

# China's population falls for third straight year

■ By Christopher Bodeen

TAIPEI (Taiwan), Jan 17 (AP)

CHINA'S population fell last year for the third straight year, its Government said on Friday, pointing to further demographic challenges for the world's second most populous nation, which is now facing both an ageing population and an emerging shortage of working age people.

China's population stood at 1.408 billion at the end of 2024, a decline of 1.39 million from the previous year.

The figures announced by the Government in Beijing follow trends worldwide, but especially in East Asia, where Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong and other nations have seen their birth rates plummet. China three years ago joined Japan and most of Eastern Europe among other nations whose population is falling. The reasons are in many cases similar: Rising costs of living are causing young people to put off or rule out marriage and child birth while pursuing higher education and careers. While people are liv-



## China's economy expands 5% in 2024

HONG KONG, Jan 17 (AP)

CHINA'S economy expanded at a 5% annual pace in 2024, slower than the year before but in line with Beijing's target of "around 5%" growth, helped by strong exports and recent stimulus measures.

ing longer, that's not enough to keep up with rate of new births.

Countries such as China that

In quarterly terms, the economy grew 5.4% in October-December, the Government reported Friday. Exports accelerated as companies and consumers rushed to beat potential tariff hikes incoming President-elect Donald Trump may impose on Chinese goods.

allow very little immigration are especially at risk. China has long been among the world's most pop-

ulous nations, enduring invasions, floods and other natural disasters to sustain a population that thrived on rice in the south and wheat in the north. Following the end of World War II and the Communist Party's rise to power in 1949, large families re-emerged and the population doubled in just three decades, even after tens of millions died in the Great Leap Forward that sought to revolutionise agriculture and industry and the Cultural Revolution that followed a few years later. After the end of the Cultural Revolution and leader Mao Zedong's death, Communist bureaucrats began to worry the country's population was outstripping its ability to feed itself and began implementing a draconian "one child policy."

Though it was never law, women had to apply for permission to have a child and violators could face forced late-term abortions and birth control procedures, massive fines and the prospect of their child being deprived an identification number, effectively making them non-citizens.

# First part of Budget session likely between Jan 31 & Feb 13

**New Delhi:** The first part of Parliament's Budget session is likely to be held between Jan 31 and Feb 13, with finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman set to table her eighth straight budget on Feb 1.

In line with convention, the session will start with President Droupadi Murmu's address to a joint sitting of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha on Jan 31, followed by the tabling of the Economic Survey.

Following the recess, sources said, the second part of the session will be held between the second week of March and first week of April. The tentative period is from March 10 to April 4.

The first part of the session is marked by a debate in both Houses on the Motion of Thanks on the president's address and ends with the prime minister's reply in the two chambers of Parliament. TNN

# MEA: Jaishankar, Army chief on same page on China disengagement

## 'Absolutely No Contradiction On Positions Taken'

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi:** Ministry of external affairs (MEA) Friday denied any contradiction between what the Army chief, Upendra Dwivedi, had said this week on disengagement with China in eastern Ladakh and external affairs minister S Jaishankar's statement earlier in Parliament on the issue. While MEA has maintained that disengagement at friction points Depsang and Demchok has been completed, the Army chief had said there's still a "degree of standoff" left between the militaries.

"We do not see any contradiction between what the Army chief has said and the position that we have taken. EAM had made the position very clear with regard to disengagement. Where the Oct 21 understanding is concerned, our objective has been to ensure patrolling, as in the past, to the relevant patrolling points, as well as resumption of grazing by our civilians as per longstanding practice," said spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal. Jaiswal recalled that Jaishankar had also underlined that the "task of de-escalation remains to be addressed".

"This is indeed what we have agreed upon with regard to Depsang

and Demchok. The terms of the disengagement agreements reached prior to 21 Oct 2024 continue to hold in relevant areas in eastern Ladakh. In addition, EAM had also underlined that the task of de-escalation remains to be addressed. So, if you take these issues into account, you will realise that there is absolutely no contradiction between the positions taken," added the official.



Getty

MEA said Jaishankar had also underlined the 'task of de-escalation remains to be addressed'

In his remarks, Dwivedi, describing the situation in the region as sensitive but stable, said the corps commanders of Army have been delegated powers to resolve "trivial" matters or "minor frictions" relating to patrolling and grazing so that they do not become "big" issues later.

The Army chief also said that there was no such thing called buffer zones as a temporary moratorium was put on patrolling in certain areas to avoid chances of violence.

SR.  
No. BGA

FOR F

# Russia, Iran sign treaty to deepen ties in face of Western sanctions



Russian President Vladimir Putin and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian arrive to attend a meeting in an expanded format at the Kremlin in Moscow, Russia on Friday. (AP/PTI)

MOSCOW, Jan 17 (AP)

RUSSIAN President Vladimir Putin and his Iranian counterpart, Masoud Pezeshkian, signed a broad cooperation pact on Friday as their countries deepened their partnership in the face

of stinging Western sanctions.

Russian and Iranian officials say, the “comprehensive strategic partnership treaty” covers all areas -- from trade and military cooperation to science, education and culture.

Putin praised the deal as a “real

breakthrough, creating conditions for the stable and sustainable development of Russia, Iran and the entire region.”

