



GILLES SABRIÉ FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

On the frozen Liangma River in Beijing on Sunday. China’s population shrank in 2023, raising alarm about a demographic crisis.

Beijing Foiled In Drive to Lift The Birthrate

By ALEXANDRA STEVENSON
and ZIXU WANG

HONG KONG — China’s ruling Communist Party is facing a national emergency. To fix it, the party wants more women to have more babies.

It has offered them sweeteners, like cheaper housing, tax benefits and cash. It has also invoked patriotism, calling on them to be “good wives and mothers.”

The efforts aren’t working. Chinese women have been shunning marriage and babies at such a rapid pace that China’s population in 2023 shrank for the second straight year, accelerating the government’s sense of crisis over the country’s rapidly aging population and its economic future.

China said on Wednesday that 9.02 million babies were born in 2023, down from 9.56 million in 2022 and the seventh year in a row that the number has fallen. Taken together with the number of people who died during the year — 11.1 million — China has more older people than anywhere else in the world, a number that is rising rapidly. China’s total population was 1,409,670,000 at the end of 2023, a decline of two million people, according to the National Bureau of Statistics.

The shrinking and aging of the population worry Beijing because China is being drained of the working-age people it needs to power the economy. The demographic crisis, which arrived sooner than nearly anyone expected, is already straining weak and underfunded health care and pension systems.

China hastened the problem with its one-child policy, which helped to push the birthrate down over several decades. The rule also created generations of young only-child girls who were given an education and employment opportunities — a cohort that turned into empowered women who now view Beijing’s efforts as pushing them back into the home.

Xi Jinping, China’s top leader, has long talked about the need for women to return to more traditional roles in the home. He recently urged government officials to promote a “marriage and child-bearing culture,” and to influence what young people think about “love and marriage, fertility and family.”

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Asthma Drug Caused Despair. Alerts Fell Short.

By CHRISTINA JEWETT
and BENJAMIN MUELLER

In early 2020, the Food and Drug Administration responded to decades of escalating concerns about a commonly prescribed drug for asthma and allergies by deploying one of its most potent tools: a stark warning on the drug’s label that it could cause aggression, agitation and even suicidal thoughts.

The agency’s label, which was primarily aimed at doctors, was supposed to sound an alert about the 25-year-old medication, Singulair, also known by its generic name, montelukast. But it barely dented use: The drug was still prescribed to 12 million people in

Children Are at Higher Risk of Side Effects to Mental Health

the United States in 2022.

Children face the greatest risks of the drug’s ill effects, and though usage by minors did decline, it was still taken by 1.6 million of them — including Nicole Sims’s son. Ms. Sims had no idea why, at 6, her son started having nightmares and hallucinations of a woman in the window. When he told her that he wanted to die, Ms. Sims went online, desperate for answers.

Only then did she learn about

the F.D.A. warning. She also found a Facebook support group with 20,000 members for people who had experienced side effects of the drug. Members of the group recounted a haunting toll that they linked to the drug with the help of peers, not their doctors.

“It’s a mental health crisis that nobody is recognizing,” said Anna Maria Rosenberg, an administrator of the group.

The F.D.A.’s handling of Singulair illustrates systemic gaps in the agency’s approach to addressing troubling side effects from medicines approved long ago — and to warning the public and doctors when serious issues arise. The agency had flagged the 2020 warning label, known as a “boxed

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KHALED ABDULLAH/REUTERS

A military funeral in Sana, Yemen, for Iran-backed Houthi fighters killed in recent U.S.-led strikes.

U.S. to Return Yemen’s Houthis to Terrorism List

By MICHAEL CROWLEY

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration will designate Yemen’s Houthi militia as a terrorist organization, partly reimposing penalties it lifted nearly three years ago on the Iran-backed group whose attacks on regional shipping traffic have drawn a U.S. military response.

Beginning in mid-February, the United States will consider the Houthis a “specially designated

An Effort to Halt Weeks of Attacks on Ships

global terrorist” group, Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken said in a statement on Wednesday, blocking its access to the global financial system, among other penalties. But Biden officials stopped short of applying a second, more severe designation — that of “for-

eign terrorist organization” — which the Trump administration imposed on the Houthis in its final days. The State Department revoked both designations shortly after President Biden took office in early 2021.

That further step would have made it far easier to prosecute criminally anyone who knowingly provides the Houthis with money, supplies, training or other “material support.” But aid groups say

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Justices Hint At Less Power For Regulators

Conservatives on Court Doubt Key Precedent

By ADAM LIPTAK

WASHINGTON — Members of the Supreme Court’s conservative majority seemed inclined on Wednesday to limit or even overturn a key precedent that has empowered executive agencies, threatening regulations in countless areas, including the environment, health care and consumer safety.

Each side warned of devastating consequences should it lose, underscoring how the court’s decision in a highly technical case could reverberate across wide swaths of American life.

Overruling the precedent, Solicitor General Elizabeth B. Prelogar told the justices, would be an “unwarranted shock to the legal system.”

But Justice Brett M. Kavanaugh responded that there were in fact “shocks to the system every four or eight years when a new administration comes in, whether it’s communications law or securities law or competition law or environmental law.”

Judging from questions in two hard-fought arguments that lasted a total of more than three and a half hours, the foundational doctrine of administrative law called Chevron deference appeared to be in peril.

The doctrine takes its name from a 1984 decision, *Chevron v. Natural Resources Defense Council*, one of the most cited cases in American law. Under it, judges must defer to agencies’ reasonable interpretations of ambiguous statutes. In close cases, and there are many, the views of the agency take priority even if courts might have ruled differently.

