

Officials in Lijiang suspended over Weibo posts

Two officials in the Old Town of Lijiang in Yunnan province have been suspended over comments made on Sina Weibo on Sunday, which appeared to attack users of China's Twitter-like social media platform.

The deputy head of the publicity department in Gucheng district, where the scenic spot is located, and the head of the district's international communication office have been suspended from their duties, while the publicity department has been urged to examine its actions, the district government said in a statement on Sina Weibo on Monday.

The Old Town of Lijiang is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a national 5-A scenic spot.

However, in recent years, there have been many reports of tourists being overcharged or being forced to shop in the city. In one incident, a tourist lost her purse and was disfigured after being beaten by a dozen people at a restaurant.

For its failure to maintain services and facilities akin to a top-rated scenic spot, the town was given a warning by the China National Tourism Administration on Saturday and told to rectify issues within six months.

Gucheng's publicity department posted a statement on Weibo on Sunday, saying it was willing to accept punishment and work to resolve issues with the services it provides.

However, when a user commented, "I will never go to Lijiang", the official account replied, saying: "You'd better not come to Lijiang! We don't need you!"

Another comment read, "Is there any risk of being beaten in Lijiang?", to which the official account replied, "It takes two to quarrel."

The replies were deleted soon after being posted, with the publicity department denying knowledge of them and promising an investigation into the case.

The replies triggered a flood of criticism among netizens, with many questioning whether the scenic spot has any desire to improve its services.

Court corrects dozens of wrongful convictions

Chinese courts have corrected 34 major miscarriages of justice in the past four years in order to build the public's confidence in the justice system, according to the Supreme People's Court.

Moreover, the courts have declared 3,718 defendants innocent from 2013 to 2016 to protect their human rights and other legitimate rights, the top court said in a white paper on judicial reform released on Monday.

Last year alone, 11 such cases involving 17 people were redressed by the courts.

"Correcting false charges has rebuilt the judicial protection of human rights, maintaining a fair and just image to boost people's confidence in the justice system," the court said in the white paper.

In recent years, miscarriages of justice due to the use of torture to force suspects to make confessions have aroused heated debate about the justice system.

The top court has worked with other authorities to reform the criminal justice system and determine a fundamental role for trials, as well as avoiding the use of torture and other illegal means to obtain evidence.

The guideline stipulated that defendants in cases where there is a lack of evidence should be found innocent.

In December, Nie Shubin, a villager in Hebei province who was executed in 1995, was exonerated by the top court due to a lack of evidence for his conviction of murder and rape.

In February 2016, Chen Man, a farmer in Hainan province who was wrongfully imprisoned for 23 years for homicide and arson, was declared innocent by the top court due to a lack of evidence.

Last year, the top court launched pilot projects in 18 cities to offer lenient punishment to defendants who confess to prevent long detentions over minor crimes.

According to the SPC, they will intensify efforts to exclude illegal evidence and prevent wrongful trials to protect defendants' human rights.

"It's necessary to have timely and proper judicial reform, which will focus on collecting high-quality and persuasive evidence to ensure justice," said Li Wei, a lawyer from the Beijing Lawyers Association.

Incentives for second child considered



China is mulling financial incentives to encourage couples to have a second child, as surveys show many are reluctant to expand their families due to economic constraints.[Wang Biao/For China Daily]

China is mulling financial incentives to encourage couples to have a second child, as surveys show many are reluctant to expand their families due to economic constraints.

Wang Pei'an, vice-minister of the National Health and Family Planning Commission, revealed the potential move at a social welfare conference on Saturday.

Top decision-makers last year relaxed the more than four-decade-old family planning policy to allow, if not encourage, all Chinese couples to have a second child.

Nationwide, the change led to 17.8 million births in 2016, an increase of more than 1.3 million compared with the previous year and the biggest annual increase in 20 years.

"That fully met the expectations, but barriers still exist and must be addressed," Wang told the conference. "To have a second child is the right of each family in China, but affordability has become a bottleneck that undermines the decision."

A survey by the commission in 2015 found that 60 percent of families polled

expressed reluctance to have a second baby largely due to economic constraints.

To address that, Wang said, the government is considering introducing supporting measures including “birth rewards and subsidies” to encourage people to have another child.

It is the first time that the top population authority has suggested such a move to boost the birthrate, according to Yuan Xin, a professor at Nankai University in Tianjin.

