

EDITORIAL

National vision for child-rearing

The Hatoyama administration adopted in late January a "children and child-rearing vision" designed to help raise the nation's birthrate. The program involves a variety of initiatives and some 40 numerically defined goals. An obvious problem is where the necessary funds will be found.

The program, covering five years from fiscal 2010, replaces another that had not been revised for five years. It forms the basis of the administration's basic policy for boosting the birthrate.

The goals include raising the capacity at licensed nurseries from the current 2.15 million children to 2.41 million in fiscal 2014 (with the number of children younger than 3 years old at such facilities increasing from 750,000 to 1.02 million). By that time it is also hoped that 170,000 more infants will be in after-hours nursery care, and 300,000 more primary school pupils will be attending after-school child care. Total usage of nursery services for sick or recuperating children is projected to reach the equivalent of 2 million days per year, up from the current 310,000.

The administration estimates that achieving the program's goals by fiscal 2014 will require an additional ¥700 billion. More money will be needed on top of that to hire more child care workers and improve working conditions at child care facilities. The administration has already decided to provide a family allowance in fiscal 2010 of ¥13,000 per month per child, and plans to double that amount in fiscal 2011. That will require ¥5.3 trillion.

An estimated 1 million children are currently unable to be accommodated by the nation's overwhelmed nurseries. A recent government poll shows that a record 43 percent of adults think that people need not necessarily have children, even if they get married. It is imperative that the government quickly secures the funds needed to create a social

environment that is conducive to raising children. Firms should encourage workers to take child care leave, and men should dedicate more time to child rearing and housework. The government needs to develop new industries that will create tax revenue, and must persuade people to bear the financial burden that will be necessary to rejuvenate Japan's population.

The Japan Times: Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2010
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