

Without migration of some magnitude, Singapore's population will decline, says IPS

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SINGAPORE - Without migration of some magnitude, Singapore's ageing population will decline - even if it manages to boost its Total Fertility Rate (TFR) to 1.85 from the current 1.15.

This is according to a demographic study on future population growth and change in Singapore released yesterday by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS).

The project - which the IPS embarked in 2007 and presented to the Government in April, this year - studied 48 scenarios which examined how the future population of Singapore will look like if the TFR remains "extremely low over the long term" and the "likely effects of raising the TFR versus increasing immigration".

Former Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew had said during a forum with students on Monday the IPS had a "grim statistic of 60,000 migrants a year to keep our people young and economically active" which was "politically indigestible".

Yesterday, the IPS presented four of the 48 scenarios at a roundtable session and concluded that "without migration of some magnitude, Singapore's population will decline - even if it manages to boost its TFR to 1.85, up from the current 1.15", said IPS director Janadas Devan, who is also an associate editor at The Straits Times.

The first scenario was that if TFR remains at 1.24 births per woman and there is zero net migration - the result of in-migrants and out-migrants - Singapore's total resident population would decline to 3.03 million in 2050.

If TFR remains at 1.24 and 30,000 net migrants were added annually through to 2050, Singapore's total resident population would increase to 4.89 million in 2050.

And with 60,000 net migrants added annually, Singapore's total resident population would increase to 6.76 million in 2050. If TFR gradually rises from 1.24 to 1.85 by 2025 and stabilises, and there is zero migration, the total resident population will be 3.37 million. Total resident population is the total number of citizens and permanent residents.

The implications of the figures in these scenarios was discussed at the roundtable yesterday. One was the weight of an ageing population (65 and above) on those of working ages (between 15 and 65 years old).

For example, it is projected that by 2050, 1.9 working adult will support one elderly person, compared to the 8.6 in 2005.

Concluding that raising TFR to 1.85 with zero migration has little effect, the IPS said that "in-migration would ameliorate this decline".

The IPS added: "If the resident TFR for Singapore remains extremely low over the long term and there is no in-migration, the resident population can be expected to decline and it will be extremely aged. The results of this exercise suggest that raising TFR alone will ameliorate

the situation marginally. Immigration helps to reduce the dependency burden and raise the support ratio."

When asked how the IPS arrived at net migration figures in the scenarios, IPS senior research fellow Dr Yap Mui Teng said they were not privy to migration figures from the National Population and Talent Division and that the numbers were decided "by estimation" of past population numbers at different time periods as well as birth and death figures.

When asked why these four scenarios were selected out of the 48, Dr Yap said: "These in a way reflect the conditions at that time (of study)."

Mr Devan added that the TFR and net migration figures adopted for the project were "realistic and reasonable".