

Singapore should not be as crowded as Hong Kong: Lee

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SINGAPORE (Reuters) - Singapore's drive to increase its population should not leave the city-state as crowded as Hong Kong, Lee Kuan Yew, the country's former prime minister, was quoted as saying in local media on Saturday. The Singapore government said last year it wants to add another two million people to expand the island's population to 6.5 million over the next 40 to 50 years -- mostly through immigration -- to drive economic growth in the city-state, where there is a low birth rate and a graying population.

"I have not quite been sold on the idea that we should have 6.5 million," Lee, the first prime minister of modern Singapore, was quoted as saying in the Straits Times.

He said Singapore should not become as crowded as Hong Kong where it has "just solid buildings, one blocking the sunlight of the other".

"There's an optimum size for the land that we have, to preserve the open spaces and the sense of comfort," Lee said.

Singapore, which competes with Hong Kong to be the Asian headquarters for financial services firms, is seen to have an edge over the former British colony's proximity to China by being less crowded and polluted.

Singapore has a population of 4.7 million people and according to a 2003 U.N. study, was the world's third most densely populated area after Hong Kong and Macau.