



INTRODUCTORY REMARKS
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AT ISEAS 50TH ANNIVERSARY LECTURE

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Please check against delivery

Prime Minister, Distinguished guests, Friends and colleagues of ISEAS -Yusof Ishak Institute, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a privilege to have Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong deliver his lecture at ISEAS's 50th Anniversary today. I must say there is a nice symmetry to the occasion because exactly 25 years ago ISEAS had the pleasure of hosting Mr Lee (then Deputy Prime Minister) as our Guest of Honour at our 25th Anniversary in 1993.

I should also add that it was 10 years ago that we had the honour of hosting Minister Mentor (MM) Lee Kuan Yew for the institute's 40th Anniversary in 2008. MM Lee graced a very stimulating dialogue event that ranged from domestic politics to global geostrategic trends. And it was this combination of

domestic politics in the region and geostrategic trends that saw the need for the establishment of an institute like ISEAS 50 years ago.

ISEAS was set up in 1968 as the brainchild of Dr Goh Keng Swee. At a time when the region was trying to build new nation-states and also seeking to form a regional organisation like ASEAN, both at the same time, Dr Goh saw that it was essential to understand what was happening to Southeast Asia and what the unfolding trends would mean for Singapore.

Dr Goh visited several renowned research centres and think tanks when he was thinking about ISEAS. They included Chatham House in the United Kingdom; the Council on Foreign Affairs and the Rand Corporation in the United States; and also a number of universities with strong Southeast Asian programs like Yale, Cornell and Berkeley.

In his discussions with these institutions, Dr Goh quickly realised that the soon-to-be formed ISEAS had to be something very different, a special institution that served Singapore's unique needs. For example, he noted that:

“The Rand type of think factory can only be created in a continental superpower and is not within our horizon of possibilities. Nevertheless we can draw a few lessons from

Rand's working and recruiting methods and its insistence on high quality personnel. Chatham House and the Council on Foreign Relations are again unsuitable because of their total concern with contemporary events. What we need is research into matters not of immediate value in policy-making but which are necessary to the development of well-rounded expertise."

Dr Goh's pragmatism and clarity of mission have been instrumental in shaping ISEAS's research agenda. We are interested in both contemporary developments with clear policy implications as well as the less obvious, less eye-catching trends which may have implications further down the road.

Over the years, ISEAS has been the beneficiary of strong support from the government, enabling it to develop to where it is today. This support has been given while dealing with us at arms-length to preserve our academic and research independence. I believe that this approach has enabled the institute's scholars to make valuable contributions to what the world knows about the region's developments which has become extraordinary complex during the past half-century.

By following Dr Goh's pragmatism, our research focus and capability have evolved with a changing external political, regional and international

environment. To keep up with this greater research responsibilities, we have been established new units to take on a wider range of research areas. This has enabled us to study and share our findings and analyses on regional and international politics as well as economic and social developments with the wider academic and policy community.

We have worked with government agencies, business organisations, NGOs as well as international organisations and other research institutes both within and beyond the region, and in this way, enhance the value of our research work.

As we progress into the next decade, we can be sure that there will be momentous changes in our region, within neighbouring countries, and between those countries as well. We also know that new trends such as anti-globalisation, nationalism generally, as well as increased major power rivalry, all these together may imperil our stability and economic success and undermine ASEAN's centrality as an organisation. These are possibilities that we are well aware of these fresh challenges and are determined to study these changes and trends and contribute, as much as we can, to understanding these issues more deeply.

Mr Prime Minister, with your support and that of our many collaborators,

we are optimistic that our research will continue to be relevant and impactful. Once again, on behalf of the Yusof - Ishak Institute, thank you for joining us today as ISEAS gears itself up to continue its work in the years to come.

With that, I have come to the end of my opening remarks.

It is my great pleasure now to invite Mr Lee Hsien Loong, Prime Minister of Singapore, to deliver the 50th Anniversary lecture for ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute.

Mr Prime Minister, please.