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# MM Lee: US base in Japan boosts stability

American presence in region benefits Asia, he tells symposium

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**TOKYO:** Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew yesterday said it was important for the United States to retain a base in Okinawa so that it can continue to project its power

er in the region and maintain stability. "We believe that (the US) presence brings about stability and peace and I believe they need a base in the north-east. If there is no base in Japan, then they cannot deploy their weaponry and project their power sufficiently," MM Lee told a dialogue session on the first day of a two-day international symposium on the "Future of Asia".

He was referring to strong demands by Okinawans for the Japanese government to move the US Futenma air base out of their prefecture because of the danger it

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MM Lee speaking in Tokyo yesterday at an international symposium on the "Future of Asia".  
PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

whose president disbanded the armed forces and won a Nobel Peace Prize and who did not have to worry about neighbouring countries attacking the country as Costa Rica had no riches to speak of.

"But I do not believe that is going to be the state of affairs in East Asia. Therefore, it is wise to have balance."

On Japan's ageing population, Mr Lee said Japan would not have enough workers in future to support its retirees. It has the choice of either reversing its low birth rate, which is no easy task, or taking in immigrants as Singapore is doing.

"You have the choice to keep Japan homogeneous and shrinking and stagnant economically, or you accept immigrants and grow," he told the audience. The conference is held annually by the influential Nikkei business daily and attended by several hundred businessmen, academics and university students.

He also advised the Japanese to choose immigrants who can be assimilated more easily. "If I were Japanese, I would not want to go beyond people who look like Japanese. I will (also) choose people from the high end, so that the children will also be of a higher calibre."

Mr Lee arrived in Tokyo on Tuesday after visiting China and is scheduled to meet Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama today.

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poses to residents.

But it now appears that Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama, after an apparently futile search for a solution, may eventually agree to relocate Futenma elsewhere within Okinawa, according to a deal between the US and an earlier Japanese administration.

"If Japan closes them off from Okinawa," said Mr Lee, "I think it will be a setback for the deployment of US forces which will not be to the benefit of Asia."

He stressed the need for the US to act as a counterbalance to China.

"I am not saying they are going to fight a war. But if there is no counterbalance, we will have no manoeuvring room. If you have two big trees, instead of one, we can choose which shade to be under," he said.

Asked to comment on the policies of Japan's eight-month-old administration, Mr Lee said: "I will say it takes some time for a new party and a new prime minister to hoist in the realities of today's Japan and today's deployment of power around Japan."

He cited the example of Costa Rica



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