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China

NOTEWORTHY

Population falls for fourth straight year as births drop to lowest rate since 1949



People carry their toddlers by a toy store in Beijing on Monday. ANDY WONG — THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BANGKOK >> How do you persuade a population to have more babies after generations of limiting families to just one?

A decade after ending China's longtime one-child policy, the country's authorities are pushing a range of ideas and policies to try to encourage more births — tactics that range from cash subsidies to taxing condoms to eliminating a tax on matchmakers and day care centers.

The efforts haven't paid off yet. At least, that's what population figures released Monday show for what is now the world's second-most populous nation. China's population of 1.4 billion continued to

shrink, marking the fourth straight year of decrease, new government statistics show. The total population in 2025 stood at 1.404 billion, which was 3 million less than the previous year.

Measured another way, the birth rate in 2025 — 5.63 per 1,000 people — is the lowest on record since 1949, the year that Mao Zedong's Communists overthrew the Nationalists and began running China. Figures before that, under the previous Nationalist government, were not available.

China was long the world's most populous nation until 2023, when it was surpassed by regional neighbor and sometime rival India.

The number of new babies born was just 7.92 million in 2025, a decline of 1.62 million, or 17%, from the previous year. The latest birth numbers show that the slight tick upward in 2024 was not a lasting trend. Births declined for seven years in a row through 2023.

Most families cite the costs and pressure of raising a child in a highly competitive society as significant hurdles that now loom larger in the face of an economic downturn that has impacted households struggling to meet their living costs.

Another potential factor in the numbers, at least for 2025: Last year in China was the year of the snake, considered one of the least favored years for having a child under the Chinese zodiac. The government's official Xinhua News Agency, however, did say early last year — perhaps optimistically — that the snake “is shaking off its negative connotations.”

— *The Associated Press*