Couples in China allowed 2 kids from today, ends three decade old one-child policy

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Beijing: Couples in China are now allowed to have two children as the new family planning law came into effect from today, ending the world's most populous country's controversial one-child policy amid concerns over an ageing population and shrinking workforce.

The new two-child policy, which was announced by the ruling Communist Party in October and approved by the national legislature in late December, allows couples to have two children from January 1.

"It is worth noting how people's lives will be affected," state-run Xinhua news agency said in its report. The one-child policy, which was implemented from 1978 and restricted most couples to only a single child through a system of fines for violators and even forced abortions, was credited to have prevented over 400 million births restricting the population to over 1.357 billion as per census held in 2013.

The three-decade-old policy was changed as demographic crisis deepened with sharp rise in population of old age people and shrinking workforce in the world's second largest economy.

According to latest figures, the number of people aged 60 or over in China has reached 212 million at the end of 2014, accounting for 15.5 per cent of the country's population, with the number of disabled elderly people approaching 40 million.

The United Nations has predicted that people over age 65 will account for 18 per cent of China's population by 2030, double the number in 2011 which will have a negative bearing on China's labour availability.

By 2050, China is expected to have nearly 500 million people over 60, exceeding the population of the US.

However, recent official surveys said that despite massive publicity to the lifting of the one-child policy, the two children rule has evoked less enthusiasm among 100 million couples who are eligible to have second child as they are not keen due to heavy costs involved in bringing up another baby.

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