

Calls for separate Taiwan state not realistic

The Straits Times, 2 February 2008

TAIWANESE politicians pushing for independence from China are 'deceiving' their people that it can be done, said Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew, weighing in on the island's presidential polls next month.

Speaking at a seminar yesterday, MM Lee was sharply critical of Taiwan's pro-independence President Chen Shui-bian.

Mr Chen is pushing for a referendum on Taiwan's membership in the United Nations, viewed as a first step towards independence.

Independence has once again become an issue in the March 22 presidential election being contested by Mr Chen's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and the more moderate opposition Kuomintang.

But the subject is a non-issue, given that Taiwan's main allies, the United States and Japan, do not support independence, said MM Lee.

He argued that Taiwan's freewheeling brand of democracy had led to political impasse.

The DPP is 'going on (over) two elections deceiving the people that (independence) is possible'.

However, the US and Japan have 'calculated the horrendous consequences of supporting such a policy'. China is prepared to go to war on the Taiwan issue and can inflict 'heavy casualties'.

Beijing sees Taiwan as part of its territory and wants it to eventually reunify with China.

Mr Lee said he had met DPP leaders and advised them to drop the issue and 'let history decide'.

'So I said to them...if China keeps on growing...you better join the economy and prosper with them.

'They said, 'That's the trouble. Every day their voice gets stronger and ours get weaker; therefore, we must act now.'

'I thought to myself: Where's the logic in that?'