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JOURNALISTS' VIEWS OF DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES IN ASEAN COUNTRIES

Discussion leaders: Rosihan Anwar
Guy de Fontgalland

The discussion was aimed at bringing into focus what participants felt should be the development priorities in the Asean countries. They also attempted to find out whether there were any conflicts and to measure the extent of commonality of development problems in the region so that possible communication strategies might be evolved at national and regional levels. The analysis of problems and priorities by participants is essentially subjective, depending on the individual's perception, and does not necessarily constitute a clearly defined set of priorities for one or all Asean countries.

The following are the main priorities identified by participants. (They are not listed in a ranking order):

MALAYSIA

1. There is an imbalance in the distribution of the country's wealth. The Malays who constitute about 53 per cent of the population own less than 15 per cent of the country's wealth. The economic imbalance needs to be corrected. The government's corrective strategy aims to make Malays share 30 per cent of the country's wealth within the next 20 years.
2. A need to unite the various ethnic groups and instil a sense of nationhood. Unity among the races will make for political stability so vital for development.
3. In the nation's agricultural programmes, greater attention should be paid to small peasants and farmers in the rural areas. They should be provided with better health, education and transport facilities.
4. Media support should be given to FELDA (Federal Land Development Authority) -- where large tracts of rural land are brought under cultivation.
5. Efforts should be made to coordinate the development efforts of states such as Sabah, Sarawak and the East Coast states in Peninsular Malaysia.
6. Attention must be paid to the problems of youth. Measures should be adopted to combat youth's unemployment, drug abuse, etc.
7. Social problems brought about by urbanisation should be tackled on a planned basis.

INDONESIA

1. Agricultural development should be given top priority as most Indonesians live in rural areas.
2. Plans should be drawn up to effect an equitable distribution of national wealth.
3. Problems of unemployment, illiteracy, and rural poverty need to be solved.

PHILIPPINES

1. Agricultural production should be given priority but the emphasis should be on overall economic growth and productivity. Agriculture alone cannot bring about the desired economic growth.
2. Local administration is often found to be inadequate and incompetent, unable to cope with the demands of speedy economic growth. New blood must be pumped into local administration to make it effective.
3. Strategies must be evolved to bring about mass participation in development projects.
4. Provincial media must be made more relevant to the communities they serve. They are often unimaginative, content to carry information lifted from city newspapers to fill their pages. Radio too is not properly geared to meet the needs of the provincial communities.
5. Media should play a greater role in national integration. Problems of the Muslim minority, for example, should be studied more closely.

SINGAPORE

1. With the rapid urbanisation and industrialisation in Singapore, there is need to create new values among the people.
2. After the fall of Indochina, a gloomy picture had been painted by the international press about the security of the region. There is now a need to inject new confidence so as to create a favourable climate for foreign investment.
3. The attitude of young Singaporeans toward blue collar jobs must be changed. There is now a growing tendency among the young to seek white collar jobs and shun blue collar jobs. Western permissiveness must also be avoided.

THAILAND

The Thai participants felt that the priorities enumerated by the other participants were more or less the same for their country as well. However, from the viewpoint of the journalists, the highest priorities in Thailand were freedom, social justice and equality, the eradication of corruption and the participation by the masses in the government of Thailand. They also had to stir the people from complacency and apathy and inject more political consciousness into them. Such goals were pre-requisites for development in the country.