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<td><strong>Author(s)</strong></td>
<td>Menon, Vijay</td>
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Welcome Address

By

Vijay Menon
Welcome to Singapore, to AMIC, and to this Seminar on "Constitutional Law, the Media and the Electoral Process in Asean". We have a distinguished roster of speakers; an equally impressive list of participants; a range of excellent, even exciting, topics — all the ingredients for an enjoyable and stimulating, four days.

Our Documentation Unit had helpfully prepared a list of our holdings on the three main elements that constitute our topic for this seminar. I could find no title that specifically focused on our topic. So, you would, in a sense, be engaged in a pioneering effort, at least as far as ASEAN is concerned. Not only pioneering, but also overdue. The power of the media has grown enormously in recent years with the advance of technology and literacy in Asean. It is necessary to study the constitutionality of this power and of the manner in which it is exercised in the context of the electoral process.

The countries of Asean, with one exception, can all be classified as newly independent; they also subscribe to the democratic values. But many of the policies, principles and practices, whether in the realm of constitutional law, media or the
electoral process are transplants and they need to be nurtured so that they become truly Asian, with an Asian flavour and deeply rooted in the Asian soil. While we can benefit from the experience of other countries and regions, we must reshape and refine that experience to suit the needs of our societies and people. And so our seminar topic assumes added importance.

Two American academics, writing presumably with academic objectivity, on the subject of Media Power Politics, have made a number of assertions concerning the media in the U.S. The effects of the media on politics, they believe, are both complex and contradictory. Media content socializes the majority of people into accepting the legitimacy of their country's political, economic and social system. But, at the same time, they inadvertently promote confusion, discontent and discord. They disrupt and defend the status quo, and often undermine the fitful efforts of ordinary citizens to participate in politics.1

But we are concerned today with Asean and the structures and practices in the region. While the constitutional frameworks may differ, the media and the prevailing electoral process show a remarkable similarity in terms of shared values.

The Prime Minister of Malaysia in an address to Asean journalists some time ago, expressed some pertinent sentiments. He said that "the media must be given freedom. But this freedom must be exercised with responsibility. They must be given the freedom to
express opinion freely, even the right to be wrong. But they must do so without prejudice and without malice... The media need to educate and themselves be educated with the rest of society, especially since their reach is so vast and their power so great".2

This seminar, hopefully, will contribute to that process.

Today's seminar is one of almost 20 that we will be holding this year. In addition, we have a number of activities relating to Documentation, Publications and Research. All these activities are made possible by the support we receive from the Government of Singapore and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung of the Federal Republic of Germany, besides a number of well-wishers and benefactors, such as The Asia Foundation, which has made today's seminar possible.

In the final analysis, the success of a seminar is what the participants make of it. We are grateful to all of you for being here with us today. We look forward to your active involvement and participation so that we can collectively derive the fullest benefit from these deliberations.

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References: