

# CHINA TO RESTRICT FAMILY SIZE FOR UP TO 30 YEARS

**BEIJING:** China will stick to family planning restrictions for up to 30 years, a senior Chinese official said yesterday, rejecting concern that limits on the number of children had shrunk the pool of workers needed to support an aging population.

Last year, the ruling Chinese Communist Party announced it would relax its long-standing and controversial "one-child policy", allowing all couples to have two children. But critics say the policy change comes too late to avert a dangerous population imbalance as many

couples are now not keen on having more children.

China's population is set to peak at about 1.45 billion by 2050 when one in every three people is expected to be more than 60 years old, with a shrinking proportion of working adults to support them. But officials would adhere to family planning restrictions "for the long term", Wang Pei'an, vice minister of the National Health and Family Planning Commission, told a news conference.

"This long-term adherence is at least

20 years, 30 years," Wang said. "After a period of time, along with demographic changes, and along with changes in the population's socio-economic development situation, we will adopt a different population policy." He said it was difficult to give a specific time on how long the restrictions on family size would be maintained, saying it was an issue that had to be dealt with "in line with the times".

Asked about the danger the two-child policy would prevent China from getting

rich before it got old, Wang said an aging population was a global problem and "an inevitable trend of a society's development". China's main problem with its labor force was not the number of workers but "how to improve the quality of workers", he said.

Wang said there was a demographic "imbalance" in China between poorer regions with higher fertility levels than cities, where many people are reluctant to have more children. The one-child policy was introduced in the late 1970s

to prevent population growth spiraling out of control, but is now regarded as outdated and responsible for shrinking the labor pool. It has also led to the problem of an aging society, with a smaller number of productive young people, a phenomenon usually seen in industrialized countries. With the adoption of the two-child policy, China's labor force could rise by more than 30 million by 2050 and its aging population will be reduced by 2 percentage points by 2030, Wang said. — Reuters

## EIGHT REASONS CHINA OFF TO A ROCKY 2016

**BEIJING:** Barely more than a week into 2016, Chinese President Xi Jinping is having a rough time of it, with challenges ranging from a plummeting stock market to new provocations from obstreperous ally North Korea. While none pose an existential threat to his administration, the world will be watching to see whether he has the sophisticated touch needed to find durable solutions and maintain stability. Below is a look at eight key issues Xi is contending with:

**Stock market volatility**  
China twice deployed its "circuit breaker" mechanism to halt trading as stock markets nosedived by 10 percent in the first week of the year. Beijing finally abandoned the mechanism, and left the perception that regulators don't have a clue as they try to stabilize a market that more than doubled between late 2014 and June, then dived 30 percent, causing deep pain among retail investors.

**Currency queasiness**  
Meanwhile, China's currency, the yuan, has slid to a five-year low against the dollar, forcing the government to spend tens of millions of dollars from its foreign currency stockpile to defend it. The government last week guided the yuan 1.5 percent lower to assist hard-pressed exporters, but the clumsy move sent shockwaves through world markets, further weighing on Chinese share prices.

**Slowing economy**  
Hiccups in the world's second-largest economy are expected to continue in 2016, with growth falling to a six-year low of 6.9 percent in the July-September quarter and forecast by the International Monetary Fund to decline further to 6.3 percent this year. That bodes ill for the economy's ability to generate enough new jobs for the more than 7.5 million students due to graduate from college this year, while also building momentum for a transition from an investment-based economy to one focused on services.

**North Korea**  
Despite persistent calls for restraint, China's traditional ally North Korea staged what it claims was a hydrogen bomb test blast on Jan. 6 that sent actual tremors across the border into northeastern China and drew condemnation from Beijing. China now finds itself again under pressure to use any possible leverage with the North to tamp down tensions in northeast Asia, while facing the possibility of more robust security cooperation between South Korea and China's traditional rivals Japan and the United States.

**Taiwan**  
Voters on the self-governing island democracy appear set to elect a new presi-

dent whose party opposes Beijing's goal of unification between the sides. Beijing's economic inducements have failed to persuade the Taiwanese public of the benefits of political union. If opposition Democratic Progressive Party candidate Tsai Ing-wen wins Saturday, as she is widely expected to do, Beijing may feel compelled to embark on economic and diplomatic pressure that could send relations into reverse. It's unlikely that Beijing would go so far as to back up its longstanding threat to use force to bring the island under Chinese control.

**Politics**  
While Xi faces no such electoral challenges under China's one-party system, he does face resistance from political rivals and the vast bureaucracy. Xi shows no sign of abandoning his signature anti-corruption campaign blamed for creating a sense of fear and paralysis among the rank and file. His growing cult of personality exudes an exterior confidence. But with the economy slowing and no sign of political reforms, he may come under pressure from critics and rivals to show results on jobs, growth, good governance and addressing the yawning income gap.

