



STATSMINISTER GRO HARLEM BRUNDTLAND

Middag for Singapores statsminister Goh Chok Tong

Akershus Festning, 6. juni 1996

Mr. Prime Minister,
Mrs. Goh Chok Tong,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour to welcome you, Prime Minister, and your delegation to Norway.

Today, Singapore is our second largest trading partner in Asia, only surpassed by Japan. About 1200 Norwegian ships call on Singapore every year. 110 Norwegian companies are established, - and 700 Norwegians live there. This is by far the largest Norwegian community in Asia. No city in the world outside Norway has such a high concentration of Norwegian businesses as Singapore.

Singapore serves as a bridgehead for Norwegian economic interests all over South East Asia, and with good reason. It is an international maritime center, and Singapore's own networks all over Asia are a valuable asset also to other countries, including Norway. Singapore's excellent infrastructure, its highly educated work force, and its political stability is recognized all over the world.

These are main reasons why Singapore will remain an invaluable partner for Norway.

Singapore's own economic growth is truly impressive. The country focused early on knowledge as the ultimate resource and the human mind as an important engine of growth and change. While attempting to make a virtue out of necessity - it had no natural resources but plenty of human resources - Singapore set an example and helped lead the way into the age of the microchip.

Singapore is a respected conciliator in world affairs. It believes strongly in the rule of law and in peaceful resolution of conflict. We are close partners in the UN, in the International Maritime Organization, and the World Trade Organization. The Government of Singapore will host the first WTO Ministerial Conference in December - an important event for world prosperity.

Prime Minister, you have been instrumental in strengthening the dialogue between Europe and Asia. You have once described this relationship as "the missing link" in the world's relations between regions.

It is visible all over East-Asia how America is making its impact felt and how the patterns of consumption hold an attraction on people in Asia.

It is less visible in the streets of Singapore, but no less important, that Norwegian companies contribute to safe transport of world trade, to safe and sound energy production and to environmentally sound production, in East Asia - operating out of the Singapore bridgehead.

Like the European Union, the Norwegian Government has a long-term strategic plan for strengthening relations with Singapore and East Asia. The plan is based on three pillars: Political dialogue, trade and economic cooperation in priority sectors, cultural exchange and information activities.

A lot is happening in East Asia that has never happened before. More and more European countries have lower per capita incomes than Singapore, and other East Asian countries are thriving on double-digit growth rates. We have never experienced such enormous economic growth, among a comparably large population. And I believe that East Asia will manage this transition period better and more effectively if full use is made of what Europe has to offer.

In Asia there will be dozens and dozens of mega-cities, of tenfolds of million people. Millions are living on land and depending on water resources which are already under strain.

Asian countries now have the opportunity to make a series of timely decisions before economic growth and performance present them with the bills of overburdening both their countries and their resources.

Many Norwegian companies which are active in Singapore have succeeded in European markets which have the world's most stringent environmental regulations.

Europe is a high cost area. And it is a high benefit area. We are proud of what we have achieved through decades in terms of social policy. Europe will not harmonize downwards - instead I expect that the Asian worker will be demanding a harmonization upwards. This will be a natural development as we gradually reach higher levels of prosperity.

From Europe, East Asia is now only one non-stop flight and a giant jet-lag away. We expand our contacts all the time.

Whether we represent Government or business, we all represent our country in one way or another. We are all shaped in a culture, and we see other countries with eyes such shaded. We Norwegians relate with Singapore and East Asia out of great respect for the people of East Asia. We expect our business representatives to give that respect tangible expression in their dealings with workers, companies and government representatives.

Mr. Prime Minister,

I wish you and your delegation a successful stay in Norway. I propose a toast to you personally, to all our guests from Singapore and to the future of our bilateral relations.