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President Chen Proposes Spratly Initiative

During President Chen Shuibian's visit at Taiping Island (Itu Aba Island) on February 2nd, he proposed the "Spratly Initiative", to recognize the "Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DoC)", and to ensure safety and traffic of international water in the South China Sea region. He also expressed interest in participating the establishment of "Code of Conduct in the South China Sea", stressing to replace sovereignty disputes with environment protection, and to replace resource exploitation with ecosystem sustainability.

Sovereignty disputes over islands of the South China Sea had long been catching global attention. Currently there are 6 countries claiming sovereignty at this area: Taiwan, China, Vietnam, Philippine, Malaysia, and Brunei. Facing such complicate and delicate issues of sovereignty, Taiwan appealed to nearby

countries that the disputes should be solved peacefully in accordance with "Charter of the United Nations" and "United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)".

The President pointed out, that Taiwan would recognize, on the basis of sovereignty fairness, the content of "DoC", to ensure safe and smooth traffic of international water around the South China Sea. He also looked forward to take part in the establishment of "Code of Conduct in the South China Sea" in order to stabilize the region as soon as possible.

"To replace sovereignty disputes with environment protection, and to replace resource exploitation with ecosystem sustainability," commented by the President on the future of South China Sea. Using the opportunity, he further proposed the "Spratly Initiative":

First, Taiwan would recognize the principle and spirit represented by the "DoC", to insist on solving sovereignty disputes with peaceful measures.

INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

Second, the development of South China Sea should prioritize in conservation of ecological environment, especially with regard to the threat of climbing sea level caused by global warming. Taiwan would appeal to all relevant countries to first consider converting South China Sea into a maritime conservation area, instead of racing to pillage resources of the ocean.

Third, the area would be opened regularly to international ecologists and environmental protection groups, so that they could conduct survey and research at the Dongsha Atoll,

Taiping Island, and Zhongjhou Reef.

Fourth, non-governmental groups would be encouraged to set up “South China Sea Research Center”, to hold international conferences, so that, through active efforts of communication at both levels, the unsettling South China Sea would be made more peaceful.



Taiwan Coral Research Center and Coral Reef Early Warning System Established

Taiwan Coral Research Center (TCRC) was established on February 26th at the National Museum of Marine Biology & Aquarium (NMMBA). The NMMBA, California State University, Northridge and National Dong Hwa University have signed the Memorandum of Understanding for Academic Cooperation between Kenting and Moorea research group of USA

NMMBA researcher, Tung-Yung Fan, indicated that in year 2007, Hawaii, Caribbean seas, and Tahiti had massive coral bleaching. At Kenting waters there was still about 40% live coral coverage, which was better than the 20% coverage at Indian Ocean; even the most affected Longkeng Ecological Reserve Area had 20% live coral coverage, and Banana Bay and Hou Bi

INSIDE

President Chen Proposes Spratly Initiative

Taiwan Coral Research Center and Coral Reef Early Warning System Established

Chinese Crested Tern Became Emphasis of World Conservation

Red-Crown Crane Migration Causes Road Plan Changes

Two Cases of Bird Smuggling Seized

Taiwan Environmental Performance Index Regressed

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INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

Lake even had coral coverage of up to 60%, which raised the interests of international coral research teams to commence their research at Kenting. Professor Fan indicated that the upwelling of the Nanwan bay brought cool water from deep waters to the surface and cooled down the corals which might have reduced the coral bleach.

After discussion, all parties decided to focus the research on three aspects including environment, ecosystem, and biotechnology. The environment research would be led by James Leichter of the U.S. Scripps Institution of Oceanography, the authoritative figure in upwelling studies, and by Fongsi Ke, to explain the internal wave effect of coral reefs and the effects of resulted thermal variation on the hindering of sea water warming. The research of the ecosystem would be led by Professor Peter Edmunds of U.S. California State University, who had extensive study on how temperature would impact coral biology and ecology, and by Professor Tung-Yung Fan. The goal was to identify long term ecological changes and biological adaptation of coral ecosystem.

The research of biotechnology would be led by Professor Ruth Gates from University of Hawaii, who specialized in the research of coral-dinoflagellate symbioses, and by Professor

Chisiang Chen; the goal would be to further study the coral-dinoflagellate symbiosis system. In addition, the execution of international cooperation had help from Professor Pingjyun Song, who had outstanding research and administration experience in the field. It was hoped that through interdisciplinary cooperation, a solution to save the coral reef could be found.

Other than this, Kenting still had to face the coral bleaching issue every summer. In March this year, Kenting National Park had established the first Coral Reef Early Warning System in the Nanwan Bay. The International Maritime Organization would monitor corals in Nanwan Bay with satellite and would immediately take necessary actions to protect and sustain the ecosystem of Kenting.



Chinese Crested Tern Became Emphasis of World Conservation

BirdLife International and Pacific Seabird Group (PSG) came to a decision recently, that the world seabird conservation for this year should emphasize on the Chinese Crested Tern, a legendary bird discovered at Matsu in year 2000. For PSG, this was the first conservation case across Pacific Ocean over the 35 years since its establishment.

INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

The 35th annual meeting of PSG was held in Washington Half Moon Lake from February 27 to March 1st; about 300 bird specialists and scientists from U.S., Canada, U.K., France, Germany, Japan, Peru, Taiwan, and Africa attended this meeting. Theme of the meeting was on “Ecological Conservation for Pacific Seabirds.”

There were 6 representatives from Taiwan, including technical specialist of Lianchiang County and Shouhua Chang, who discovered Chinese Crested Tern. Their speech was about how Chinese Crested Tern was discovered, as well as Taiwan’s effort for designating 8 desolate islands as Matsu Islands Tern Refuge.

The Chairperson, Verena announced in the meeting, that for the past 8 years since Chinese Crested Terns were rediscovered, their population had been extremely unstable. Among the chain of Matsu islands, sometimes there was only one sighting per year; in a good year, the number of sighting was still fewer than 20. It appeared that they could become extinct anytime. Thus, BirdLife International had approved an action protocol to protect the Chinese Crested Terns, and bird specialists from U.S., Canada, U.K., Japan, etc. would work their best to protect these seabirds.

During the Welcome Dinner, the Taiwanese

video “Legendary Bird – Chinese Crested Tern” was played, and due to its outstanding content, for three times the 6 Taiwan representatives were invited by the host to stand up and receive respectful applauses from the audience.



Red-Crown Crane Migration Causes Road Plan Changes

Early this year, red-crown cranes (*Grus japonensis*), a protected species, stopped by Cingshuei Wetland at Jinshan Town in Taipei County, and this attracted lots of bird-lovers and crowds of people. To prevent red-crown cranes from being disturbed, the County established the “Taipei County Jinshan Town Red-Crown Crane Patrolling Volunteers” and requested Jinshan Police and Forest and Nature Conservation Police to patrol the wetland.

On February 5th, when Mr. Siwei Jhou, Mayor of Taipei County, was conducting the Flag Presentation Ceremony for the Red-Crown Crane Patrolling Volunteers, he expressed that, although the Jinshan No. 2-3 Roads supported by CPAMI (Construction and Planning Agency, Ministry of Interior) had begun their construction, the County decided to stop the construction and changed the design plan in order to keep a reservation area for animals. The

INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

roads would be changed to go around the Cingshuei Wetland to protect the ecosystem. It was estimated that the County had a cost increase of NTD 200,000,000 for the construction fee because of this change.

Cingshuei Wetland at Jinshan Town had been a rest stop for migratory birds; if the County turned the land into a wildlife preservation area, more migratory birds would be able to rest here and to continue their migration southward or northward. According to statistics, there had been a total of more than 200 species of migratory birds that passed by the Cingshuei Wetland in their journey.



Two Cases of Bird Smuggling Seized

Macaw Eggs Seized at Taoyuan International Airport (Feb. 15)

SCPO (Southern Coastal Patrol Office) joined with BAPHIQ (Bureau of Animal and Plant Health Inspection and Quarantine) and successfully seized Mr. Tsai, who smuggled eggs of Macaw parrot from Thailand into Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport on February 15. Mr. Tsai, from Tainan City, was transferred to Tainan District Prosecutors Office (TDPO) and charged for violating the Wildlife Conservation Act.

Originated from South America, the Macaw is an endangered bird species. Based on statistics by bird conservation groups, there are only 2000-ish of these parrots left in the world.

SCPO was informed last year that Mr. Tsai went to Thailand to buy highly protected parrot eggs. Since Thailand is an infected area for Avian Influenza (Bird Flu), Kaohsiung Police requested the leadership of TDPO when investigating the case, and joined force with other police units, as well as DOI (Department of Immigration), to start monitoring.

The special team assigned for the case tracked Mr. and Mrs. Tsai for several days, and found that the couple left for Thailand on February 8th. Immediately the team members informed units such as the Taipei Customs, BAPHIQ, etc. On the night of the 14th, inspection was set up to catch Mr. and Mrs. Tsai at the Taoyuan International Airport in Taiwan. The two were caught smuggling 13 parrot eggs that were never quarantined; these eggs were sent to ESRI (Endemic Species Research Institute, Council of Agriculture) for DNA inspection.

Big Smuggling of Live Birds Seized at Kinmen (Mar. 5th)

The Kinmen 12th Reconnaissance Brigade, Flotilla, and Coast Patrol of the Coast Guard

INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

Administration, joined forces on March 5th and seized the live-bird smuggling that is the largest scale in Kinmen history. Several types of Macaw parrots and racing pigeons, for a total of 493 individuals, were distrained; two Kinmen males were arrested and under investigation.