Supporters of the doctrine say it allows specialized agencies to fill in gaps in ambiguous statutes to establish uniform rules in their areas of expertise, a practice they say was contemplated by Congress.

Its opponents, including business groups hostile to what they see as overregulation, counter that it is the role of courts, not executive branch officials, to determine the meanings of statutes. They also say that agencies’ interpretations can change with new administrations and put a thumb

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CONSEQUENCES Breaking down what’s at issue as well as a case’s possible outcomes. PAGE A15

Icy Cold Drains E.V. Batteries And Strains Drivers’ Patience

By EMILY SCHMALL
and JENNY GROSS

CHICAGO — With Chicago temperatures sinking below zero, electric vehicle charging stations have become scenes of desperation: depleted batteries, confrontational drivers and lines stretching out onto the street.

“When it’s cold like this, cars aren’t functioning well, chargers aren’t functioning well, and people don’t function so well either,” said Javed Spencer, an Uber driver who said he had done little else in the last three days besides charge his rented Chevy Bolt and worry about being stranded with a dead battery — again.

Mr. Spencer, 27, said he set out on Sunday for a charging station with 30 miles left on his battery. Within minutes, the battery was dead. He had to have the car towed to the station.

“When I finally plugged it in, it wasn’t getting any charge,” he said. Recharging the battery, which usually takes Mr. Spencer

JOHNSON DIGS IN AGAINST A DEAL ON IMMIGRATION

HOLDS UP UKRAINE AID

Meeting With Biden Fails to Mend G.O.P. Split on Border Limits

By KAROUN DEMIRJIAN
and ERICA L. GREEN

WASHINGTON — Speaker Mike Johnson on Wednesday dug in against President Biden’s efforts to revive stalled legislation to send aid to Ukraine, saying the Republican-led House would not entertain it unless Democrats agreed to a far more severe crack-down at the U.S.-Mexico border than they have been willing to consider.

Mr. Johnson’s latest ultimatum cast further doubt on the prospects of Congress’s approving Mr. Biden’s request for tens of billions of dollars in emergency security assistance to help Ukraine fight off Russia.

Republicans have insisted that such a package be paired with measures to clamp down on migration at the southwestern border, and a bipartisan group of senators has made considerable progress on striking a compromise to do so. But the plan has no path to enactment if the House, where a sizable far-right contingent is pressing for even tougher immigration policies, refuses to accept it.

“I told the president what I had been saying for many months, and that is that we must have change at the border, substantive policy change,” Mr. Johnson told reporters after emerging from a meeting with Mr. Biden and other congressional leaders at the White House, adding: “We must insist — must insist — that the border be the top priority.”

Mr. Biden summoned top lawmakers in both parties, including the top-ranking national security committee lawmakers in Congress, in an urgent bid to break a monthslong logjam over the aid to Ukraine.

During the meeting, Mr. Biden underscored that Congress needed to pass funding for air defense and artillery capabilities in order for Ukraine to continue to defend itself against Russia’s invasion, according to a statement from the White House, and that doing so quickly would “send a strong signal of U.S. resolve.”

“The president discussed the

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DAVID ZALUBOWSKI/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Drivers are waiting hours to recharge their electric vehicles.

an hour, took five hours.

With more people owning electric vehicles than ever before, cold snaps this winter have created headaches for electric vehicle owners, as freezing temperatures drain batteries and reduce driving range.

And the problems may persist a little longer. Chicago and other parts of the United States and Canada this week have been stunned by bitterly cold tempera-

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INTERNATIONAL A4-9

Guilty Pleas in 2002 Bali Attack

Two Guantánamo Bay prisoners admit to conspiring in the nightclub bombings that killed over 200 people. PAGE A4

Health Issues for Royal Family

Catherine, the Princess of Wales, had surgery, and King Charles III will have an enlarged prostate treated. PAGE A9



NATIONAL A10-17

Rent Strikes in San Francisco

Tenants are withholding payments over living conditions, testing whether a union model can work for residents the same way it does for laborers. PAGE A10

Enduring Snow for an ID Card

As the migrant crisis entered a precarious phase in New York City, families camped out overnight, hoping a card could help them find work. PAGE A17

Eyeing Haley’s Home Turf

Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida signaled he would largely bypass New Hampshire’s primary election and train his efforts on South Carolina. PAGE A14

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The Sky-High Costs of Drugs

Research shows prices in the United States are nearly double those in other well-off countries. Why? PAGE B1

Airbus Out in Front, Again

As troubles mount for Boeing, Airbus becomes the biggest plane maker for the fifth straight year. PAGE B1

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Tennis Without the Shushing

Trying to draw younger fans, the Australian Open added a bar alongside one court. Spectators love it, but some players wish they’d keep it down. PAGE B6

THURSDAY STYLES D1-6

Best Looks at the Emmys

We highlight the outfits that stood out on a red carpet awash in feathers, beads, sequins and diamonds. PAGE D1

Dressing for Summer

On the streets of Melbourne, Australia, you’ll see chunky fringed skirts, blazers, tank tops and tattoos. PAGE D5



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Mandela Items Set for Auction

South Africa sought the return of “heritage objects,” but Nelson Mandela’s daughter can sell them instead. PAGE C1

Barstool Culture

At the Francis Kite Club, a collectively built space for artists, people talk art and politics over cocktails. PAGE C1

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Nicholas Kristof

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