

Peru runs breakthrough gas train

LIMA, Peru — Peru has unveiled the world's first train powered by environmentally friendly compressed natural gas (CNG).

The cargo and passenger train, which runs along the world's highest railway at 16,076 feet above sea level in Peru's central Andes, will switch from diesel to run on two engines designed by General Electric Co., said Juan de Dios Olaechea, president of the Ferrocarril Central Andino.

"With this technological development, Peru is taking a big step forward in terms of its energy independence," De Dios Olaechea told an inauguration ceremony.

Ferrocarril Central Andino, 82 percent owned by Peruvian capital and 18 percent owned by U.S.-based Railroad Development Corp., has operated the train since 1999 between Lima and the central Huancayo region.

Taking advantage of the Andean nation's huge Camisea gas reserves, the company plans to convert all eight engines in its fleet to CNG from diesel in the next seven months. Natural gas is cleaner-burning and less expensive than gasoline, while its relatively stable price makes it attractive at a time when world oil prices hover at record highs.

Although liquefied natural gas (LNG) is used in some trains worldwide, it is more volatile and must be kept at very low temperatures, making its application more limited for transport.

Peru began pumping gas from its Camisea field in the southern jungle to Lima last August and hopes to become a net energy exporter with gas sales to Mexico from 2009.



The new technology could be more widely used in transportation than the more volatile LPG.

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