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M'SIA'S PROGRESSIVE APPROACH GOOD FOR S'PORE, SAYS LEE

SINGAPORE, Oct 17 (Bernama) -- Singapore believes Malaysia will continue to adopt a progressive and secular approach after Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad retires in October 2003.

"His successor Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi is expected to continue Dr Mahathir's progressive approach, which will be positive for Malaysia and for Singapore," said Singapore Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

Lee said the Malaysian government's approach in modernising the nation was particularly driven by Dr Mahathir, who was currently pushing hard to have science and mathematics taught in schools in English instead of in Malay, which is the national language.

"However, this approach and world view is fiercely resisted by the opposition Islamic party, PAS, which wants to create an Islamic state in Malaysia," he said at a seminar on 'Developments in Southeast Asia: Singapore's Perspective' organised by Nomura Securities in Tokyo today.

He noted that PAS enjoyed significant support from the majority Malay community in Malaysia, especially the rural Malays, describing this struggle for Malay support as likely to be "long- and hard-fought."

"If PAS were to win power, Malaysia would go in quite a different direction. But it will not be easy for PAS to defeat the governing party, because to do so it would need also the support of the non-Malays, who form one-third of the population," added Lee.

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