**South China Sea**  
Since the year began, China has landed three aircraft on a new island it built in the South China Sea, drawing protests from Vietnam and the Philippines, which have competing territorial claims in the region. China's robust assertions of its claim to virtually the entire South China Sea have long drawn complaints and sparked the occasional maritime confrontations in the area through which \$5 trillion in global trade passes each year. The test flights landed on one of seven new islands Beijing has built by piling sand atop reefs and atolls. The US is adamant that the new features don't deserve the legal status of actual islands, and the US Navy has flown and sailed close to them, drawing a furious response from Beijing. Xi now has to defend China's actions while avoiding damage to its foreign relations.

**Hong Kong**  
China faces continuing opposition from pro-democracy forces in Hong Kong, the former British colony that reverted to Chinese rule in 1997 while retaining its own legal and economic systems. Beijing's hand-picked chief executive, Leung Chun-ying, is deeply unpopular, and planned electoral changes stalled after massive street protests in 2014, leaving deep rifts in hyper-efficient Hong Kong's society and politicizing a generation of students. Now, the recent disappearances of people associated with a publishing company that specializes in titles critical of China's leadership have raised fears that Beijing is tightening its grip on Hong Kong's freedom of the press and other civil liberties. — AP



**PYONGYANG:** This undated picture released from North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) on January 10, 2016 shows North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un delivering a speech at the Ministry of the People's Armed Forces. — AFP

## KIM'S NUKE TEST PROVES GIFT OF SORTS FOR S KOREAN PRESIDENT

### TEST STOPPING PARK'S SLIDE IN POPULARITY

**SEOUL:** North Korea's nuclear test has provoked global outrage, a push for sanctions, even fear. But Kim Jong Un's decision to conduct it has also handed a gift of sorts to his rival in the South. In an instant, Wednesday's explosion shifted the focus on the presidency of Park Geun-hye, who has faced several mass protests condemning her leadership in recent weeks.

Park's swift, hard-line response, including a return of cross-border propaganda broadcasts that Pyongyang loathes, has, for the time being, overshadowed criticism over her leadership style, her alleged abuse of workers' rights and her purported submission to Tokyo in a deal meant to end a dispute over Japan's wartime sexual enslavement of Korean women.

Park has temporarily stopped a slide in popularity by doing something she has proven herself adept at: Standing tall in the face of what Seoul sees as a provocation from its northern rival. A survey showed her approval rating rose slightly last week, for the first time in five weeks. While the boost is likely temporary, the timing of the nuclear test may help Park and her ruling party. Crucial parliamentary elections loom in April.

**'Quieting down'**  
The test is "immediately quieting down" the most contentious complaints against Park, said Yoon Tae-Ryong, a professor at Seoul's Konkuk University. "Some members of the ruling party must be grinning inside." Shortly after the North's test, Park put her front-line troops on their highest alert, reportedly moved missiles, artillery and other weapons closer to the border,

partially banned South Koreans from a jointly run factory park in the North and allowed huge green speakers along the border to begin cranking out South Korean K-pop songs and criticism of the North's leadership.

She could have done more to punish the North, by slapping them with bilateral punitive measures and ending the South's participation in the factory park, which is a rare cash cow for the impoverished, widely shunned North. The park, however, is also the last major inter-Korean project from an earlier era of rapprochement. She's attempting to walk a delicate line: To show South Korea's intense displeasure without killing the possibility of drawing the North into future diplomacy that could settle the neighbors' many differences.

A military clash is also a worry. Pyongyang posts a large part of its 1.2 million military and a huge array of weapons along the Korean border, within easy striking range of the South Korean capital, Seoul, and its 10 million residents.

The North views the restart of the propaganda broadcasts and their criticism of its authoritarian leadership as tantamount to war. Seoul says the broadcasts led the North to fire artillery across the border the last time they happened, in August. British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond on Friday publicly urged Seoul to refrain from the broadcasts.

**Propaganda purposes**  
North Korea, however, has done little to respond to the broadcasts this time, perhaps because Pyongyang is too focused on celebrating its nuclear test for internal propaganda purposes.

The most tangible effect of the South's retaliation so far is that it has helped Park change the conversation back home.

Though the president has a strong base of conservative supporters, thousands of opponents took to the streets on several occasions before the nuclear test to criticize her policies and what they saw as her attacks on personal and political freedoms.

There's resistance to a new requirement for schools to use only state-issued history textbooks starting in 2017, which critics call an attempt to whitewash past dictatorships - including that of Park's father, Park Chung-hee, who ruled South Korea in the 1960s and 1970s. The country's military dictatorship ended only in the late 1980s and the divide between left and right remains deep.

Park has also received massive public criticism for a botched rescue operation during a ferry disaster in 2014 that killed more than 300, mostly schoolchildren, and for the handling of a MERS virus outbreak last year that killed 38.

