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Menon, Vijay

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Welcome Address

By

Vijay Menon

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SEMINAR ON "THE INFORMATION REVOLUTION IN ASIA"
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 21-23, 1986
WELCOME ADDRESS BY VIJAY MENON
SECRETARY-GENERAL, AMIC

Hon. Minister, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you, on behalf of all of us at AMIC, to this seminar on 'The Communication Revolution in Asia', possibly, the very first time we have organised a seminar in New Delhi.

The Asian landscape is vast, with about a third of the earth's surface and over half the population. Yet, today, it consists largely of developing countries. The writing brush, paper and printing were all invented in Asia. Even movable metal type was used in Korea at least 200 years before Gutenberg. However, as scholars have pointed out, while Asia invented the tools, it was Europe that developed these inventions and brought them back to Asia.

Today, when we compare Asia with North America, for instance, we see the enormity of the social and economic gap that has to be bridged. Asian life expectancy at birth is 58 years compared with 74 in North America; infant mortality is 91 per 1000 births compared with 12; the birth rate per thousand population is 30 against 16; Adult literacy is 67% as against 99% and the per capita GNP is US\$920 against US\$11,240. The picture would be bleaker if we were to leave out the the more advanced Asian countries.

But there is cause for hope. As a President of the World Bank pointed out, despite gloomy predictions, in the quarter century from 1955 to 1980, many developing economies grew more rapidly than the industrial ones, with incomes rising faster than population. Industrial bases expanded; agricultural output grew at historically high rates; education systems were rapidly developed and literacy rates rose. Health and nutrition systems also improved.

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However, there is much concern in many Asian countries today about the future, concern at the accelerating rate of innovation in the means of communication and the discernible shift in the West, from traditional industry to information and services to capitalise on what is variously referred to as the emergence of the post-industrial society, the information age, the second industrial revolution or the Third Wave.

The convergence of communicating and computing is undoubtedly the single most dramatic development of our times. The issues for Asia are many and profound: the prospects of long-term and severe structural unemployment, a new gap between the information rich and the information poor, the inadequacy of traditional education and changes in the workforce composition.

At the conclusion of a recent conference on Telecommunication, Information and Interdependent Economies in the year 2000, the Chairman had this to say,

'Information and communication technologies can have major beneficial effects on society and, like all major technical advances, are an integral part in the evolution of the economic and social systems of industrialised and industrialising nations. Just as technological change affects our political, economic, and social structures, so does technological change itself depend on the performance of our economy, on the functioning of our social systems, and, most important, on the capacity of our societies both to generate and to absorb new ideas.'

AMIC - the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre - is happy to co-sponsor this Seminar jointly with the Council for Social Development and the World Association for Christian Communication. It is one of over a dozen seminars and workshops we have organised this year, in different countries of Asia. And I must pay a special tribute to Mr. Neville Jayaweera and the WACC for supporting as many as five of our current year's programmes.

We are most grateful to you, Hon. Minister for inaugurating this seminar and to all of you, our distinguished guests, for giving us the pleasure and the encouragement of your presence. It is our hope that this Workshop will help to ensure that the direction signs are clear and correct for policy planners and decision makers grappling with the information revolution in Asia.

This is indeed what this seminar is all about - the capacity of our societies to generate and absorb new ideas.