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THE CHANGING ASIAN MEDIA ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC SERVICE PROGRAMMING:

A KEYNOTE ADDRESS

by

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To be competitive, we need to develop our multimedia technology and services to spur greater advancement in fields such as education, industry, banking, medicine and other social endeavors. Multimedia is of current interest to the country and it is something in which we should be involved in.

Multimedia, the latest mode of electronic communication, is channel via a network capable of carrying voice, text, data, graphics and video to homes and offices.

Teleconferencing is an example of multimedia application that integrates existing means of communication into a system of interactive services from education, social services, banking and entertainment.

Multimedia is simply a combination of audio, video and computer applications in one perfect union - creating a brand new medium in communication technology. In simple form multimedia is the ability to transport voice, video, data and image information over communication media. It creates an environment of super fast connection to any kind of information, from movies to books, from news to business and shopping data, to everyone and anywhere.

The advancement in multimedia application has directly encouraged a paradigm shift to our communication related activities. We are adopting a new culture in our social interactions, a new approach to the way we look at our
Let us now take a look at the changing scenario in the world of broadcasting. Today more private radio and television stations are in operation. In Asia, for example, there are more than 800 radio stations and about 23 television stations. The number of public radio and televisions is definitely outnumbered by the commercial stations.

This is as a result of more liberal policies of the various governments in the region through corporatisation and privatisation in manufacturing, trade, communication and telecommunications.

The paradigm shift is in the usage of the latest in the state-of-the-art technology. High-capacity fiber optic transmission system is capable to transmit voice, video and data. This make possible among other things such applications as videoconferencing, computer telephony, video-on-demand and long distant learning.

The shift in radio and television broadcasting technology, is from terrestrial to cable and satellite broadcasting, and from analog to digital telecommunication.

With the aggressive development of the broadcasting technology, a new revolution exists on the electronic communication activities. We are witnessing technological innovations - the expanded use of radio and in particular television medium. The new reformation is the radical readjustment of radio and television networks usage as communication tools. A quantum leap from terrestrial to DBS, from analog to digital.

Satellite Broadcasting has come of age in Asia. Since the inception of INTELSAT in 1990, Direct Broadcast Satellite (DBS) has been the main agenda in the development of satellites and satellite delivered television programme activities in this region. By the end of 1995 there would be altogether 9 satellite operators serving South East Asia or Asia in particular. This multitude of TV channels beaming down from the sky identical of similar form of television programme patterns to a scattered and fragmented audience; varied in respect of beliefs and faiths, cultural and religious background. Audience demography are also of different ethnic and nationalities, political ideology and economic status. The impact of the media is encroaching right into the pulse of the society.

To an average Asian, these are the facilities that are hovering above them. The transition now is from scarcity to a greater abundance of broadcasting programmes: both TV and radio. Theirs is the marketplace. All wanted to be
allowed to prove their value in that marketplace. This would lead to global satellite network rivalry, for maximum advertising dollar earnings. But who is counting the tally?

Thus, the aggressive commercial exploration of the communication technology, by the superpowers of the media industry has resulted on the proliferation of the media-related industry throughout the world. That the change is in global society's needs that are influencing the present communication technological developments and global economic realities.

Broadcasting considerations therefore associated to audience demands, programme contents, consumer interests, advertising interests, the private stations network's corporate image, and the financial investments of the networks. One could anticipate that the broadcasting scenario in this region will definitely experience change. The change that is difficult to compete on equal terms, may bring possible treats to individual country's national culture and identity.

Since their programme carry social and moral values as well as commercial values, they are bound to have an impact on the local viewer. How does a nation guard against the influx of moral subversion, ghetto culture and unhealthy trendsetting brought in by the media?

So, developing countries should take great efforts to develop their media technologies, synergise their expertise to produce their own high-quality media programmes in order to sustain local values. We believe that a societal culture is influenced by its patterns of communication. For example, the extensive exposure of our youths to excessive violence, sensationalism and counter culture may very much bring about a negative impact on the socialization of Asian youth since the media has become one of the major socialization agents. We have been informed that ABU (ASIA-PACIFIC BROADCASTING UNION) has embarked on a plan to formulate a code of ethics that can assist global broadcasters in understanding the sensitivities and values of the Asian people. This is a realistic approach considering the fact that the onslaught of the present global broadcast is only the beginning of "regional intrusion" more of which is yet to come. Malaysian audience for example will be served by about 30 satellite channels by 1996.

Past creditable performance of the broadcasting media has sharpened the appetite of Asian for entertainments, news and information. It has increasing
demands for greater quality, diversity, and choice in TV programmes. Furthermore, the emergence of cable television, a spinoff from direct satellite broadcasts and interactive communications multimedia via the information superhighway is gaining inroad into our society.

We are seeing a rapid development of new communication technologies. The combination of computers and telecommunication technologies has brought about a revolutionary transformation in our media environment, to make possible the prompt transmission of a colossal amount of multiplex information.

