



An aerial picture shows the riverbed of the Jialing river, a tributary of the Yangtze River, in the southwestern city of Chongqing. — AFP

Power shortages take people back to pre-technology era

Lu Feiran

Ice blocks, outdoor summer night gatherings... This summer has brought back childhood memories for Chengdu college student Shen Guangjie, when the air conditioner is yet to be installed at her home.

Living in a suburban district of Chengdu, the provincial capital of Sichuan, Shen has experienced unstable electricity supply since last week as an intense heatwave maintains its grip on China's southwest, with daily high temperatures lingering around 40 degrees Celsius.

"For a long time my way of spending summer holiday was either to stay at my air-conditioned home to play video games, or go to malls with friends to escape the heat. But this summer my lifestyle has changed entirely," Shen exclaims.

With intermittent power cuts, sometimes lasting for several hours, or even longer, this summer has indeed been different. The local power company told residents that the grid has been ravaged under

high demand. To save power, public places in Chengdu have turned up the AC temperatures and gone easy on the lighting.

"Like me, many other people also want to enjoy AC in the malls, so it doesn't feel much cooler at all," Shen says. "Finally it seems like we are back to the pre-AC era."

Every evening, her residential community is thronging with people looking for some cool air. Neighbors share watermelons in the greenery area, while some of her friends even spent an evening at an old air-raid shelter.

In fact, one evening her family drove to Longquan Mountain, a scenic area near Chengdu, only to find it teeming with more people than expected.

"From the top of the mountain, we could see the stars clearly as the city below was not as bright as before — most of the landscape lights had been turned off," Shen says.

The situation is similar in the neighboring city of Chongqing.

To save power, metro lines in the municipality have turned off in-car lights, leaving only the emergency lights on. The

red-tinted train cars look like a scene out of a horror movie.

"It looks just like the haunted house attraction I visited last week, with the commuters as performers in them," comments a netizen "Daosheng" on Weibo.

According to Sichuan Electric Power Co of the State Grid, the highest load of power demand is currently 65 million kilowatts, up 25 percent than last year's for the same period.

From this week, measures have been taken to relieve the power shortage in Sichuan.

In Yibin, more than 400 enterprises have suspended production while in Chengdu, entertainment venues, such as malls, Internet cafes, bars, karaoke bars and tea houses, have started to turn off air-conditioning until further notice. All landscape lights and electric advertising boards have been turned off as well.

The unstable power supply is also causing other kinds of inconveniences.

As some the electric vehicle charging piles in Sichuan have suspended services, long queues have formed in front of piles that are still in



To save power, metro lines in Chongqing have turned off in-car lights, leaving only the emergency lights on. — Ti Gong

operation.

Jimu News reported that many electric car owners in Chengdu had to wait for more than 30 minutes to even two hours for charging.

"I changed my schedule to go charging at around 11pm," a car owner surnamed Lin told the newspaper. "That turned out good actually. It was cool, and no need for a good waiting line."

Meanwhile, huge blocks of ices have become probably the most popular products in Sichuan and Chongqing.

As air-conditioning systems are turned off in many workplaces, ice blocks have become the only way to bring the temperature down.

A netizen called "J-Darui" shares her office experience.

"Our air-conditioning has been cut off for two days, and blocks of ice are placed in many corners of the office. I've only seen such scenes in costume dramas," she says on Weibo.

"But it doesn't help much. Some of my colleagues hold ice to their chest, some wave fans manically, and me? I'm sweating all over. The temperature in the office rises to 37.5 degrees

soon after the ice melts, and work efficiency is out of the question."

Experts say that the power shortage is caused by severe drought brought by the intense heatwave.

Since July, the Yangtze River valley has the least rainfall since 1961 for the same period, with waters from upstream reduced severely as well.

"Up to 77 percent of power generation in Sichuan relies on hydroelectric generation," Lin Boqiang, president of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy, tells China News Service.

"With the end of summer, the situation is expected to change for the better. I believe that the power shortage is going to be relieved in one to two weeks."

Lin says that 70 percent of power consumption is for industries, so it's reasonable to suspend some production to ensure residential power use.

However, the heat, drought and power shortage are warning signs for humans.

"People from all over the world should work together to prevent such extreme weather in the future," Lin says.