

Seminar on Asian Values in Journalism Seminar  
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**Welcome Address**

**By**

**Vijay Menon**

SEMINAR ON  
“ASIAN VALUES IN JOURNALISM”

KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA, AUGUST 24 - 25, 1995.

WELCOME ADDRESS BY MR. VIJAY MENON, SECRETARY-GENERAL, AMIC

It gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you to this Seminar on “Asian Values in Journalism”, organized by AMIC, Malaysia and Singapore.

Seven years ago, in August 1988, AMIC and the Department of Information of Indonesia organized a Consultation in Jakarta on “Press Systems in ASEAN”. Three years later, in 1991, AMIC was able to organize a similar Consultation in Kathmandu on “Press Systems in SAARC”. Today, we are glad to bring together journalists and communication scholars from Asia and Australia, fourteen countries in all, to discuss Asian Values in Journalism.

At the Jakarta Consultation, the participants identified the primary functions of the ASEAN press as: supporting nation-building, political stability, national development and social justice; promoting regional cohesion; moulding national identity; promoting social harmony, explaining public issues; informing and educating; and exercising self-restraint in sensitive racial, ethnic and religious matters.

In a preamble to their report, the journalists asserted that the promotion and preservation of political stability, rapid economic growth, social justice and greater regional cohesion should and will be the main priority of the ASEAN press.

Not many Western journalists fully understand or appreciate the critical process of national building which is still underway in Asia.

The Australian journalist and academic, Neville Petersen, has summed up some of the essential differences in the Asian and Western perspectives. One side admits the presence of values, the other side does not. One tradition consciously pursues national goals, the other side does not accept this as an obligation.

Petersen points out that many Asian journalists and media commentators share the belief that journalists and their publications could be doing far more to bridge the gaps between different races and different faiths, that they should be mission-oriented, that they should have greater concern for the moral well-being of the public they serve, that they should not let political coverage take precedence over social and cultural issues, that they should be providing more feedback from, and should be showing more concern for, the basic needs of their readers. The libertarian theory of the West evolved in the last century in response to the social conditions and philosophies prevalent at that time. Neither the context nor the conditions are applicable to present-day Asia.

A search for a more positive approach to defining journalistic values and goals is warranted, perhaps on a regional basis, given the common ground that exists. A search for Asian values should not mean the total rejection of Western journalistic codes and conventions. It should mean the adoption of whatever is useful, taking into account Asian social contexts, cultural values and religious beliefs.

As Dr. Wimal Dissanayake of the East-West Center has said: "Culture is communication and communication is culture. Asian nations could not possibly have created such magnificent cultures if they had not subscribed to and nurtured certain distinct approaches to communication. Modern communication scholars, in both the East and the West, need to rediscover and re-examine these approaches, with a view to finding out how relevant they are to our concerns". This seminar is a step in that direction.



For the benefit of those who are unfamiliar with our organization, I would like to briefly explain that AMIC was established in 1971 in Singapore as a non-profit organization focussing on mass communication in the region. Although it began as a regional documentation centre, AMIC has expanded the scope of its activities to include publications, research, training and consultancy services.

What is most gratifying to us is the support that we are privileged to receive from within the region and outside. The Government of Singapore and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung of Germany have helped us since our inception. The governments of Indonesia, Bangladesh and Nepal have formal agreements of cooperation with us. And a number of institutions in Europe and America support our efforts to promote mass communication in Asia.

We are grateful to you, Honourable Minister, for joining us this morning to formally inaugurate this important seminar. Your presence and that of our many distinguished guests will be a source of encouragement and inspiration to all of us to work for the successful attainment of the seminar objectives. Our thanks also go to our keynote speaker, chairpersons, speakers and discussants — who have readily agreed to give us the benefit of their time and thoughts so that our meeting might be fruitful. A special word of thanks is due today to Sida of Sweden whose generous support has enabled us to make this a truly regional meeting. We would also like to acknowledge the encouragement, both moral and material, provided by the New Straits Times and other benefactors in Malaysia, and the efforts of the Organizing Committee headed by Encik Zainoor Sulaiman.

Once again, Honourable Minister, thank you for being with us this morning.

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