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TAIWAN BOOSTS SANCTIONS AGAINST CHINA'S ECONOMIC ESPIONAGE

Taiwanese Premier Su Tseng-chang told a Cabinet meeting that over the past few years China has intensified its "red supply chain" infiltration of the island's industries. Because China's government and firms are luring Taiwan's high-tech talent and stealing its "core" technologies, Taipei must establish stricter regulations and a more robust national security policy, Su said. Taiwan's legislature approved amendments to toughen sanctions against China's economic spies. The amended National Security Act stipulates that anyone who gives China Taiwan's core technologies will face 5-12 years in prison and a \$1.8-\$3.6 million fine. Additionally, anyone who receives government subsidies for work on core technologies must receive approval before they travel to China for three years after working on that project. (*Taipei Times*, February 18, 2022)

CHINA ENTICING TAIWANESE TALENT AND FIRMS TO MIGRATE

China is treating Taiwan's firms like locals to entice skilled Taiwanese talent and eventually "domesticize" those living in China, according to a report by Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council. In 2018, Beijing passed its "31 measures" to woo Taiwanese talent and businesses, and local governments have introduced their own policies. Beijing employs a carrot-and-stick approach, on the one hand sweetening investment incentives in certain industries, on the other imposing sanctions, said the report. Beijing will continue to expand both these "soft" and "hard" strategies, it found, citing many attempts to unilaterally influence Taiwan's politics. However, it also found that the measures had not generated a big increase in Taiwanese investment in China. China's "cross-strait youth innovation bases," for instance, which provide 18 months of support for Taiwanese entrepreneurs looking to start businesses in China, did not consider their lack of experience and familiarity with the mainland market. (*Taipei Times*, February 14, 2022)

ANGER AMONG NEIGHBORS MOUNTS AT CHINESE DAMS

China operates 129 dams along the Mekong River, including 11 mega-dams, and at least 7 more are under construction. During the rainy season, two dams – the Nuozhadu and the Xiaowan – hold about 10 billion cubic km of water so they can produce hydroelectricity in the dry season. Satellite imagery shows reduced and intermittent flows through the Upper Mekong. In 2021, on 22 separate occasions upstream dam releases caused the river to rise by more than half a meter and then fall by an equal amount after the release. Those changing river flows, in turn, effect the ecosystem of the waterway. "The entire ecosystem of the Mekong, especially migratory fish, depends on the fluctuation, the pulse of the floods, for starting the lifecycle activities, such as migration, and the seasonality of the flows. If the fish are confused, if the natural rhythm is not happening, and the flows are not occurring as would naturally happen with all these dams altering the natural rhythm of the river, then Tonlé Sap Lake is no longer getting the pulse of the larvae, and that severely impacts the fishing industry," said Nguyen Huu Thien, an independent climate expert based in Vietnam. Cambodia's Tonlé Sap Lake fishing industry is down 40% from its peak production. (Radio Free Asia, February 16, 2022)

CHINA'S CENSORS REMOVE GAY STORYLINES FROM 'FRIENDS'

China's censors continue to strip content from older Western films and TV shows before rereleasing them. Most recently, the sitcom 'Friends,' which is hugely popular in China, was re-released by Tencent with several cuts, including those relating to Ross ex-wife, Carol, who is gay. Censors also removed scenes with suggestive sexual references and mistranslated lines by LGBTQI characters. The censorship was trending on Weibo, with tens of millions of views of related hashtags and comments. One viewer praised the show for having portrayed LGBTQI characters in "a natural and normal way" at a time when few other pop culture products did. "I don't understand why this line was cut, why it's still the same here after 30 years, we are even going backwards." The backlash itself was soon censored. (*The Guardian*, February 14, 2022)

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Under Xi Jinping, there has been a rise in entertainment censorship targeting non-traditional family values and culture. Guidelines first introduced in 2016 have banned the depiction of gay people on TV, as well as depictions of extramarital affairs and one night stands. Last year, regulators ordered broadcasters to avoid "abnormal aesthetics" and "sissy men." LGBTQI online accounts, university groups, and publications have likewise been shut down.]

AUSTRALIA ACCUSES CHINA OF "ACT OF INTIMIDATION" AFTER AIRCRAFT INCIDENT

Australia's Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, has accused China of an "act of intimidation" after a PLA navy vessel pointed a laser at an Australian P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft last week. The laser came from a PLA vessel passing through the Arafura Sea, Australia's defense department said. "I can see it no other way than an act of intimidation, one unprovoked, unwarranted. And Australia will never accept such acts of intimidation," Morrison said. Defense Minister Peter Dutton called the incident "a very aggressive act. I think the Chinese government is hoping that nobody talks about these aggressive bullying acts. We're seeing different forms of it right across the region and in many parts of the world." (Reuters, February 20, 2022)

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Australian episode is not an isolated one. In May 2018, for instance, the U.S. complained to China over several "very serious incidents" incidents of its pilots being irritated by lasers coming from China's base in Djibouti.]