

FERTILITY, POPULATION REPORT

Need for long-term plans to boost count

SINGAPORE'S birth rate dipped slightly to 1.28 last year, down a notch from 1.29 the previous year.

At the same time, the proportion of elderly folk aged 65 and above rose to 8.7 per cent last year, up from 6.8 per cent a decade ago.

These twin trends of low fertility and an ageing population were updates provided yesterday by the Government's National Population Secretariat, which oversees population issues.

It explained the need to continue working on long-term strategies to boost the population, even though Singapore is in the midst of an economic downturn.

These strategies include getting more Singaporeans to marry and procreate, attracting foreigners here and helping them integrate into the society, and staying connected to Singaporeans abroad.

The statistics also showed that more Singaporeans are marrying later or staying single. They are also having children later, and having fewer of them or none at all.

At a media briefing yesterday morning, Ms Quah Ley Hoon, director of the National Population Secre-

tariat at the Prime Minister's Office, said growing Singapore's population "is a long-term issue".

"To build a sustainable, connected and integrated population, we will need to continue to encourage marriage and parenthood, engage overseas Singaporeans, as well as facilitate the naturalisation and integration of suitable foreigners," she said.

Thus, the Government's Marriage and Parenthood Package, which was enhanced last August, is even more important in this downturn, she added.

It gives financial and physical support to Singaporean couples to marry and raise a family.

As more foreigners choose to sink roots here, they need a hand to bond with locals and there are plans to have social integration efforts, she said.

Engaging overseas Singaporeans also remains very crucial, as more go abroad to work and study, she added.

The updates also showed that the total population has grown to 4.84 million last year – a rise of 5.5 per cent over the previous year.

The record number of foreign residents, which now make up about 25 per cent of the total population – has helped to contribute to the growth.