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CHINA INTRODUCES ITS TWO CHILD POLICY: WHY NOW?

Ms Shaheli Das*

The decision of the Chinese government to permit all couples to have two children may be termed as historic. The amendment in its social policy to control population growth has come after a period of 35 years and marks a watershed in Chinese politics. It is in line with a communique issued after the Fifth Plenary Session of the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) Central Committee.

Since its inception, China's one child policy has stood out in the history of the world. It had been a cause of much speculation by the West, terming China as the "Totalitarian Other". The necessity to adopt a stringent population control policy can be traced back to the 1960s, during the era of Mao Zedong. Mao's ambivalence towards population control was evident from his statement "the more the people, the stronger we are".¹

However, the succeeding generation of the CPC leadership, especially Deng Xiaoping who is popularly referred to as the chief architect of

China's contemporary economic miracle, brought about considerable transformation in the policy. Subsequently, in 1979 the one child policy was adopted by the government. The policy was vociferously criticised by the USA. They viewed it as a massive deprivation of individual rights. However, when viewed from the Chinese perspective, one could realise that the policy was designed to wield power, national wealth and global standing by checking the population growth. China Daily has reportedly mentioned that since its implementation, the policy has prevented nearly 400 million births.

Although the country's economy did stride up the growth trajectory in the last three decades yet the policy has disastrously backfired on a number of grounds. In the social realm, the policy has led to a massive gender imbalance whereby China at present has 32 million more boys under the age of 20 than girls.² Further, given the Asian preference for male children and the patriarchal society in China in particular, couples have increasingly used ultrasound machines to

determine the gender of the foetus and mostly given birth to the male offspring. In the year 2005, for every 120 boys only 100 girls were born.³It is also being widely speculated that the two child policy would only magnify the skewed sex ratio of China.

Human trafficking has been another outcome of the country's one child policy. Since people were barred from giving birth to a second child, therefore there emerged a rising tendency to purchase abducted children. Such a case was especially true for those who believed that more the number of children greater would be the security for parents. The Ninth Amendment to the Criminal Law which has been effective since November 1, 2015 has pronounced stringent punishment not only for the traffickers but also those people who attempt to purchase abducted children. It may be held that the two child policy would possibly be successful in curtailing this social menace.

In terms of economy, China's meteoric rise had till now been dependent on a young and vibrant workforce. With fewer children being born, it is likely that the under-50 population would dwindle in the forthcoming decades. The declining labour force and the ever growing aging population has already begun to slowdown China's economic growth rate.

Further, it must be considered that China's domestic policy mostly has a bearing on its foreign policy. The CPC in a well calculated move

has introduced the two child policy at a strategic moment. The National Health and Family Planning Commission has reportedly mentioned that the new policy would mean an additional 30 million people in the labour force and a decrease of 2 percent elderly Chinese population by the year 2050.⁴A growing population at this stage of history would boost the party's development goals that it has crafted in its 13th Five Year Plan. A push in its domestic demand would in all likelihood contribute to flourishing economic growth. This would in turn offer the common people a better living standard. One must not forget that constructing a "well-off society" by the year 2020 is one of China's Two Centenary Goals. Therefore the introduction of the two child policy must be viewed as the *means to an end*. The end being the partial fulfilment of President Xi Jinping's China Dream. This being the long term objective, in the short term the government seeks to uplift its local industries such as that of child care services and maternity medical care.

On the whole, the policy seeks to revamp China's social and economic structure and rid the society of all its ills. Although the Chinese masses are offering a mixed response to the relaxation of the child birth program, yet the leadership must be applauded for their pro-active stance in taking the country forward. Thus, the new policy has brought in a phase of greater hope for China, allowing it to move a step forward towards accomplishing itself as a significant global power.

**Ms Shaheli Das is a PhD Scholar in East Asian Studies Department, Delhi University.*

(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])

Notes

¹ Malcolm Potts, "China's One Child Policy", *British Medical Journal*, Volume 333, No. 7564, August 19, 2006.

² Marcus Gee, "The Cruel irony of China's One Child Policy", *The Globe and Mail*, September 24, 2009, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/the-cruel-irony-of-chinas-one-child-policy/article4286437/>

³Ibid

⁴ Two Child policy to increase potential economic growth rate", *China Daily*, November 10, 2015, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2015-11/10/content_22421188.htm