

CHINA & TAIWAN RECONNECTED: BY AIR ROUTE



After years of hostilities a new leadership of Taiwan makes talks with China possible. Newly elected Taiwanese president Ma Ying-jeou, who took office in May, has started talks with Chinese officials. The president wants to revitalize Taiwan's economy by closer ties with Beijing. As a result an agreement on flights was signed. This document made it possible for regular charter flights to go between the countries after almost sixty years. China has considered Taiwan a breakaway province and stated it would reunite the island with the mainland, by force if necessary. The island has an independent government since 1949 when communists won the nation's civil war in mainland China. Since then the relations between the two states were rather bad. Military forces were prepared on both sides to enter a possible conflict.

Before the flights agreement was signed the traveling between the states was rather difficult. Planes flew to Taiwan only on Chinese holidays and were forced to stopover in Hong Kong or Macau. The planes now will fly from Friday to Monday and will connect five major cities in China with eight airports in Taiwan.

The first travelers from China have arrived to Taiwan on board of the China Southern Airlines plane and Taiwan-based China Airlines has flown the Taiwanese to Shanghai. Officials on both sides welcome this "thawing". According to the director of China's Taiwan affairs office, Wang Yi, the flights were a new beginning in cross-strait exchanges. Taiwanese officials hope the flights will bring the so much needed boost to the country's economy. Since July 18 the number of mainland tourists allowed to visit Taiwan will rise to 3,000 per day and the Taiwanese hope further extending of the service will bring as much as 1 million Chinese tourists a year to the island.

There are, however, also fears and disagreements with the development. Critics expect rude, cheap spending visitors coming from mainland. There are also pro Tibet protestors who dislike any positive changes in China-Taiwan relations.

Do you think the air connection will have good consequences on the China - Taiwan political relations? Add your comment.

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