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POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN MALAYSIA WILL AFFECT SINGAPORE - HSIEN LEONG

By: Salbiah Said

SINGAPORE, Oct 4 (Bernama) -- Whether Malaysia develops along Umno's secular, modern approach or goes in PAS' 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 a 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."

Lee was speaking at the Kent Ridge Ministerial Forum in the United States. The text of his speech was released here today.

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".

Lee also quoted Dr Mahathir as saying: "For the opposition (PAS), even if they put a wooden stump, they would still win. They (PAS supporters) don't think. They see the moon (the PAS symbol), they will support..."

Said Lee: "In Malaysia, Dr 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."

Stressing that the region's future also hinged on political developments, Lee said a stable Indonesia was even more important to Southeast Asia.

Should Indonesia become divided, politically unstable and economically weak, it would have deep and broad repercussions for Singapore and the region, he said.

On the war on terrorism, Lee said the terrorists could not win but eliminating them would 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."

On the recent arrests of members of the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), Lee said they were planning terrorist attacks against American and Singaporean targets, including the U.S. Embassy, the water pipeline and the Ministry of Defence.

"Their purpose was to cause conflict between Malaysia and Singapore, and religious strife between Muslims and non-Muslims, so as to bring about a Daulah Islamiyah, or Islamic state, in Southeast Asia. Had they succeeded, the harm to Singapore would have been enormous," he said.

Stressing the need to strengthen racial harmony in the face of such a threat, he said: "To start with, we have to see this as a national problem, and tackle it together, Muslims and non-Muslims. The extremists want to destroy the trust and confidence that we have built between the communities. We must not allow them to do so."

Lee said non-Muslims must understand that the problem was caused by a

"tiny handful" of extremists who did not reflect the attitudes of Singapore's generally moderate Muslim community.

"They should therefore not let the discovery of the JI group affect their attitudes to Muslims in general, or their trust in their fellow citizens," added Lee.

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