The new media is changing the environment. It wets the population's appetite for satellite communications. The demand for a more information channels and entertainment programmes are growing by leaps and bound.

The development of broadcast technology is a process that never ends. The "television" will become the "telescreen" where a complete multimedia is received in every home. The screen will provide viewer with programmes at his or her commands. The combination of communication, information, entertainment, selling and buying through the telescreen will definitely change the viewership structure and lifestyles.

Although Public Broadcasting in Asia has emerged as a medium that can meet many of this growing demands, as a public broadcasting organisation, it has its constraints.

So the onslaught by foreign media through DBS and CABLE is the pertinent issues that we need to handle first. Because Asia has become the dumping ground of subversive ideology and unhealthy morality of the west.

To compete, Asian broadcasters should first recognise our potentials. Radio and television media has come a long way to this region. Most of us in our own national boundaries along the years, have developed a mass following. International media co-operation and networking among Asian broadcasters through ABU, AMIC and other Inter-Government bilateral agreements have resulted to many regional and subregional co-operations.

Two decades ago radio television media accepted as a medium of public information and entertainment. Radio and television have been the media to educate, to inform and to entertain. So broadcasting in Asia has not only been on the premise to inform, and educate the public, but also act as motivator similarly entertainer for all level of society. It can be said that Radio and Television media main functions are to advocate national integration of each
nation. It also broadcasts information that is in line with local government policies.

Now it has become a medium to transmit ideology and acted as a springboard for power-struggle for the highest placing in the global political and economic superpower positioning.

In Asia we are witnessing a radical change to some public broadcasting organisations through corporatisation or privatisation policy of individual governments. But the deregulation of broadcast media has encouraged the establishment of private broadcasting organisations. And with the emergence of the new media the changing role of media managements is that: Corporate Managers are replacing Media Professionals.

This has cause a big paradigm shift in global media function and entity. Therefore, there is the need for each nation to reposition its national radio and television networks

National Public or Private Broadcasting Organisations need to be reorganised and be responsible to its own national public. National Media Policy should be restudied and rewritten, which among other thing should incorporates national integrity, resilience, moral, cultural and ethical values.

Malaysia's National Development Policy for example, is with a vision - to become a fully developed country by the year 2020, i.e., in accordance with the nation's own mould, that:

"Malaysian should not be developed only in economic sense. It must be a nation that is fully developed along all the dimensions: economically, politically, socially, spiritually, psychologically, and culturally. We must be fully developed in terms of national unity and social cohesion. In terms of our economy, in terms of our social justice, political stability, system of government, quality of life, social and spiritual values, national pride and confidence..................

- Dr. Mahathir Mohammad
Prime Minister Malaysia.

Therefore the role of the Malaysian Media should be along the policy:
- to promote values that will revitalize nationalism, civic consciousness, and solidarity.
- to develop a Malaysian society that is fully aware all its potential (in science, technology, economy, education, culture, etc.) psychologically subservient to none, and respected by the people of other nations.
- to help establish a moral and ethical society, strong in religious and spiritual values.
- to help in the realization of a scientific and technologically innovative society.
- to help propagate a caring culture.
- to reflect national aspirations, conform to the principle of RUKUNEGERA, ISLAM and safeguard national security.

How best can these be implemented by the Malaysian Broadcasting Organizations both public and private in their programmes such as news and current affairs, educational and information (documentaries, capsules, social dramas etc.), in fulfilling their public service obligations, is yet to be seen.

In the environment where mega communications infrastructure exists there bound to be competitions and network rivalry i.e.
- competitions between public and private terrestrial radio & TV broadcasting.
- competition between terrestrial radio & TV broadcasting with cable and satellite radio & TV.
- competition between broadcasting media with multimedia information superhighway.

So there should be a reformation on the role and usage of public service programmes by the media for its continued viability. The traditional approaches to public service programme concepts, usage, and broadcast strategies may not be compatible with the general society's need, anymore.

One must realise that since a decade ago the broadcasting structure worldwide has changed, from broadcasting to general audience, to narrowcasting for specific group. The formulation of new broadcasting strategy, should be taking advantage the current trends of communication approaches:

1. Niche radio or television programmes scheduling for example focusing to specific group with specific needs. This is the current communication strategy and trends.
2. Narrowcasting to community level through radio, television and multimedia communication channels, is the best approach to
disseminate public service programmes, to all level of society.

3. Public services programming to take fullest advantage the abundance usage and approaches to multimedia communications.

4. The formulation of broadcasting strategy should be in line with audience needs, and conform with the value and inspiration of each society.

In conclusion, I believe that making appropriate new media policies are very important for the economic and social development of a nation. We must accept that the new media industry (especially information/telecommunication industry) is perceived as an essential element in the national economic development. There are a lot of factors we should consider, when we make new media policies, especially when public responsibility is to be given prominence.

Thank you.