

2016 Budget (PMO COS)

Speech by Mr Thomas Chua, President of Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce & Industry and Nominated Member of Parliament

13 April 2016

Balance Business Needs and Procreation Policies

Chairman, fellow MPs. The Government has been enhancing policies to increase the birth rate, including helping singles to find life partners, housing policies, encouraging procreation, childcare, work-life balance, getting husbands and wives to share responsibilities. Indeed, all possible ways and means have been used to address the issue of our country's ageing population and declining birth rate.

On the relationship between population and a nation's strength, I would like to share a story from ancient China. During the Song Dynasty, there was a small kingdom called Western Xia (Xi Xia). The soldiers were valiant and good at fighting, winning numerous battles against the Greater Song. However, Western Xia, despite having a strong army with great fighting spirit, ultimately had to make peace with the Greater Song because of its small population and lack of manpower.

This story illustrates how a small, but tough nation lost because of its shrinking population, reminding us that the size of Singapore's population and its demographic structure is related to its economic development, social stability and national defence. The strong Western Xia survived for close to 200 years and similarly, as a small nation surrounded by bigger nations, how long can Singapore survive?

Having just celebrated 50 years of nation-building, we are beginning our journey towards the next 50 years. If we are unable to solve the issues of an ageing population, businesses would eventually face a more severe manpower challenge. Thus, supporting the country's population policy would mean supporting the sustainable development of businesses. However, businesses do face difficulties during the implementation. There is a conflict between implementing lean management, increasing productivity, and promoting family-friendly and flexible working arrangements. How should this conflict be resolved?

At the same time, on the topic of increasing the birth rate, how is the Government going to communicate even more effectively with the citizens? Demographic structure affects the survival of Singapore. We should handle the population issue with the same perseverance we have in resolving the water issue. As the saying goes: "Everyone is responsible for the rise and fall of the country". Marriage and parenthood should be, from now on, a national concern.