volley of fire immediately burned down the six transmission lines and two lightning conductors above the tanker. Two nearby towers used to elevate the lines then collapsed, and another two towers bent. The ruined towers led to the break of two 35 kV power lines, the burning of a 10 kV line and a series of breakdowns in twenty-five 10 kV transformers. As a result, the power supply to thousands of households, stretching from the Shijingshan area to the Lucun area, was cut off for almost a day.

An official at the Beijing Power Supply Company, who preferred to remain anonymous, told Interfax that the power facilities would not entirely repaired until August 20, even though the power supply returned to normal days earlier. However, at the moment it is hard to predict what the total losses will be, she added, stressing only that the accident and the chain reactions that followed were unprecedented in Beijing.

The waste dump, according to neighboring residents quoted in the local newspaper Jinhua Shibao, used to be full of oil barrels. The station was suspected to have played host to the illegal trade in gasoline and diesel. A source at the local police station confirmed to Interfax that the three injured people in hospital, including one driver and two members of staff at the dump, were suspects, and an investigation has been launched.

An official at the North China Power Group, during an interview with the Beijing-based newspaper, claimed that wide-ranging blackouts, like the ones that occurred recently in the US and Canada, could not take place to Beijing, however. He stated that there were supply emergency facilities installed in Beijing's power grid, which could automatically protect the residents from blackouts by cutting the supply to corporate and industrial users. Moreover, the Shisanling Storage-Pumped Hydropower Station, with generating capacity of 800,000 kW, could be used to save power and supply to Beijing should any accidents happen.

This summer, Beijing has been experiencing a heat wave, leading to an energy shortage since late July. Currently, 60% of the total power supply to Beijing was distributed from other power grids, including the Inner Mongolia, Northeast, Shanxi and Hebei power grids. More power projects are being set up to meet local shortages. The recently-launched wind power project in the county of Zhanbei in Hebei Province is scheduled to be finished in the year of 2008. The construction, involving 1 mln kW of generating capacity and RMB 1.6 bln (USD 193.31 mln) in investment, is aimed at guaranteeing supply for the Olympic Games.