

31.2 degrees! Hottest mid-April day in Shanghai over 120 years

Shanghai recorded its hottest April day in 120 years Saturday, with temperatures reaching 31.2 degrees Celsius.

Shanghai's existing weather records show that the last time a mid-April day was 33 degrees Celsius was in 1896, according to Kong Chunyan, chief service officer at Shanghai central meteorological station.

The city has experienced a warm front and the southwesterly inland wind was not very strong. This, coupled with low humidity and low cloud coverage, resulted in temperatures rising very quickly, according to the local weather station.

Shanghai, which enjoys a subtropical climate, usually sees high temperatures during the June-September period. The city's highest temperature on record was 40.8 degrees in 2013.

Sunday will be foggy and cloudy with a chance of showers. The highest temperature will drop to 26 degrees.

"Conditions are not sufficient for another day of temperatures of 30 or above," said Kong.

UN calls for total tobacco ban in China's public places



Dr. Bernhard Schwartländer, WHO Representative in China, speaks at the launch ceremony for the report on April 14, 2017 in Beijing. [Photo by Chen Boyuan / China.org.cn]

The United Nations has urged that all public places in China impose a smoking ban to help reduce tobacco-related diseases that are hurting both China's health and economy.

While congratulating Shanghai on becoming the latest Chinese city – following Beijing and Shenzhen – to enforce a total smoking ban in public places, the UN remains hopeful that more cities following their examples.

“The Bill China Cannot Afford: Health Economic and Social Costs of China's Tobacco Epidemic”, a report jointly launched on April 14 by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) stresses that stricter tobacco control could avert millions of deaths.

China is the world's largest tobacco producer, consumer and manufacturer. In 2014, Chinese smokers consumed 44 percent of the world's cigarettes, more than the next 29 cigarette-consuming countries combined, including Indonesia, Japan, Russia and the United States.

The report found that around 28 percent of adults (aged above 15) are currently smokers. An average smoker in China smokes around 22 cigarettes – more than one pack – each day; this is almost a 50 percent increase since 1980. The report warned that 1.38 million lives are lost in China each year from tobacco-related diseases.

“If nothing is done to reduce these numbers and introduce more progressive policies, the consequences could be devastating not just for the health of people across the country, but also for China's economy as a whole,” warned

Dr. Bernhard Schwartländer, WHO Representative in China, at a ceremony launching the report.

The pervasive tobacco issue in China, as the report argues, is the low sales price of tobacco. Although the latest tobacco tax increase in 2015 led to a slight rise in the retail price of cigarettes, the price rise was far lower than the average increase in salaries, making cigarettes even more affordable.

“Raising tobacco taxes is one of the most cost-effective measures to reduce consumption, while also generating substantial revenue for health and other essential programs,” said Bert Hofman, World Bank Country Director of China, Mongolia and Korea.

The report argued that raising retail price of cigarettes by 50 percent could lead to 47 million fewer male smokers, 20 million fewer premature deaths over 50 years, and saving eight million people from falling into poverty because of tobacco-related medical costs.

The report also addressed the question of the cost of tobacco control, for it is often an argument raised frequently by the tobacco industry that the use of tobacco contributes to the China’s economy.

“We have seen this over and over again around the world. For the WHO, health and human life are of the highest value and no human life can be measured against the amount of tax revenue you earn from this kind of product,” said Dr. Schwartländer.

Despite its tax contribution, the tobacco industry ultimately creates negative effect for the China’s economy, said Prof. Hu Angang, dean of Institute for Contemporary China Studies at Tsinghua University.

Hu explained that the tobacco industry causes more financial losses, such as smokers’ medical bills, a less efficient workforce (due to health-related absences) and smoking-related accidents, than benefits through its tax contributions.

“We actually did not know this fact until we were undertaking UN-led tobacco control research,” he said, adding: “We used to think that the tobacco industry helped boost the economy more or less.”

UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) commit governments to take action to reduce tobacco use by one-third over the next 15 years in the belief that smoking is a main risk factor for the prevalence of non-communicable diseases.

The UNDP does acknowledge China’s progress in economic development and the subsequent poverty alleviation, according to Nicholas Rosellini, UN Resident Coordinator in China.

“The harmonious and human-centered development, which is the central goal of the Chinese government, requires leaving tobacco addiction behind,” said Rosellini.

Reliance on tobacco is inconsistent with poverty eradication and attaining sustainable development. The report concluded that tobacco control policies can be pro-poor and benefit people with the lowest income the most.

Have a happy and peaceful Easter – Jeremy Corbyn

Jeremy Corbyn, speaking on Easter Sunday, said:

"I would like to wish everyone a happy Easter this weekend.

"As millions mark Easter around the world, it's a time to reflect on the challenges we face both at home and internationally – and what our response should be.

"We hear painful stories every day, of homelessness, poverty or crisis in our health service – or across the world, of the devastating consequences of war and conflict, including millions forced to become refugees.

"It would be easy to retreat into our private lives because the challenges seem overwhelming, or allow ourselves to be divided and blame others.

"But we need to respond to these problems head on, through action and support for social justice, peace and reconciliation.

"Those principles are at the heart of Christianity. And Christians throughout the world will this weekend be remembering Jesus's example of love and sacrifice, and the Easter message of redemption and peace.

"At a time of growing conflict, that message of peace could not have more urgency throughout the world.

"I meet Christians, and others of all faiths and none on a daily basis, who share and live those ideals: people who give their time for others, to run food banks, protect the vulnerable, look after the sick, the elderly and our young people.

"That spirit of respect for each other, peace and equality is one we can all share. So to all Christians and those of all faiths and none, have a happy and peaceful Easter."

News story: HMS Sutherland escorts two Russian warships past UK coastline

The Type 23 frigate located the two Russian ships in the early hours of Friday morning [14 Apr 17] as they sailed through the North Sea towards the Dover Straits.

The Steregushchiy-class corvettes, Soobrazitelny and Boiky, were joined later in the afternoon by a Russian support tanker and an ocean-going tug.

HMS Sutherland will continue to monitor the movements of the ships as they pass close to UK territorial waters today.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

HMS Sutherland is carefully marking these Russian ships as they pass close to UK waters. The Royal Navy maintains a vigilant watch and is always ready to keep Britain safe.

Royal Navy sailors on the Plymouth-based frigate keep watch on every movement of the ships, using state-of-the-art radars to track the course and speed of the ships as they pass close to the UK.



HMS Sutherland is escorting the Russian ships. Crown Copyright.

Commander Andrew Canale, the Commanding Officer of HMS Sutherland, said:

As one of the Royal Navy's high readiness units, HMS Sutherland is required to escort warships that approach the UK and this task is considered routine business for us.

It is vitally important the Royal Navy demonstrates its presence and commitment to the integrity of UK territorial waters as we work around the clock to secure the seas of our island nation.

As a high-readiness unit, HMS Sutherland may be called upon at any time to help prevent arms trafficking, people smuggling, conduct counter-terrorism operations, maritime search and rescue, or escort duties like those it is undertaking today.

Investing in and empowering our schools to give every child the best start in life

In government, the SNP has made closing the attainment gap in our schools our defining mission. Councils play a vital role in education – supporting children from their early years right through to early adulthood.