

Fewer babies for first time in five years

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The Straits Times, 26 January 2010

FOR the first time in five years, Singapore has had fewer babies. The number of births fell by 172 last year to 39,654.

The reason is probably the economic downturn, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said yesterday, in disclosing the dip.

Still, the drop marks a grave trend, he said. 'It may not be a lot less, but it is a lot less than it ought to be, in terms of total numbers.'

It means the total fertility rate (TFR) has gone down further, he added. 'If unchecked, (it) will cause us to have not just a shrinking population, but an even more rapidly ageing population.'

Singapore's TFR was last reported to be 1.29. To replace itself, a society needs a rate of at least 2.1. For Singapore, this means having about 60,000 babies a year.

Since 2004, the number of births has been on an uptrend. The best rise was in 2007, when the number shot up by more than 1,000 over 2006.