



Photos: Xinhua
GUILLERMO MUNRO / CHINA DAILY

Family planning policy to remain

Official plays down speculation that restructuring plan will lead to change

By ZHAO HUANXIN
zhaohuanxin@chinadaily.com.cn

There will be no change to the country's family planning policy, a public sector reform official said one day after a key government restructuring plan was unveiled.

"The pressure facing residents and resources still persists in our country with such a huge population," said Wang Feng, deputy head of the State Commission Office for Public Sector Reform.

The country will keep its basic state policy on family planning after the creation of a new commission through the merging of the health ministry with the National Population and Family Planning Commission, Wang told a news conference on Monday in Beijing.

Following the restructuring, work in the field of family planning will be beefed up, not weakened, as implementation of the policy continues to be a chief responsibility of Party and government heads, he said.

The proposed national health and family planning commission will strengthen implementation of the family planning policy regarding institutions, personnel and functions, he added.

Without the policy, launched more than 30 years ago, the Chinese population could be 400 million higher than the current level.

In his last Government Work Report at the opening of the annual legislative session on Tuesday, Premier Wen Jiabao said that in response to changes in the size and structure of China's population, the country should solve problems related to the size, health, structure and geographical distribution of its people and promote long-term, balanced population development.

Sunday's restructuring plan axes the National Population and Family Planning Commission and shifts its population policy-making functions to the influential National Development and Reform Commission.

There has been speculation that reforming the family planning commission will bring about a relaxation of the policy.

But officials and experts were quick to dampen such expectations.

"I don't see there is any necessary link between the two," Vice-Minister of Health Huang Jiefu told the media when asked if the governmental overhaul intimates loosening of the population policy.

Zhu Lijia, a professor at the Chinese Academy of Governance, said he didn't think that shifting the National Population and Family Planning Commission's policy-making function meant the country would relax its policy in the short term, China Business News quoted him as saying.

Speaking at the news conference, Wang Feng also said that the introduction of private capital in railway construction and operations will help break the monopoly in the industry and bring in competition.

Wang said it has been difficult for private capital to enter the railway system as the existing Ministry of Railways functions



The pressure facing residents and resources still persists in our country with such a huge population."

WANG FENG
DEPUTY HEAD OF THE STATE COMMISSION OFFICE FOR PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM

as a government department and an enterprise.

Under the restructuring plan, the Ministry of Railways will be

split, with its regulatory powers going to the Ministry of Transport, while its operations go to a commercial entity.

Advisory body sets sights on pollution

By WU WENCONG
wuwencong@chinadaily.com.cn

About one-tenth of the roughly 5,000 proposals submitted to the country's top political advisory body since the two sessions began on March 3 are related to environmental protection, a top national political adviser has said.

Luo Fuhe, executive vice-chairman of the China Association for Promoting Democracy Central Committee, revealed the figure at a meeting on pollution control that included CPPCC members and top officials from eight ministries.

A working plan relating to groundwater pollution prevention and control in the North China Plain was released on Friday and is aimed at setting out a rough picture of the current pollution situation before 2015.

The plan, jointly issued by four ministries, including the Environmental Protection Ministry and the Water Resources Ministry, set a target to build a complete monitoring network of the region's groundwater quality and sources of pollution by 2020.

The results of the first stage of the investigation will be announced to the public by 2015, Chen Ming, deputy head of the Water Resources Department at the Ministry of Water Resources, told China Daily.

Chen said groundwater quality nationwide is, "better in the mountainous regions than in the plains, and quality of deep groundwater is better than of shallow groundwater".

"That's why the North China Plain, where the pollution situation is relatively bad, has been chosen as the first target to combat groundwater pollution," he said.

The plan divided the region and the key source areas of its groundwater system into 30 plots, emphasizing five major pollutants to prevent and control, including heavy metal and organics.

Recent media reports said 55 percent of the country's groundwater has been polluted, but Chen did not confirm the figure.

"About 30 percent of China's groundwater is good enough to be used as drinking water, ranging from level I to level III. The water quality of the other parts is at Level IV or below," said Chen.

But he added that this does not mean 70 percent of groundwater is polluted, because the No 1 pollutant in China's groundwater is fluorine, a natural element.

Allegations of companies in Shandong province pumping wastewater 1,000 meters into the ground spread online in February.

Chen said official investigations failed to unearth any such activity, but they did uncover, and fine, several factories for digging shallow holes or wells about 5 meters deep, to discharge their sewage which polluted shallow groundwater.

Authorities hope to harvest grain self-sufficiency

Increasing population and industrial production puts pressure on supplies

By AN BALJIE
anbaijie@chinadaily.com.cn

Agriculture authorities will try to stabilize grain output even though many farmers have given up production in the process of urbanization, said a senior official.

Chen Xiaohua, vice-minister of agriculture, said on Monday that China will enhance its capacity for self-sufficiency in agricultural products as domestic demand for grain has been increasing in recent years.

About 98 percent of China's demand for grain, including wheat, was supplied domestically last year, Chen said during a news conference on the

sidelines of the National People's Congress.

Chen said that the increase in domestic grain consumption is caused by the increasing population and a surging demand from industrial production.

Domestic grain production reached 589.5 million tons last year, a year-on-year increase of 18.3 million tons, according to data released on Monday by the Ministry of Agriculture.

China's grain production has increased for nine consecutive years and stabilized at above 525 million tons for five years, said the ministry.

The ministry has a target of stabilizing this year's grain output above 525 million tons.



Chen Xiaohua, vice-minister of agriculture

Chen said spring crops are growing well nationwide and the supply of agricultural materials such as fertilizers are sufficient.

However, the report released by the ministry also pointed out

that difficulties and challenges to agriculture and rural development remain.

It's harder to maintain 120 million hectares of farmland with more resources and environmental constraints, said the report.

Water scarcity for grain production is more serious than ever, with a shortage of 30 billion cubic meters of water for farmland irrigation, according to the report.

The report said the net profit of wheat was only 7.80 yuan (\$1.25) per hectare, which frustrated farmers' enthusiasm for agricultural production.

Chen, the vice-minister, said agriculture authorities will encourage farmers to contract farmland from the others and cooperate to develop modern agriculture.

Li Liancheng, an NPC dep-

uty and village official from a township in Puyang county of Henan province, urged land transfers be carried out carefully to avoid harming farmers' interests.

The central government should lay out policies to support the development of more farmers, Li said.

Zhao Yanshui, an NPC deputy and also chairman of YTO Group Corp, China's leading tractor maker, said many young villagers have migrated to urban regions and left the farmland to elderly members of the family.

"To help the elderly people operate tractors we have renovated our products, such as adding some power-assistance devices and fixing air-conditioners in the cabin," Zhao said during a group discussion on Sunday.