

Immigration policy, growing families dominate population forum

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Babies in Singapore

SINGAPORE: The impact of immigration policy on the quality of life in Singapore, ways to encourage young couples to have babies, and for singles to get married and have children, dominated discussions at a forum on population.

The forum was organised by the Institute of Policy Studies.

Among the speakers was Singapore's former top city planner Liu Thai Ker, who said the country's long-term population projections had been outstripped much earlier than anticipated in the masterplan projections.

And so his advice to Singaporeans - break the psychological barrier to face issues of higher density.

Mr Liu Thai Ker, Chairman of Advisory Board Centre for Liveable Cities, said: "If we remind Singaporeans the fact that our population size in 1960 was only 1.9 million, today it is 5.2 million. Is our environment worse than 1960 or better? The answer is obvious, it is much better.

"With careful planning and careful technological intervention, you can have the cake and eat it - higher density and better environment.

"If we do it very, very carefully, the next lap of dealing with further density growth is more challenging but given that we have 50 years of solid experience, personally I remain cautiously optimistic. As long as we face the problem, don't run away, I feel Singaporeans must not bury the problem. They should face it squarely."

Academics also had proposals to encourage young couples to grow their families, for example, having a less stressful education system.

Associate Professor Paulin Straughan, Department of Sociology at the National University of Singapore, said: "We find that pressure building up to the PSLE is tremendous for all parents.

So my proposal is very simple, get rid of the PSLE, let the child enrol in Singapore from Primary One and stay all the way through 'N', 'O' or 'A' levels.

"If we do that, we free the school from this obsession of testing, and the teachers and educators can focus on teaching and learning, and if we do that, more young couples would be willing to grow larger families."

Moving forward experts say we should focus on attracting high quality talent into Singapore.