

BN's success vital to us: Hsien Loong

SUN ~ 5 OCT 2002

SINGAPORE: It is imperative to Singapore's interest that the present Malaysian government continues to rule.

Whether Malaysia develops along Umno's secular, modern approach or goes in PAS's religious and conservative direction will have an impact on Singapore, says Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

Lee described the struggle between Umno and PAS for Malay support as "hard fought". Citing the Pendang and Anak Bukit by-elections in Kedah recently, he said: "The seats had been held by a PAS leader who had died. It was a tough fight. Umno made maximum effort to win back the two seats, but got back only one."

"Many rural Malay voters staunchly supported PAS, despite all that Umno did," he said at the Kent Ridge ministerial forum in the United States on Thursday.

Lee claimed that PAS stood for an Islamic state that included hudud laws "like

chopping off hands for theft and stoning to death for adultery".

He noted that Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had said after the by-elections that "it is not easy to convert people who refuse to think or evaluate but merely follow what (their leaders) tell them to do".

"In Malaysia, Mahathir is doing everything he can to develop and modernise the country. He is pushing hard to have science and mathematics taught in English in schools, against considerable resistance."

On the war on terrorism, Lee said the terrorists cannot win but eliminating them will be a very difficult task.

"But the terrorists fighting in the name of Islam will try their best to make this a conflict between Muslims and the infidels," he said.

"As the fight goes on, including in Iraq, it may well have repercussions on relations between Muslim and non-Muslim countries."