These live birds were going to be smuggled to China; there were 204 various types of Macaw parrots in 15 boxes, and 289 racing pigeons in 20 boxes. This was the greatest live-bird smuggling ever discovered in Kinmen in history. Total cost of the goods was over NT\$2,000,000. The largest among the Macaws was a Blue-and-yellow Macaw (*Ara ararauna*) at about 85 cm in body length -- a protected species.

Ti-ren Shiau, Captain of the Kinmen Reconnaissance Brigade, stated that, these live birds were transported to Kinmen from Taiwan through legal route. However, the bird market in Kinmen was limited, and investigation showed that the suspects planned to smuggle the birds into China. After the phase of investigation came to an end, the two suspects were submitted to Kinmen District Prosecutors Office, under charges for violating the Wildlife Conservation Act as well as the Act Governing Relations between Peoples of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area. The smuggling portion would be handled by the Kaohsiung Customs.



Taiwan Environmental Performance Index Regressed

On January 23rd 2008, in the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting held at Davos, Switzerland, the newest Environmental Performance Index (EPI) for 2008 was announced. The rank of Taiwan regressed from 24th to 40th. Poor policy to deal with “climate change” was the major cause for Taiwan’s lower ranking.

In U.S., Yale University and Columbia University released the “2008 Environmental Performance Index (EPI) Report”, and among the 149 countries listed, Taiwan was ranked the 40th, right behind U.S., which was the 39th. In Eastern Asia, Taiwan came in third, after Japan, which was ranked 21st, and Malaysia, ranked 26th.

When compared to the report of 2006, there was an overall backslide among the Asian countries; Taiwan slid from 24th to 40th, Malaysia from 9th to 26th, Japan from 14th to 21st; but Taiwan’s regression of 16 ranks was above all the rest.

Environment Protection Administration (EPA) expressed that, there were a few reasons for Taiwan’s regressed ranking:

INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

- Indicator structure and weighing adjustment: for 2008 EPI, the structure and weighing for each indicator was hugely adjusted. The number of indicators was increased from 16 to 25; new indicators included many of Taiwan's weaker areas.
- Waste reduction and resource recycling were not considered: during the recent years, EPA had been promoting waste management policies such as zero waste, source reduction, and resource recycling, etc. The efficacy of Taiwan's recycling program was even surpassing U.S. and Japan, but these were not included as part of the EPI evaluation.
- Questionable or erroneous index data: In Taiwan, biorefractory pesticides had all been banned or had never been used, but the index marking for agriculture management was zero. In addition, the sulfur dioxide exhaust quantity provided by EU research facility was different from the data provided by Taiwan. Also, computer-deduced ozone concentration by the assessment team had tremendous difference from Taiwan's monitoring data.
- UNEP Water Quality Index accuracy in question: In the UNEP's newly completed study for "Water Quality Index", the ranking of various countries had big difference when compared to what was commonly recognized; accuracy of the index should be questioned.
- Too much exhaust emission of greenhouse gas and air pollutants: Due to high-degree of industrialization, high density of automobile and motorcycles, as well as anti-nuclear policies and renewable resources were still under development, etc., the exhaust emission of greenhouse gas and air pollutants had not been reduced.
- Management of productive natural resources to be reinforced: Development of agriculture and fishery in Taiwan had caused much impact on ecology and natural resources; also, forest indicator data were lacking; all these affected the ranking.
- Quality of river water still had much to improve: In Taiwan, pollution of river water had been reduced from 15.8% in 2003 to 5.7% in 2007 due to EPA's efforts in actively realizing related plans. Eutrophication of dams had been reduced from 10 dams in 2003 to 6 dams in 2005;

INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

this indicated that the improvement work for water quality had some initial success. In the future, control would be improved for waste water from livestock; also, management measures (such as grass waterway, vegetation corridors, etc) best for mountain orchards, farms, farm lands, etc would be carried out. All these would reduce total nitrogen concentration and improve water quality.

The highest index value for EPI was 100, and was based on six policy categories, which included 25 indicators. The evaluation team listed six policy categories for environment protection; these included Environmental Health, Air Pollution, Water Resources, Biodiversity and Habitat, Productive Natural Resources, and Climate Change.

The EPI reporting host, who was a professor from Yale University, expressed that, this year the evaluation weighed heavier on performance dealing with Climate Change. At the top of the ranking was Switzerland, which was the most efficient among the developed countries in lowering greenhouse gas emission.

Based on this biannual assessment report, 7 of the top 10 countries were in Europe.

Switzerland was ranked the first with 95.5, followed by Norway, Sweden, Finland, Costa Rica, Austria, New Zealand, Latvia, Colombia, and France.



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Publisher/ Editor-in-Chief: Ling-ling Lee

Editors: Yi-fen Lin / Grantland Wang

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Society for Wildlife and Nature (SWAN)

Add.: 1F, No. 35, Lane 175, Hoping E. Road,
Taipei 116, Taiwan, ROC

Tel: +(886-2) 2709-8160

Fax: +(886-2) 2784-6774

Email: swanicn@gmail.com

Website: [http:// www.swan.org.tw](http://www.swan.org.tw)