Japan’s population falls for a 15th year with record low births and record high deaths

AP — Japan’s total population declined for the 15th straight year in 2023, dropping by more than a half-million people as the population ages and births remain low.

Births in Japan hit a record low of 730,000 last year. The 1.58 million deaths last year were also a record high. Japan’s population was 124.9 million as of Jan. 1.

The data released Wednesday by Japan’s Internal Affairs Ministry also showed that the 11% increase in foreign residents helped their population surpass 3 million for the first time. They now make up nearly 3% of the total population and are mostly of working age from 15 to 64.

Surveys show that younger Japanese are increasingly reluctant to marry or have children, discouraged by bleak job prospects, the high cost of living — which rises at a faster pace than salaries — and a gender-biased corporate culture that adds a burden only on women and working mothers.

The government earmarked 5.3 trillion yen ($34 billion) as part of the 2024 budget to fund incentives for young couples to have more children, such as increasing subsidies for childcare and education, and is expected to spend 3.6 trillion yen ($23 billion) in tax money annually over the next three years.

Experts say the measures are largely meant for married couples who plan to have or who already have children, and don’t address the growing number of young people reluctant to get married.

Japan’s population is projected to fall by about 30%, to 87 million by 2070, when four out of every 10 people will be 65 or older.

AP NEWS