The Hunan provincial statistics authority also suggested in a recent report that the local government give subsidies to couples having a second baby to help reverse falling fertility rates.

“It’s not easy, and a ‘baby bonus’ plan should be applied evenly nationwide as all government policies should be transparent and fair for all,” he said, adding that the population authority alone cannot handle such a plan as it requires consensus and cooperation among all authorities.

In some low-fertility countries like Japan, baby incentives such as cash subsidies, prolonged maternity leave, tax breaks, and child and healthcare benefits have been introduced by the government to boost the population.

China, however, is a different case, according to Yuan, who explained that the nation still faces challenges from a huge population base and limited natural and public resources to sustain population development.

“It’s not the right time to introduce any financial incentive plans,” he said.

Also, “the second-child policy is a choice by the top decision-makers facing a dilemma of the existing challenges and structural population problems like rapid aging and a shrinking workforce”, he said.

After all, having one or two children should be a decision made by the families themselves, Yuan said.

A mother of a 3-year-old girl in Beijing said: “I don’t expect cash from the government for a second child. Sound social public policies to help working parents raise the children are needed more.”

The woman, surnamed Bai, referred to prolonged maternity leave, equal working opportunities for mothers, easy access to quality education resources for children and a well-functioning social welfare system.

Number of SATs held outside US to be cut

A cut in the number of times students will be able to take the Scholastic Assessment Test—which is used for entry to United States colleges—throughout the year will force many Chinese students to revise their strategies for studying abroad, according to people involved in testing services.

The College Board, based in New York City, announced it will reduce how many SATs are held outside the US from six to four—in January, May, October and December—for the 2017-18 and 2018-19 academic years. Two tests, scheduled for June and November, will be canceled, it said.

The board said that it will also step up security audits of testing centers.

Qi Lianshan, who has worked for several SAT prep services over the past decade and is now a self-employed SAT tutor in Beijing, said the decision could affect those who had planned to take the test in June the most.

June is an ideal time for students to take the SAT because they usually start submitting applications for undergraduate programs in the second half of the year. In May, they are still busy taking Advanced Placement tests, also administered by the College Board.

“Now the students may have to take both AP tests and the SAT in May, which means a lot more pressure and less possibility of achieving a high score,” he said, adding that students who plan to take the SAT next year should modify their preparations to secure a good result.

Si Mingxia, director of the US division at Vision Overseas, an agency under New Oriental Education and Technology Group that helps Chinese study overseas, said the move by the College Board could be a step to thwart rampant cheating and unfair competition.

The College Board did not respond to a request for comment. Its chief administrative officer and general counsel, Peter Schwartz, said in a statement last week, “We are unwavering in our commitment to SAT test security and we will continue to confront any efforts to undermine it.”

In 2015, prosecutors in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia charged 15 Chinese citizens over a conspiracy to have impostors take the SAT and other college entrance exams for other students for payment of up to \$6,000. Most of the defendants pleaded guilty and were deported.

Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region to build one-hour commuting circle

The construction of a rail and road network in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region is in full swing, bringing the three neighboring areas closer together. [Photo/Xinhua]

The construction of a rail and road network in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region is in full swing, bringing the three neighboring areas closer together.

Rail transit line connects Beijing, Hebei

According to the plan for a 1,000-kilometer-long inter-city railway network across Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region laid down in 2016, the construction will take five years to complete.

The network centers around Beijing, Tianjin and Shijiazhuang, with three major channels, namely Beijing-Tianjin-Tanggu, Beijing-Baoding-Shijiazhuang and Beijing-Tangshan-Qinhuangdao Expressways.

Line Pinggu will be equipped with vehicles running at a maximum speed of 160 kilometers per hour. It will take only 45 minutes to go from Pinggu to downtown Beijing.

Picking up pace in building 7 highways

The Beijing section of Beijing-Taipei Expressway was opened on Dec. 9, 2016. Currently, seven highways are under construction. The next four years will see new highways open to traffic every year.

3 cities share transportation card

A total of 317,000 interconnective cards have been given out for transportation in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region. Since Dec. 25, 2016, the card has been viable on all bus lines in Beijing (except for tailored business buses) and 122 suburban lines operated by bus groups.

Six hundred more bus lines in 10 cities in Tianjin and Hebei also use the card.