

POLICY REVIEW

Regulation on consular protection unveiled

Strengthened rules to ensure lives and rights of nationals, businesses abroad welcomed

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The latest regulation on consular protection and assistance will guarantee the protection of the lives and interests of Chinese citizens abroad at a time when an increasing number of residents and businesses are going global, senior officials and experts said.

The Regulation on Consular Affairs, unveiled by the State Council on July 14, clarified the responsibilities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, State Council departments and Chinese diplomatic missions overseas in terms of offering consular protection.

It was released following the growing number of evacuations and cases of consular protection in recent years.

According to the Foreign Ministry, China has organized nearly 20 evacuations and has handled more than 500,000 cases of consular protection involving millions of nationals over the past 10 years. The 24-hour 12308 hotline for consular services has received over 3 million calls since its launch in 2014. Last year, the Foreign Ministry and China's overseas diplomatic missions handled around 70,000 cases of consular protection, and the hotline received 500,000 phone calls.

Deng Li, vice-minister of foreign affairs, told a news briefing on July 14 that the ministry will take steps to improve the consular protection abilities of diplomatic missions, while encouraging insurance companies, law firms and security companies to get involved in the protection of overseas citizens.

He said the ministry encourages citizens abroad, or those who plan to travel overseas, to register through the China Consular Affairs mobile app to secure better access to consular services.

Meanwhile, the ministry will keep close tabs on global security situations to ensure they can issue timely warnings, Deng added.

Xia Liping, professor of diplomacy at the China Foreign Affairs University in Beijing, said that the increasing numbers of Chinese workers around the world are facing mounting security risks.

She cited figures showing that the number of consular protection and assistance cases has been increasing on a yearly basis, which makes the introduction of legislation in this regard even more urgent.

She said that one of the major highlights of the new regulation is that it makes clear that overseas diplomatic missions are the primary entities responsible for consular protection.

The regulation also listed circumstances in which Chinese citizens and businesses abroad suffer from infringements to their rights, and stipulated measures that diplomatic missions must take accordingly.

In one of the most recent operations, during which some 1,500 citizens were evacuated from the war in Sudan, different strategies were adopted, including the deployment of two naval ships that ferried 940 Chinese citizens and 231 non-Chinese nationals to safety.

According to the Ministry of Commerce, there were 46,000 Chinese



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

businesses overseas at the end of last year in 190 countries and regions. The number of Chinese citizens now employed overseas exceeds 1.5 million.

Yao Wen, Chinese ambassador to Bangladesh, said that the increasing number of projects being implemented under the Belt and Road Initiative has spurred Chinese businesses and nationals to seek opportunities abroad, which has also led to the expansion of the country's interests overseas.

He explained that the complex global security landscape, and higher expectations for consular protection, have made work even more challenging for China's overseas diplomatic missions.

In Bangladesh, one of the most densely populated countries in the world, there are now around 3000 Chinese nationals and 600 businesses.

Yao said that challenges to consular protection are particularly notable this year, with domestic politics heating up as Bangladesh prepares

to hold a general election in January next year.

"Our embassy has always taken guaranteeing the safety and property of Chinese businesses and nationals as its top priority," he said.

Another challenge embassies face is the variety of meticulous consular services they must provide. "We need to provide tourists with a safer travel experience, students with better educational conditions, businesspeople with more enabling business climates, and expatriate Chinese with more welcoming services," Yao said.

The ambassador said that while the new regulation will make expatriate Chinese more keenly aware that they are primarily responsible for their own safety, it also lays the foundations for improving the ability of diplomatic missions to serve their interests.

Going forward, Yao said the embassy in Bangladesh will continue to use the mechanisms in place with Bangladeshi authorities to help citizens with problems getting visas

and facilitate business operations.

In order to provide more professional consular service, he highlighted the need to study local laws and regulations in greater depth, and to focus on the security interests of small-sized businesses in remote regions.

Shao Zheng, the charge d'affaires at the Chinese embassy in Yemen, said that he believes the new regulation will help make China's consular affairs more efficient and convenient in general, and help Chinese expatriates solve the problems that trouble them the most.

He said that the development of a sound legal foreign affairs framework remains the most important tool in ensuring the safety and interests of citizens and institutions abroad.

Consular affairs in Yemen have been particularly challenging since 2014, when a civil war broke out in the Arab country, leading to a major humanitarian crisis.

Shao said the embassy has been trying its best to offer consular pro-

tection and assistance through multiple channels, while repeatedly urging the Yemenis to protect Chinese facilities and personnel.

The embassy played an instrumental role in the evacuation of 962 Chinese and non-Chinese nationals from the war-torn country in 2015.

