Experts believe China's population growth has been somewhat slowed by the "one child policy," in effect since the 1970s. In the 1950s, China's population was estimated at 563 million. The country reached the 1 billion mark in the early 1980s.

On the other hand, it is estimated that in a few decades, India, the world's second most populous country, is expected to surpass China in population. In 2040, India's population is expected to be 1.52 billion, and China's will be 1.45 billion. Thus, India will become the world's most populous country. As of 2005, India has a total fertility rate of 2.8, well above replacement value, so it is growing much more quickly than China.

China's population control experience

China first implemented the "one child" population policy in the 1970s against the backdrop of poverty and famine and growing concerns over whether the country could continue to feed its burgeoning population. The policy strictly outlined that urban couples should (read: must) have only one child, but those in the rural areas, where 80 per cent of the population lives, may have two children but they should delay getting married and also space their children.

The harsh side of the policy was that officials were often over-enthusiastic in implementing it and punished anyone violating e the rule. In some cases they forced pregnant women to go for abortions. On the other hand, single-child couples were entitled to better child-care, housing facility and even cash bonuses. These steps generally worked thereby lowering fertility rates to an average of about two children per woman, down from more than five children per woman in the 1950s.

According to Chinese family planning officials, the child policy has prevented 400 million births, since the regulations were introduced in the 1970s. It is believed that China has kept its population in check "using persuasion, coercion, and encouragement." But it is made clear that the policy will not be relaxed to allow couples to have more children. This sounds like a piece of good news. But according to some western critics and western-educated Chinese academics the policy "was a mistake and might result in a number of serious demographic problems in the future."

Senior officials of the National Population and Family Planning Commission of China observed: "Because China has worked hard over the last 30 years, we have 400 million fewer people. Compared with the world's other developing countries with large populations, we have realised this transformation half a century ahead of time."

Now this is a food for thought for everyone in other under-developed



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