Most recently, the nuclear test tamped down anger over an "irreversible" settlement last month between Japan and South Korea of a decades-long standoff over Korean women forced into sexual slavery by Japan's World War II military. All those controversies may have been muted by the nuclear test, but none are going away. "Conservatives have mustered support temporarily because of this external shock," Jang Seung-jin, a professor at Seoul's Kookmin University, said of the nuclear test. "When the nuclear news calms down, I think her approval rating will dip back to where it was." — AP



**HONG KONG:** In this Sunday, Jan 10, 2016 file photo, a protester wearing a mask of missing bookseller Lee Bo stands in a cage during a protest against the disappearances of booksellers in Hong Kong after five men associated with a Hong Kong publisher known for books critical of China's leaders have vanished one by one in the last three months. The sign in front reads: "Missing men." — AP

## PASTOR DETAINED BY N KOREA STRUGGLES WITH HARD LABOR

**SEOUL:** A 60-year-old Canadian pastor, jailed for life with hard labor in North Korea, spends eight hours a day, six days a week digging holes in an orchard in a prison camp where he is the sole inmate. In an interview in Pyongyang with CNN, Hyeon Soo Lim said it had been tough adapting to the physical rigors of his internment following his conviction last month on charges of "subversive" acts against the state.

"I wasn't originally a laborer, so the labor was hard at first," said Lim, his head shaven and wearing a grey prison outfit with the number 036. The interview was conducted in the room of a Pyongyang hotel, where the North Koreans also presented another ethnic Korean prisoner, whom they said was a US citizen arrested for spying in October.

There have been no recent reports either from Pyongyang or Washington of any American having been detained. But the North Korean side produced a US passport identifying the man as Kim Dong-Chul, 62, who became a naturalized US citizen in 1987. Kim told CNN he had been living in China near the North Korean border for the past 15 years, commuting regularly to Rason-a North Korean special economic zone.

**Spying for S. Korea?**  
In the interview-conducted through an official translator-Kim said he had spied on behalf of "South Korean conservative elements" and taken photos of military secrets. The foreign ministry in Seoul had no immediate comment on the report.

The interview with Hyeon Soo Lim began

with the pastor being briskly marched inside by two uniformed guards holding his arms. The guards left the room but the South Korean-born Lim, who speaks and understands English, said he had been told to answer all the questions in Korean-suggesting the conversation was being closely monitored. Lim was detained by North Korean authorities in January last year after arriving from China.

At his sentencing last month, North Korea said he had admitted all charges against him, including "viciously defaming" the North Korean system and its leader, and plotting to overthrow the state. Lim, a pastor at the Light Korean Presbyterian Church in Toronto, was the latest in a series of foreign missionaries to be arrested, deported or jailed for allegedly meddling in state affairs.

Lim said he was required to work eight hours a day, six days a week, digging in the orchard of a labor camp with no other prisoners except himself. He said he received regular medical care and three meals a day, and was hoping for a Bible which he had requested but still not received. "I pray every day for the country and the people, I pray for North and South to be reunified, so that a situation like mine won't happen again," he said.

The interview lasted almost an hour, after which the guard returned and Lim was marched out. Canada has protested at the "unduly harsh" sentence and complained that consular officials had been denied access to Lim. Lim was no stranger to North Korea, having led multiple aid missions to the country, involving work with orphanages, nursing homes and food process-

ing factories. Pyongyang views foreign missionaries with deep suspicion, though it allows some to undertake humanitarian work. A number of Christian missionaries-mostly ethnic Koreans who are US citizens-have been arrested in the past, with some of them only allowed to return home after intervention by high-profile US political figures. —AFP



**PYONGYANG:** This file picture taken by North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) on July 30, 2015 shows Canadian reverend Hyeon Soo Lim, who is being held in North Korea, during a public interrogation at the People's Palace of Culture. —AFP

## FRAIL THAI KING LEAVES HOSPITAL

**BANGKOK:** Thailand's ailing but much-loved King Bhumibol Adulyadej left hospital yesterday for the first time in several months in a surprise visit to a Bangkok palace, an official statement said. The 88-year-old king, who is regarded by many Thais as a near-deity and a unifying figure in the bitterly split nation, was driven from Bangkok's Siriraj Hospital to the sprawling Chitralada Royal Villa nearby.

"The king went to the Chitralada Royal Villa by personal car," according to a statement on the Facebook page of the office of the king's principal private secretary. In a trip lasting around an hour the world's longest-reigning monarch paid a visit to a pond as well as other "projects" in the compound before returning to the hospital, the

statement added. It was a rare foray outside the hospital where the king has spent much of the last two years. He was last seen in an official photograph distributed in mid-December. Few details concerning his health are given out by the palace. But on Sunday it issued an update reporting that the king's pulse and blood pressure had returned to normal after he was given antibiotics to fight an infection and fever.

In September the palace released a video of the monarch in a wheelchair, looking visibly weakened, visiting a shop in the hospital. Most Thais have only known King Bhumibol on the throne and anxiety over the future once his six-decade reign ends is seen as an aggravating factor in Thailand's bitter political divide. —AFP