He said the amount of trade and economic cooperation was still insufficient, voicing hope the new treaty will help clear bureaucratic hurdles and expand ties.

The Russian leader added that the countries are trying to resolve technical obstacles to advance planned projects to ship Russian natural gas to Iran and build transport corridors to Iranian ports in the Gulf.

Pezeshkian said the projects are feasible, adding that experts were working to resolve the remaining obstacles.

“We witness a new chapter of strategic relations,” the Iranian President said, adding that the countries were set to expand trade ties and also boost the “level of security cooperation.”

# IMF retains India's FY25 growth forecast at 6.5%

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi:** The International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Friday retained India's growth forecast for 2024-25 at 6.5% but said that growth in the country has slowed more than predicted, led by a sharper-than-expected deceleration in industrial activity.

"In India, growth is projected to be solid at 6.5% in 2025 and 2026, as projected in Oct and in line with potential," the IMF said in its World Economic Outlook update.

The IMF's estimate for this year is similar to the World Bank, which has also forecast GDP growth for India at 6.5% for this year. For next year, the World Bank has estimated growth to be

at 6.7%. India will still retain the tag of fastest growing major economy in the world, against the backdrop of geopolitical tensions and global policy uncertainty.

Several multilateral agencies have revised their growth estimates downwards for India after the National Statistics Office's (NSO) projection showed the economy is expected to expand by 6.4% — the lowest in four years in the current financial year, and sharply below the 8.2% recorded in 2023-24.

The sharp slowdown in growth has triggered calls for measures to boost consumption, which some experts say have been hit by stubborn inflationary pres-

ures. Pressures have mounted on the Reserve Bank of India to cut rates to boost growth. The budget is expected to unveil measures to step up growth, amid the backdrop of an uncertain global economy. With respect to the projection in Oct, growth in 2025 for China was marginally revised upward by 0.1 percentage point to 4.6%.

Global growth has been projected at 3.3% both in 2025 and 2026, below the historical (2000-19) average of 3.7%. The forecast for 2025 is broadly unchanged from that in Oct 2024 WEO outlook, primarily on account of an upward revision in the US offsetting downward revisions in other major economies, according to IMF.

# Israel security cabinet greenlights Gaza deal

## Full Cabinet Likely To Approve Ceasefire; Govt Publishes List Of 95 Palestinian Prisoners Eligible To Be Freed, Starting Sunday

Jerusalem: Israel's security cabinet recommended approval Friday of a ceasefire deal after PM Benjamin Netanyahu said an agreement had been reached that would pause the 15-month war with Hamas in Gaza and release dozens of hostages held by militants there.

Mediators Qatar and US announced the ceasefire Wednesday, but the deal hung in limbo for more than a day as Netanyahu insisted there were last-minute snags he blamed on Hamas. The militants maintained they were "committed" to the deal, while residents of Gaza and families of the hostages anxiously waited to see whether it would materialise.

The deal now goes to the full cabinet of more than 30 ministers for final sign-off. It is expected to approve the ceasefire, which could start as soon as Sunday, even though it has drawn resistance from Netanyahu's far-right coalition partners. Their objections could destabilise his govt, however.

Fighting continued into Friday, and Gaza's health ministry said 88 bodies had arrived at hospitals in the past 24 hours. In previous conflicts, both sides have stepped up military operations in the final hours before ceasefires as a way to project strength.

Netanyahu instructed a special task force to prepare to receive the hostages returning from Gaza, and said that their families were informed a deal had been reached. The PM's office said that if the deal passes, the ceasefire could start Sunday



**FAR-RIGHT PROTEST:** Hundreds of far-right demonstrators blocked roads in Jerusalem on Thursday in protest of the provisional ceasefire agreement. They were seeking to pressure Israeli govt to reject the deal

and the first hostages could be freed then too. The Israeli justice ministry published a list of 95 Palestinian prisoners who are to be freed starting Sunday as part of the first exchange. "Release is... subject to government approval," it said.

Under the deal, 33 of some 100 hostages who remain in Gaza are set to be released over six weeks in exchange for hundreds of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. Israeli forces will pull back from many areas, thousands of Palestinians would be able to return to what's left of their homes, and there would be a surge of humanitarian aid. The remainder of the hostages, including male soldiers, are to be released in a second — and much more difficult — phase that will be negotiated during the first.

An Egyptian official and a Hamas official said last-minute issues were over the list of Palestinian prisoners to be released from Israeli jails during

the first phase of the deal, but those have now been resolved.

The Egyptian official added that an Israeli delegation from the military and Israel's Shin Bet internal security agency arrived in Cairo Friday to discuss the reopening of Rafah crossing, a key link between Gaza and Egypt. An Israeli official who also spoke on condition of anonymity confirmed a team was going to Cairo.

On Thursday, Israel's hard-line national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, threatened to quit the govt if Israel approved the ceasefire. He reiterated that on Friday, writing on social media site X: "If the 'deal' passes, we will leave the government with a heavy heart." Ben-Gvir's resignation would not bring down the govt or derail the truce deal, but the move would destabilise the govt at a delicate moment and could eventually lead to its collapse if Ben-Gvir were joined by other key Netanyahu allies. AP