

# NORWEGIAN CONSTITUTION DAY

17 May 2008



## MESSAGE FROM THE AMBASSADOR



It is a great pleasure and honour for me to address the people of Bangladesh on the occasion of the Norwegian Constitution Day, 17th of May 2008.

The Constitution Day is of immense importance to the people of Norway. No matter how small a town or village, there are celebrations and festive activities taking place today.

Foreigners are often struck by the very non-military nature of our national day celebrations. All over Norway, children's parades with an abundance of flags form the central elements of the celebrations. Each elementary school district arranges its own parade with marching bands in between the schools. The biggest parade is in the capital Oslo with students from more than 100 schools marching through the city centre and passing the Royal Palace where the royal family greet the parade and the people from the main balcony.



### Our National Poet - Henrik Wergeland (1808 - 1845)

This year, in particular, we are celebrating the 17th of May in the spirit of our National Poet Henrik Wergeland. Already as a 21 year old student Wergeland became a symbol of the fight for the right to celebrate the constitution day, something which at that time was forbidden by royal decree. In 1833 he became the first person to give a public speech on the occasion of the day and his name has thus ever since been closely associated with celebration of the Constitution Day. This year, on the 200th anniversary of his birth, it is pertinent to put extra emphasis on his leading role and pioneering endeavour. Henrik Wergeland lived only to be 37 years old, but his range of pursuits covered literature, theology, history, contemporary politics and social issues. Wergeland was a child of the European Enlightenment and grew up in a time of momentous change for Norway. His reputation as a national poet is due as much to his passionate political and social engagement as to his poetry.

## THE NORWEGIAN OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY

### How Norway became one of the World's biggest Petroleum Exporters

The North Sea and the Norwegian continental shelf are associated with oil and gas in Europe and throughout the world. Not surprisingly, since nearly half of the remaining oil and gas reserves in Europe are to be found on the Norwegian continental shelf. Not only that, but due to Norway's small population (only 4.7 million people or less than half a crore) the domestic need for oil and gas is limited and 90 per cent of Norway's total oil production is exported. This makes Norway the third largest exporter of oil in the world, only beaten by Saudi Arabia and Russia.

In a historical context, exploration of oil and gas resources is a recent phenomenon in Norway. By the end of the 1950's few believed in the possibility of extracting hydrocarbons from the North Sea bed, but the discovery of gas outside the coast of the Netherlands in 1959 changed the picture. In October 1962 Philips Petroleum sent a letter to the Norwegian government and asked for permission to explore oil and gas on what was to become the Norwegian continental shelf. The company offered the government USD 160 000 per month for the rights.

With his fiery, impetuous temperament and zeal for knowledge, Wergeland would have become deeply engaged in the global challenges we face today.

We would have seen him fighting for a more equitable distribution of the world's goods, for nature and environment, for inter-religious and intercultural understanding; Wergeland regarded religious orthodoxy as an obstacle to political developments. He fought for the weak and preached tolerance between faiths: "Every religion has a gentle and loving heart" he wrote.

What Wergeland stood for is more relevant today than ever. We have an obligation to follow up what he started. We must examine our consciences and intensify our efforts to further the cause of tolerance, cultural equality and respect for human dignity. It could be mentioned that the 17th of May committee of Oslo, responsible for organising the celebrations in the capital this year, consists of seven people, five of whom have come to Norway as immigrants. It would be a lie to say that this is without controversy, but Wergeland himself was indeed a controversial figure in his time, and I believe the choice is completely according to his spirits.

### Relations between Norway and Bangladesh

Norway was among the first countries to recognize Bangladesh's independence, on 14 April 1972. Thus 14 April 2008, the day when Bangladesh celebrated the Bengali New Year 1415, also marked 36 years of co-operation between our two countries. For 36 years we have been a long-standing partner in many areas, multilaterally as well as bilaterally.

Norway early established development co-operation programme in Bangladesh. At present, the overall goal of the co-operation programme is to support Bangladesh's efforts to reduce poverty. The co-operation includes governance and human rights - with particular emphasis on women's rights - education, energy and private sector development.

The children represent hope and future in Norway as well as in Bangladesh. The right and access to education is therefore fundamental. Bangladesh has made substantial progress in this regard, and I am happy that Norway is contributing to further progress through support to both the government and non-governmental organisations.

Partnerships and exchange programmes between higher education and research institutions are established under Norad's Master Program (NOMA), and many Bangladeshi nationals have studied in Norway. Cultural co-operation and exchange visits are equally important, and we hope to see more of this in the years to come.

Trade between our two countries increased in 2007 and Bangladesh has a huge surplus on its trade with Norway. Trade between our two countries increased by 27 per cent from 2006 to 2007. This is truly encouraging, and I believe there are even more scope and opportunities for commercial co-operation. With the huge human resource capital in Bangladesh, there are many potentials.

The government declined. It lacked experience, but felt that if the continental shelf was to be opened for exploration, more companies needed to be involved. Additionally, there were unresolved issues with regard to the delimitation between the Norwegian and the British and the Danish continental shelves. In 1963 the government declared its sovereignty over the continental shelf and proclaimed that all resources contained therein belonged to the State. Later the same year the government granted foreign companies the first permissions to conduct seismic surveys. In March 1965 agreement was reached with Denmark and Britain regarding delimitation of the continental shelf and in April the same year the first concessions for exploration were granted.

