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

By

Vijay Menon
WELCOME ADDRESS BY MR VIJAY MENON, SECRETARY-GENERAL, ASIAN MASS
COMMUNICATION RESEARCH AND INFORMATION CENTRE (AMIC) AT THE
OPENING OF THE SEMINAR ON "CONSTITUTIONAL LAW, THE MEDIA AND THE
ELECTORAL PROCESS IN ASEAN", SINGAPORE, APRIL 18-20, 1990

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

- contd. -
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.

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:
