

Release No.: 12/NOV
16-0/92/11/08

92-LHL-23

ADDRESS BY BG LEE HSIEN LOONG
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER FOR TRADE & INDUSTRY
AT THE ARAB ASSOCIATION'S 46TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER
ON 8 NOV 92 AT 7.45 P.M.

I would like to convey my warm greetings to the members of your Association. I was looking forward to joining you in the Association's 46th Anniversary Dinner, but regret not being able to do so because I have had to make an unexpected overseas trip to the United States.

2. Many people think that Singapore society comprises exactly three separate communities -- the Chinese, Malays and Indians. If they concede that this is not quite so, it is only to the extent of adding a fourth group -- the "Others". This led one choreographer to conveniently call his multi-racial dance the 'CIMO' dance -- Chinese, Indian, Malays and Others. Naturally, those bundled together as "Others" are not amused.

3. The truth is that apart from the 3 majority groups -- Chinese, Malay and Indian -- we have many other races. Their numbers are much smaller, but they add immeasurably to the richness and diversity of our cosmopolitan society. According to the 1990 census, the 'others' category constituted 1.1% of our population. This small figure hides a rich collection of communities: Arabs, Armenians, Eurasians, Annamites, Bhutanese, Brazilians, Burmese, Mauritian, Maldivians, Mexican, Jews, Parsis and many others.

4. Even within the main Chinese, Malay and Indian communities, there are subgroups with identities of their own. The Chinese have the varied clans and dialect groups. The Indians come from all over the subcontinent, and include Sikhs, Bengalis, Malayalees besides the Tamils, who form the largest group. The Malays identify themselves as Menangkabau, Boyanese, Bugis, or Acehnese. The Arabs form one such group within the wider Muslim community.

5. Singapore Arabs number about 6,000. Arabs first came to this part of the world in the 14th century, bringing Islam with them. But the local Arab population grew only after Stamford Raffles set up a trading post here in 1819. The community quickly secured a respected position in Singapore. They did this through inter-marriage, religious propagation and generous contributions towards religious and charitable institutions. Many of the pioneers were traders and astute businessmen. Their contributions at the turn of the century helped Singapore attain fame as the entrepot port of the east.

6. Successful Arab businessmen built mosques and endowed properties for charitable purposes. Many Arab traders in the 19th century bought up large tracts of land as long term investments for themselves and for their heirs. Their foresight that Singapore would prosper, and that land values would inevitably appreciate, brought their families great wealth.

7. Many of you are the descendants of these prominent Arab families -- the Aljunieds, the Alsagoffs and the Alkaffs. Places names like Aljunied Road and Alkaff Quay remind all Singaporeans of the role your forebears played in our early economy. You are rightfully proud of what they did, and of your heritage.

8. The Arabs are not the only small group to have left their mark on Singapore. The Parsis are another small community, numbering no more than 100,000 worldwide, of whom 100 are in Singapore. They maintain close-knit family ties and observe colourful ceremonies. Prominent Parsi families here include the Framoz and the Mistri. In 1954, Navroji Mistri donated one million dollars to set up the Mistri Wing, the children's ward at SGH. More recently, a Parsi businessman, Pesi Davar, left an estate from which about a quarter of a million dollars go annually to charity. A Parsi lady, Mrs Keki Medora, actively raised funds to build Trafalgar home, served as President of the Leprosy Association, and on the St Andrew's Hospital Board and other committees.

9. The Armenians, another small community, have made significant contributions to Singapore's commercial and public life. The early Armenians who were traders built the Armenian church in 1835, now a national monument. The original owners of the Raffles Hotel and Seaview Hotel were the three Sarkies brothers, all Armenians.

10. The Jews are another small community. The early Jews were Sephardic Jews, traders who came from Iraq, and later from India. Like the Arabs, they contributed to the civic life here. Sir Mannasseh Meyer, a wealthy businessman, was Municipal Commissioner to the Colonial Government and gave generously to private charities. David Marshall, who is now our Ambassador in Paris, became Singapore's first Chief Minister. Whatever the problems in the Middle East between Jews and Arabs, in Singapore the two communities coexist together.

11. These examples show that the statistical simplification of grouping small communities under the 'others' category obscures the richness of the tapestry of our society. We are much more cosmopolitan than may appear at first glance. We must not try to force this richness and diversity into two or three fixed moulds, or worse, homogenize

all the cultures together into a single Singapore broth.

12. It is not easy to sustain a small community in Singapore. Finding marriage partners for children is always a problem, as is keeping the culture alive from generation to generation. However, Singapore honours the contributions from all communities, no matter how small, and regardless of race. Singapore society would be the poorer without them. We should maintain an open environment within which these small groups will be comfortable, and never allow the majority communities to impose on them and make them feel marginalised or unwanted.

13. Whichever culture or ancestry a group belongs to, all groups have, over the years, become integrated as part of Singapore society. We are all Singaporeans together, although we are not identical to one another, nor ever will be. Let us therefore respect one another's cultures and customs, and strengthen the basis of multi-racial and multi-religious harmony in Singapore.

Cc: INFORMATION5 (8812:GVT224)
From: INFORMATION5 (8812:GVT224)
Subject: [Arab Association 46th Anniversary Dinner]
Posted: Tue 10-November-92 17:24 SING
Delivered: Tue 10-November-92 17:24 SING (60 lines)
Msg ID: IPM-8812-921110-156563990

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS RELEASES

DISTRIBUTION LIST

1	Mr Yatiman Bin Yusof, Parliamentary Secretary (Foreign Affairs)	GVT 047
2	Mr Lim Boon Heng, Senior Minister of State (MTI)	GVT 090
3	Dr Yeo Ning Hong, Minister for Defence	GVT 200
4	Mr Ch'ng Jit Koon, Senior Minister of State (Community Development)	GVT 234
5	Dr Ahmad Mattar, Minister for Environment	GVT 080
6	BG George Yeo, Second Minister for Foreign Affairs	GVT 049
7	Mr Harun A Ghani, Political Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs	GVT 710
8	Library Officer, Auditor-General Office	GVT 370
9	Library. Ministry of Education	GVT 036
10	Mr Lee Chiong Giam, Chief Executive Director (PA)	GVT 615
10a	Mr Soon Low Boon, Library (PA)	
11	Library, Parliament House	GVT 251
12	National Archives	GVT 237
13	Mr Aziz Champion, Ministry of Law (PS's copy)	GVT 125
14	Budget Division, Ministry of Finance	GVT 052
15	Mrs Elaine Swinn-Tan, Head, Public Relations, MOL	GVT 168
16	Economics Dept, MAS	GVT 721
17	PSD, Ministry of Finance	GVT 111
18	The General Manager, Board of Commissioners of Currency	GVT 611
19	Library, Ministry of Community Development	GVT 235

20	Commissioner for Lands, Land Office, Ministry of Law	GVT 463
21	Library, Jurong Town Corporation	GVT 390
22	Public Relations Dept, Ministry of Home Affairs	GVT 137
23	Resource Centre, Ministry of Trade & Industry	GVT 091
24	Public Relations Dept, VITB	GVT 480
25	Registry Supervisor, Ministry of National Development	GVT 240
26	The Chairman, Singapore Institute of Standards and Industrial Research	GVT 325
27	Librarian, NTUC Research Unit	GVT 351
27a	PA to Mr Ong Teng Cheong, Deputy Prime Minister	
28	Mindef Library	GVT 207
29	Director, Community Relations Dept, Ministry of Community Development (Kindly make copies and distribute to all the secretariats)	GVT 470
30	Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Defence	GVT 560
31	Dr Lee Boon Yang, Minister for Labour & Second Minister for Defence	GVT 205
32	Dr Tay Eng Soon, Senior Minister of State for Education	GVT 030
33	Mr Wong Kan Seng, Minister for Foreign Affairs	GVT 044
33a	Mr Peter Ho, DS (SEA) Min. of Foreign Affairs	GVT 044
34	Dr Richard Hu, Minister for Finance	GVT 017
35	Mr Yeo Cheow Tong, Minister for Health & Minister for Community Development	GVT 172 GVT 230
36	Mr Sidek Bin Saniff, Minister of State for Education	GVT 680
37	Mr J. A. Nathan, Globalink, TDB	GVT 817