

South Korean family planning

South Korean government workers are being told to 'go home and multiply'. Tonight the Ministry of Health, concerned about the country's falling birth rate, will force staff to leave the office early and return to their loved ones.



Forget that still unwritten report or **the backlog of paperwork building up** on the desk, on this cold and rainy mid-week night there can be no excuses to stay late in the office. South Korea's Ministry of Health, Welfare and Family Affairs will be turning off all the lights at 7pm in a bid to force staff to go home to their families and, well, make bigger ones. It will repeat the experiment once a month.

The country now has one of the world's lowest **birth rates**, lower even than neighbouring Japan, and **boosting** the number of newborn children is a priority for this government, **staring into the abyss** of a **rapidly ageing society**, **falling levels of manpower** and **spiralling** health care costs.

The Ministry of Health, now sometimes jokingly referred to as the 'Ministry of Matchmaking', is in charge of **spearheading that drive** and it clearly believes its staff should lead by example. Generous gift vouchers are on offer for officials who have more than one child and the department organises social gatherings in the hope of **fostering love amongst its bureaucrats**. But critics say what is really needed is wide-scale reform to tackle the **burdensome** cost of childcare and education that puts many young people off from starting a family.

John Sudworth, BBC News, Seoul

http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/language/wordsinthenews/2010/01/100120_witn_korea_page.shtml

Vocabulary:

1. the backlog of paperwork building up - the large and increasing amount of office documents (letters, reports etc) that you should have dealt with before but which you still need to deal with

2. birth rates - the number of babies born in a particular place during a certain period

3. boosting - increasing

4. staring into the abyss - looking to a future situation which will be difficult

5. rapidly ageing society - when the population of a country is getting older with not enough younger people to take their place

6. falling levels of manpower - when there are not enough young and fit people to do all the jobs needed to maintain the country's economy

7. spiralling - steadily increasing

8. spearheading that drive - taking charge of the plan

9. fostering love amongst its bureaucrats - encouraging office workers to start having relationships with each other

10. burdensome - difficult and requiring a lot of responsibility, time and money

Let's Talk!

What are some reasons that families become less interested in raising / more kids?

What could be the possible problems of falling birthrates could do in a country?

How falling of birthrates affect a country?

What other possible solutions you could think to solve this problem?