CHINA

Lai's latest restrictions fuel cross-Strait concerns

TAIPEI/XIAMEN — People from both sides of the Taiwan Strait are disappointed to know Taiwan authorities led by Lai Ching-te have doubled down on restrictive policies toward the mainland.

Portraying the mainland as a "hostile external force", Lai outlined 17 strategies to counter so-called threats facing the island, including a number of restrictive policies on mutual visits by Taiwan and mainland residents as well as on cultural, academic and religious exchanges.

One policy is to ensure that local residents register their personal information with the authorities before traveling to the mainland.

"Some artists working at public educational institutions would hesitate to attend events on the mainland for fear of possible career setbacks," said Sun Di, a long-time organizer of cross-Strait art events.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Sun has encountered either rejections or delays when applying to host cross-Strait events in Taiwan or obtain travel permits for mainland artists to visit the island.

"The latest policy obviously signals that my work will become more difficult in the future," he said. "This is what the Taiwan authorities want — to sever the shared cultural roots between the two sides of the Strait."

Another heavily-hit sector is tourism, once a major beneficiary of mainland visitors. At a travel fair that opened in Taipei on Friday, local travel operators expressed concerns over the gloomy future of cross-Strait tourism.

"Our clients have called to inquire about the new policy about mainland tours. Some of them are nervous. It is very likely to affect our business since our most popular products are tours to the mainland," said an executive from a Kinmen-based travel agency who requested anonymity.

He lamented that years ago, mainland tourists swarmed into Kinmen, whereas now only visitors from Fujian province remain, and many travel agency employees and tourist coach drivers had to turn to other jobs.

This decline is not due to a lack of interest on the mainland's part. The mainland announced in January that it planned to resume group tour services for Fujian and Shanghai residents to Taiwan.

"We had been so happy to hear that Shanghai tourists could come, but the Taiwan authorities' response is very disappointing," the executive said.

Meanwhile, Taiwan still forbids residents from traveling to the mainland on group tours, against which the tourism industry has petitioned the authorities for a long time.

C&D Tour, based in Xiamen, Fujian, was one of the first mainland travel agencies qualified to organize group tours to Taiwan in 2008.

"Over the years, people on the two sides of the Strait have gotten to know each other better through tourism," said Zhang Zhang, general manager of C&D Tour. "Many of our partners on the island are eager to resume cooperation as soon as possible. I can clearly feel the strong expectation from both industry professionals and the public."

However, Lai's restrictive strategies have dented their hopes.

"The scrutiny on mainland individuals coming to Taiwan for exchanges is expected to become even stricter. Cross-Strait civil exchanges will be impacted and may not proceed normally," said Ringo Lee, chairman of the High Quality of Travel Association. "The relaxation of the ban on group tours to the mainland and the opening of Taiwan to mainland tourists may remain a distant prospect."

Beyond tourism and cultural ties, restrictive policies have significant economic implications as Taiwan remains deeply intertwined with the mainland economically, with the mainland and Hong Kong contributing to roughly 90 percent of its total trade surplus last year.

The Democratic Progressive Party's new strategies have inevitably raised concerns among businesses, particularly among Taiwan entrepreneurs doing business on the mainland, said Lai Cheng-yi, honorable chairman of the General Chamber of Commerce in Taiwan.

"The two sides of the Strait have long been inseparable in economic and trade exchanges. Maintaining stable flows of people, goods and capital between the two sides is beneficial to Taiwan's overall trade and economic development," he added.

Weng Hsiao-ling, a legislator of the Chinese Kuomintang in Taiwan, said: "I wonder whether Lai's strategies will have a reverse effect. The harder he bars people from having contact with the mainland, the more people would like to learn about the mainland."

XINHUA

Seeking buyers



Tea farmers flock to the fresh leaf trading market in Hongxing town in Ya'an, Sichuan province, on Tuesday. Farmers carrying bamboo baskets gathered to sell freshly picked tea leaves, while tea merchants from various regions came to purchase the fresh produce. ZHANG LANG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

China's glacier area shrinks by 26 percent over six decades

New data reveals retreat accelerating, with 7,000 small ones disappearing

By YAN DONGJIE
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The glacier area in China has shrunk by about 26 percent over the past 60 years, with approximately 7,000 small glaciers disappearing, according to data from the Northwest Institute of Eco-Environment and Resources of the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

The findings were released on Friday, the first World Day for Glaciers, as researchers presented China's third glacier inventory at the 3rd Chinese Conference of Cryospheric Science in Lingshui, Hainan province.

The data shows that around 2020, China's total glacier area was about 46,000 square kilometers, with roughly 69,000 glaciers. Comparing the country's first glacier inventory — conducted between 1960 and 1980 — with its third, the glacier area has decreased by 4.8 percent per decade.

Between the second inventory completed in 2008 and the third, the glacier area has declined by about 6 percent — equivalent to 5.2 percent per decade — indicating a rapid acceleration in glacier retreat in recent years.

Global glacier inventory efforts began in 1978, focusing on the distribution and volume of mountain glaciers. China's first and second glacier inventories were published in 2002 and 2014, respectively, with research detailing changes in the country's glaciers from the latter half of the 20th century to the early 21st century.

China launched its first glacier inventory in 1978, led by academician Shi Yafeng, as countries with glacier distributions worldwide began compiling their own inventories. The process took 24 years and was completed in 2002.

