



The logo of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is pictured at the ministry in Taipei on March 3 last year.

Photo: Lu Yi-hsuan, Taipei Times

Twenty-two international airlines have corrected the way they refer to Taiwan on their booking Web sites, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has said in response to a written inquiry by Democratic Progressive Party Legislator Chiu Chih-wei (邱志偉).

Beijing in 2018 began requiring airlines that fly to Chinese airports to refer to Taiwan in their booking systems as “Taiwan, China” or “Taiwan Area.” Although there are still 39 airlines that refer to Taiwan in one of these two ways, 22 companies have corrected their systems to refer to the nation as “Taiwan,” Chiu said on Saturday, citing the ministry.

However, it would not reveal the carriers’ names out of concern that China might again pressure them into reversing course, the ministry said.

In January 2018, China demanded that US hotel chain Marriott International Inc change its Web site and mobile app, which at the time listed Taiwan as a country, the ministry said, adding that a number of other companies also came under pressure afterward.

In April 2018, Beijing started to demand that international airlines add the word “China” after any reference to Taiwan in their systems, giving them 30 days to make the changes, which was later extended to July 25, the ministry said.

China threatened the airlines, saying that it would employ legal measures to “punish” them if they did not comply and would seek “administrative penalties” against them, it said.

Airlines correct references to Taiwan: ministry

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Many major carriers, including Air Canada, British Airways PLC, Air France and Lufthansa AG, complied with China's demands, but some maintained a flexible approach rather than outright compliance, it added.

The Civil Aviation Administration of China in July 2018 said in a press release that 44 international airlines had fully complied with Beijing's demands on how they referred to Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau, but that there were still four US airlines that had not implemented sufficient changes.

It would review the situation and decide whether to enact "civil aviation administrative procedures," the agency said at the time.

There is an opportunity now to approach airlines about rectifying how they refer to Taiwan, as the worldwide aviation industry suffers from the COVID-19 pandemic and Taiwan has been successful in keeping the disease at bay, Chiu said.

Increasing praise and support for Taiwan, alongside growing antipathy toward China, have been evident in the US' and European countries' support for Taiwan's participation in the WHO, he said.

The ministry should seek to take advantage of the current situation to counter Chinese pressure on Taiwan on the international stage, he said.

Taiwan's flag carrier, China Airlines Ltd (華航), should take the lead on the issue by removing the word "China" from its name, he said.

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