CHINA

Going green to beat smog
Gas trucks boom in China as government curbs diesel vehicles

YUNAN: On a recent morning in Yutian, a dusty town nestled by the highway that connects Beijing to the sea, Sun Meiqian strolled into a dead end piled with bulking trucks and concentrate trucks and started a brand new rig.

After having driven a diesel truck for a trucking company, he decided to buy his own vehicle—a lengthened TLD rig fueled with liquefied natural gas, capable of housing as much as 40 tonnes of loads like steel or slabs of marble.

This is one of a new breed of low-polluting and cheaper to operate than diesel ones—but will be the cornerstone of his own business, plying the route to the western fringes of China.

“Everybody says gas is cleaner with nearly no emissions,” he said after signing a stack of paperwork in the dealer’s office.

Sales of large LNG trucks are expected to hit record levels in China in the coming years as steps up an anti-pollution campaign that includes curbs on heavy-duty diesel vehicles.

LNG trucks account for about 4% of the total number of heavy vehicles able to total 40 to 49 tonnes of load or more that are currently on China’s roads.

The vast majority of the 43 million tons of freight transported across China last year was by highway.

But retail fuel prices are doubling as companies and manufacturers shift to vehicles that run on the gas that has seen a key part of its use against smog.

In Yutian, the 20-year-old trucker drove 540% to nearly 30,000 in the first quarter of this year compared to the same period last year, according to the China Economic and Trade Association.

That was partly fuelled by a ban this year on the use of diesel trucks to transport coal at northern ports in provinces like Hebei and Shanxi, where Beijing is trying to improve the air quality.

“We are seeing a boost in LNG trucks this year, thanks to the government’s efforts,” said Mr Liu, marketing manager of China National Heavy Duty Truck Group, known as Sinotruk, the country’s largest manufacturer of heavy-duty trucks.

The shift to gas trucks is helping fuel demand for LNG in China as are other government measures aimed at cleaning the air, especially in the north, which is shrouded in a hazardous coal-fired smog for much of the winter.

One major project is piping gas to 1.4 million households across the north for heating this winter, shifting away from coal.

China, already the world’s No.3 LNG consumer, has seen imports jump 45% so far this year.

Chinese refiners like Zhejiang Group and ENN Energy Holding, which build LNG filling stations, and Zhangjiagang CNG Gasco Energy Co Ltd, which specializes in LNG tanks, are expected to benefit from the gas boom, analysts said.

Government restrictions on cargo overloading last year, for safety reasons, has also driven truckers to use smaller and other to consider gas-powered lorries.

Sales of new heavy-duty trucks, including diesel and LNG vehicles, jumped 75% in the January-February period to 768,254, according to an industry website.

It did not break down the numbers, but companies say that diesel growth is being delayed by this year’s LNG trucks.

Last week, Sinotruk netted new orders. The world’s biggest such order, valued at 900 of which run on LNG, at an even being together coal transport companies from seven northern Chinese cities, Mr Liu said.

In the first half of this year, Sinotruk sold 5,200 LNG trucks, up 65% year on year.

“Gas trucks are both more environmentally friendly and more economic,” said Mr Liu, president of Zhejiang Shengteng Transportation Company, a privately-held trucking company.

Firms are also planning to expand the fleet to more than 1,000 by the end of this year, adding 65 new trucks made by Shanghai Heavy Duty Automobile Co, the country’s largest LNG vehicle producer.

It is also cutting back its diesel fleet to 30 from 50 previously so that from the beginning of next month.

China has vast amounts of data, useful for improving the accuracy of facial recognition technology. It has a large database of faces, which is a huge advantage for the technology. It has been used for a variety of purposes, such as identifying criminals who have long eluded the law.

One instance was at the Qingdao beer festival in August, when 190 suspects were identified over the month-long event.

Secondary checks confirmed that 25 of them had escaped from custody, including a suspected major drug dealer who was on the wanted list for a decade.

The authorities are also using facial recognition to name-and-shame (‘daxiao’ in Chinese) those that use cash deposits and digital yuan, even those and part of their address — flattened on giant LCD boards.

The system can also special- ly label repeat offenders.

“Using facial recognition in the area of public security is already a reality in China, which speaks to the power and accuracy of the technology,” said Mr Xu, CEO of SenseTime, one of the leading Chinese firms in the field.

A 40-day trial in Chongqing this year using the firm’s technology resulted in 50 cases of interest.

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Facial recognition technology gains traction

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Xi Jinping funds for relocation drive

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Xi Jinping, who is preparing for a major Communist Party leadership conference later this month, has made an anti-graft campaign a top priority, targeting “tigers and flies”, both high-level and low-ranking officials, a core policy priority during his five-year term.

China is preparing for the 19th Communist Party Congress, scheduled to start later this month, in which Xi is expected to secure a second five-year term and consolidate his position.

The 19th Congress, to be held later this month, will mark a milestone in the country’s history as it marks the centenary of the Communist Party of China and the end of the second five-year term under Xi Jinping, the country’s leader since 2013.

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