The first inventory recorded about 46,000 glaciers in China, covering roughly 59,000 square kilometers.

With global temperatures rising, China's glaciers have continued to shrink, according to the Northwest Institute of Eco-Environment and Resources.

To further assess glacier distribution after 2000, the Cold and Arid Regions Environmental and Engineering Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Sciences began the second inventory in 2007, publishing the data set in 2014. The results showed that by 2008, China had around 48,000 glaciers covering about 52,000 square kilometers.

China is the only major country with a significant glacier distribution to have completed three comprehensive glacier inventories, according to the institute.



Surveyor Zhang Yong (left) and colleagues operate a ground-penetrating radar device to conduct a routine observation on the Aemye Ma-chhen Glacier in Qinghai province on March 19. LI YALONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

In tune with temperature



People wearing short sleeves and traditional Chinese costumes walk on the streets of Nanjing, Jiangsu province, on Tuesday. With temperatures soaring above 30 C, the sudden heatwave has prompted a mix of attire, from short sleeves and spring outfits to traditional costumes. LIU LI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Giant panda Fu Bao returns after health scare

By XU NUO
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After more than 100 days of rest, giant panda Fu Bao returned to public display on Tuesday at the Shenshuping base in Wolong National Nature Reserve in southwest Sichuan province, according to the China Conservation and Research Center for the Giant Panda.

In December, she was observed trembling while foraging and was immediately subjected to a physical examination and close monitoring by keepers and veterinarians.

After undergoing a series of medical tests, including blood work and screenings for parasites and infectious diseases, no abnormalities were found. Fu Bao was then moved to a non-exhibit area for rest.

In January and February, the panda exhibited normal estrus behavior, during which she received meticulous care from keepers and veterinarians. Renowned experts from Beijing were also invited to collaborate with the panda base's veterinarians for a joint consultation to further investigate potential causes of the trembling.

The latest test results for Fu Bao show no abnormalities. Experts have determined that she is fit for display based on her current condition and medical examination results.

Fu Bao was born in July 2020 at South Korea's Everland theme park in Yongin, about 40 kilometers south of Seoul. She is the first offspring of Hua Ni and Yuan Xin, a pair of giant pandas leased from China to South Korea in 2016.

Her birth marked the first time a giant panda was born in South Korea, and she quickly became a beloved figure. Everland said that since her public debut in January 2021, she has attracted more than 5.4 million visitors.

In April last year, in accordance with international agreements, Fu Bao was sent to China. Her departure was met with an emotional farewell from thousands of fans who gathered at Everland to see her off.

Fu Bao's arrival in China has also sparked interest among South Korean tourists. Travel agencies have offered "panda tourism" packages to Sichuan, allowing fans to visit her in her new habitat.

Some avid South Korean panda fans alleged mistreatment of Fu Bao shortly after her arrival in China, pointing to a patch of fur loss on her neck.

The China Conservation and Research Center for the Giant Panda refuted the claims, saying that tests suggested no abnormalities such as allergies, scabs or thickening of the skin. A spokesperson for the center said the Shenshuping base will continue to closely monitor and care for Fu Bao. To ensure her well-being, the base will adjust display times or suspend displays based on her health status and weather conditions.

Documentary on urban life inspires viewers

By DU JUAN
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"Every story deserves to be heard." That idea drives *Hotline Beijing*, a documentary that has sparked widespread discussion since its Feb 18 debut. The film explores urban challenges, resonating with audiences and inspiring reflection on governance.

Based on Beijing's 12345 citizen service hotline, the documentary highlights issues such as alley parking management, retrofitting old buildings with elevators and the personal growth of a call center operator through seven stories. It also examines legislation on handling public complaints and a foreign journalist's research into Beijing's governance mechanisms.

"The film reminded me of my experience as a teaching assistant after graduation," said Wang Shuangshuang, a young white-collar employee in Beijing who previously worked at universities. "There were misunderstandings in my work, too, requiring a lot of communication — just like one of the characters in the film. When I watched it, I felt that everyone faces challenges in life."

Beyond emotional resonance, the film has sparked discussions on urban management and governance.

"The film is about city management, which inspired me to think about how to leverage my expertise in governing the capital," said Liu Dongping, Party secretary of the School of Electronic and Information Engineering at Beijing Jiaotong University. "For example, improving informatization and intelligence in the renovation and upgrading of old residential communities."

Xiu Mingyue, an undergraduate at the Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications, said she started thinking about how to apply her knowledge to urban governance after watching the film.

"As an AI major, I believe we can use big data and large models to analyze people's needs statistically, predict emerging issues in advance and solve problems before they arise," she said.

Director Xu Jieqin told the audience the film is based on six years of Beijing's immediate responses to public complaints and requests. The film, which took 10 months to complete, began production in March last year and underwent multiple revisions.

With a cumulative box office of 76.26 million yuan ($10.5 million), the film has become the top-grossing domestic documentary of the year so far, according to local media.

Xia Chao, chairman of the China Literature and Art Critics Association, said documentaries serve as the nation's visual archive, holding significant value in preserving historical truth, portraying the times and fostering empathy.

Hotline Beijing is "very meaningful, vividly showcasing China's experience, wisdom and solutions for urban management while effectively conveying the image of contemporary Chinese people", Xia said.

Wang Yichuan, vice-chairman of the association, said during a discussion that the film uses a "comedy-drama" approach, blending humor with serious themes to engage audiences. "This is the key to the film's success," he said.