Shao, who took part in the operation, said it demonstrated the importance of a strong motherland in protecting the safety and interests of its citizens abroad.

He also said that the operations in Yemen and Sudan, which were the first times Chinese battleships docked in international harbors in the performance of this kind of mission, showed that the country's military vessels were its "Noah's Ark during times of crises overseas".

"It also highlighted the importance of developing regular, institutionalized mechanisms for consular protection assistance so that everybody works in close coordination during times of danger," he added.

Policy Digest

Elevators to be installed in suitable residences

In conjunction with six other central government bodies, the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development has issued a notice calling for renovation of aging urban residential communities.

As part of the requirements, local authorities have been tasked with helping to install elevators in apartment buildings that currently do not have any.

Authorities should conduct feasibility studies based on factors such as the structural safety of the apartment buildings and the desire of residents for elevators, to determine which buildings are suited to installation.

When a building has been determined as suitable, authorities should engage with residents in a patient and detailed manner and guide them to discuss and reach an agreement on how best to design and install elevators, how to finance installation, as well as how to keep them maintained.

The notice also tasked authorities with guaranteeing the residents' rights to know about, to participate in and to supervise the process, and to make sure that after installation, elevators are properly maintained and operate over the long term.

China works toward CPTPP membership

China is working to press ahead with the process of joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, and is consulting with signatory countries in accordance with required procedures.

A full and in-depth analysis, assessment and study of all the articles in the trade agreement has been conducted, Yang Tao, head of the Ministry of Commerce's comprehensive affairs department, told a recent news conference.

Accordingly, China has already sorted out measures that may need to be taken and has identified laws that may need changing, Yang said. The country intends to remain in communication with CPTPP signatory countries regarding participation in the trade pact.

China applied to join the CPTPP in September 2021 and advocates regional free trade arrangements that are open, transparent and mutually beneficial, and has continued to promote trade and investment liberalization and facilitation, Yang said.

More measures taken to safeguard wheat harvest



All-out efforts have been made to minimize the impact of continuous rainfall in late May that coincided with the wheat harvest, an official from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs said.

The rainfall affected 1.86 million hectares (27.9 million mu) of crops, most of it in Henan province, according to Pan Wenbo, head of the ministry's Department of Crop Production.

The rainfall has had a limited impact on other major wheat-producing provinces, such as Shandong, Anhui, Hebei and Jiangsu, which have all seen an increase in the summer grain harvest, Pan said.

This summer's harvest is 1.275 million metric tons less than last summer, and represents a 0.9 percent decrease.

Pan said that this slight drop will have a limited impact on the grain market, as China had seen an increase in its wheat harvest for four consecutive years from 2019 to last year, and so the country has abundant stocks of wheat.

WANG QINGYUN

Entry, residency process for families of foreign executives eased

By XU WEI

Recent efforts to improve the business climate for foreign businesses, including measures to facilitate the entry of company executives and their family members, will help China integrate more deeply into the global economy, said officials and experts.

In a policy document published on June 29, the State Council unveiled steps to deepen reforms in five free trade zones — Shanghai, Guangdong, Tianjin, Fujian and Beijing — as well as in the Hainan Free Trade Port, as part of

efforts to boost institutional opening up.

Spouses and family members of executives who have been transferred to foreign-invested businesses in pilot areas, enjoy similar entry and residency periods as executives.

Meanwhile, executives of foreign businesses planning to establish new subsidiaries in pilot regions will be granted a maximum period of two years' residency, the document said.

Yang Zhengwei, head of the department of pilot free trade zone and free trade ports at the Ministry

of Commerce, told a news conference that the measures are intended to help foreign executives bring their families to China, and to make the country more attractive to global talent.

The measure to extend the period of stay for executives opening new branches in free trade zones will help attract foreign investment, he added.

The moves come as foreign direct investment on the Chinese mainland dropped 2.7 percent year-on-year to 703.65 billion yuan (\$97.47 billion) in the first half of the year, according to data from the

ministry. The number of new foreign-backed businesses established in the same period was 24,000, a year-on-year increase of 35.7 percent.

Andy Mok, a senior research fellow at the Center for China and Globalization, a Beijing-based think tank, said the moves to ease entry and residency rules for foreign executives and their families "represents a strategic move to attract global talent and foster foreign investment".

"This showcases not only China's commitment to integrate more deeply into the global economy,

but also its ambition to spur high-quality growth through an influx of foreign expertise and innovative practices," he said.

Other key measures in the policy document include ensuring that Chinese and foreign financial institutions have the same access when authorities greenlight the opening of new services in pilot areas.

Individuals and businesses will be allowed to purchase financial services from overseas, and the legal investments of foreign investors will be transferred in and out of China freely, and without delay.