The discovery of the field "Ekofisk" in 1969 kicked off the Norwegian oil adventure. Commercial operation began in 1971 and after more than 35 years of operation Ekofisk is still one of the most important oil fields in the North Sea. Oil production in Ekofisk is estimated to continue at least until 2050.

The Norwegian continental shelf has been gradually opened for exploration and in the early phase foreign companies dominated. Statoil was created in 1972 as the Norwegian State's oil company and as domestic know-how increased, so did the state's direct



The Norwegian Royal Family

Through its impressive social and economic development, Bangladesh has become increasingly independent of foreign assistance. As aid is getting less important, we are moving slowly but steadily towards a more equal and mature relationship between our two countries. There are many areas of concurrent interests where co-operation on an equal footing can be mutually beneficial such as development of commercial interests, climate change, cultural contacts, and common international challenges like UN reforms, UN Peace keeping missions and peace and stability in the region.

I believe that co-operation with other countries reinforces a sound and democratic development in any country. The partnership between Bangladesh and Norway is a trusted one, and I am confident that it will continue to play an important role in the years to come.

In conclusion, allow me to take this opportunity to express how impressed I am by the people of Bangladesh's ability to shake off the worst of disasters, rise up and move forward again and again. The stamina and strength of the people are remarkable. I am making these observations at a time when Bangladesh is going through an unprecedented process of reform. The Caretaker Government has established new standards; a new code of conduct for business, politics and public life in general. The Caretaker Government has shown great commitment to work towards a free and fair election by the end of 2008. Norway together with other development partners have contributed to the preparation of the voter list which is a crucial tool for a free, fair and credible election.

The people of Norway fought many hard and difficult battles for Independence and the nation's Constitution. So did the people of Bangladesh. This is a shared heritage of our nations.

Today, on our Constitution Day, it is therefore my sincere wish that the road ahead for Bangladesh and its people will be a peaceful one, based on the principles for a democratic society governed by the rule of law as envisaged in the Constitution of Bangladesh.

**Ingebjørg Støfring**  
Ambassador of Norway to Bangladesh

## SOME QUICK FACTS ABOUT NORWAY

Location: North Western Europe  
Borders: 2542km land border with Sweden, Finland and Russia.  
Coastline: 2500 km straight coast, including the fjords the coastline extends up to 83000 km.  
Area: 385 555 sq. km, more than the double size of Bangladesh.  
Population: 4.7 million, about one third of Dhaka.  
Minorities: Indigenous Sami population 50 000  
Foreign nationals: 415 000

### History of Independence

872 Unified under one king  
1397-1538 Union with Denmark (and Sweden 1397-1438)  
1538-1814 Union with Denmark/under Danish rule  
1814-1905 Personal Union with Sweden  
1905 Declared independence

### Did you know this about Norway?

- Although outside the EU, it has adopted more EU legislation into domestic law than any EU country except Denmark (EFTA Surveillance Authority – January 2005);
- It has compulsory school for ten years, education is free through university level and literacy is 100%;
- It has one of the longest coastlines in the world, yet it is only 3.5 miles wide at its narrowest point;
- Norway has 1/1000<sup>th</sup> of the world's population and 1/10<sup>th</sup> of the world's shipping (the 5<sup>th</sup> largest fleet in the world);
- 41% of all adults are members of a trade union;
- The first UN General Secretary was a Norwegian (Trygve Lie);
- It has the highest female employment rate in Europe (74% of all adult females);
- It has the world's longest road tunnel (24.5km);
- Norway's only Oscar was won by the documentary of Thor Heyerdal's Balsa raft crossing of the Pacific Ocean
- 99% of electricity generated in Norway is produced hydro-electrically;
- Norway topped the 2004 UN survey of Human Development in the following areas: life expectancy, access to tertiary education and average income. It came at the bottom of the list that measured the openness of its trade with developing countries.
- Apart from Iceland, Norway is the most sparsely populated country in Europe;



Exploration of oil and gas initially started outside the south-western coast of Norway and has gradually expanded northwards. As a part of its overall strategy for management of natural resources, Norway has recently submitted its claim to the UN commission on the limits of the continental shelf for delimitation of its continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles. Such delimitation is vital for a coastal state's right to exploit the resources on its continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles.

To reduce over heating of the economy from oil money and the uncertainty from oil income volatility and to save money for future generations the Norwegian government started in 1995 to save petroleum income in a sovereign wealth fund, often referred to as "the oil fund" (formally the Government Pension Fund – Global). The fund invests in developed financial markets outside Norway. During the first half of 2007 the fund became the largest fund in Europe, with assets totalling about USD 300 billion, equivalent over USD 62000 per capita. It is currently the second largest state-owned sovereign wealth fund in the world, second only to the sovereign wealth fund of Abu Dhabi. As such, the Norwegian state has savings equivalent to one year's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The investment choices of the Pension Fund are guided by ethical guidelines that exclude a number of investment options.

Congratulations on the 194<sup>th</sup> Norwegian Constitution Day.

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