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Speech

By

Alain Modoux
Honorable Minister for Finance,
Mr. Secretary-general of AMIC,
Excellencies,
Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It has been 22 years since the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre, AMIC, was established. For both of us, AMIC and UNESCO, this represents 22 years of friendly and fruitful cooperation. From the very founding of AMIC, our two organizations have been closely associated in research, publications and seminars. We have appreciated particularly the work done on the Mahaweli Community Radio in Sri Lanka, where AMIC not only undertook the field work with Sri Lankan partners and led the evaluation seminar in 1987, but also published an overall account of the project together with several other relevant chapters. In this way, AMIC has brought one country's experiments in community radio to the level of regional importance, and potential application to other countries. I congratulate AMIC on this work.

AMIC has also cooperated closely with UNESCO in the organization of communication research and documentation centres in the region, grouped under the aegis, ASIACOMNET. AMIC has worked towards harmonizing data collection, processing and transfer using the UNESCO software Micro-CDS-ISIS. Of all the regional COMNETs, ASIACOMNET is the most active and the most advanced, and we all look forward to further work in this area with the support of the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC). And many other communication research centres would like to benefit from the experiences of AMIC and learn the ropes for establishing dynamic programmes for research, documentation and analysis of media in their regions.

Right at this moment, my other colleagues are discussing the organization of the world COMNET at the meeting of the
International Association of Mass Communication Research (IAMCR) in Dublin. And I trust the overall coordination of COMNET shall be organized and it will work well, if we can count on regional COMNETs like yours.

The future too opens several possibilities for cooperation, particularly for developing and strengthening the operations of Asian press institutes, under a regional project where AMIC's expertise will certainly be a major contributing factor. I would also envisage the need for further work on press technology as all Asia is in the flux towards new communication technologies.

But to lead more systematically into the themes of the seminar, I wish to raise today some issues in which the Asian region and UNESCO share a common interest:

The impact of the new technologies

Most of the Asian countries have entered into the information technology age. This creates new business opportunities in services, for example financial and banking services, marketing, travel services, data communications, accounting and so on. Paradoxically, the new technologies of broadcasting seem to cause a real concern among the leaders of some countries who are taking a rather conservative approach to "direct satellite broadcasting" (DSB) and the related technologies. In other Asian countries, however, there is a steady and free flow of images from these Western TV companies flooding the TV sets in homes through satellite dishes. The recent inception and operation of STAR TV in Hong Kong might accelerate the changes in the whole region. Hooking itself to the satellite technology and the dish antenna, STAR TV is the first broadcasting company in Asia to aggressively market satellite programming to continent-wide audiences. These new media will force change on the communication industry, in particular on the newspaper industry which will have to fight hard throughout Asia to keep its share of the advertising pie.

Asia will also witness a spate of satellite launches by countries within the region. Indonesia has already had its own satellite for sometime, Palapa, which is the success story of satellite technology in rural development in Asia. It has
contributed to national integration through the learning of the national language, Bahasa Indonesia, especially among those with little or no schooling. Palapa satellite television has also enhanced higher education by linking a dozen new universities in the Indonesian archipelago. I understand that Thailand hopes to launch its own satellite this year, while Malaysia has signed an agreement of understanding with Arianespace to build one, possibly two, satellites of its own, and hopes to launch in 1994.

Amidst all these, there is also news about the improvement in antenna technology which will give further nightmares to policy-makers. Technology itself will challenge and overcome much of government regulation by putting the choice in the hands of the consumers directly. With more and more countries allowing themselves to be dictated by international and domestic prices in the economic arena, it will not be long, in my opinion, when the forces exert pressure on the broadcasting services which by the governments' own policy choices in the past have been allowed to become commercial commodities. It may not be practical for governments to ban the use of satellite dishes in the next years, because technology will make these smaller and more difficult to detect. Societies are also maturing and selecting themselves what they wish to see, and what they wish their children to see on television. With technology outpacing restrictive legislation, censorship in its conventional form is becoming practically obsolete.

This being said, several Asian countries are concerned with the need to preserve their culture, their values and their national identity. This is a legitimate concern which is shared by many countries around the world, in particular by the "old" democracies in Western Europe. Should one like it or not, the "globalisation" of our broadcasting environment has become a reality. As O.P. Khushu, Director of the Technical Department of ABU rightly put it in an article published in the latest issue of MEDIA ASIA:

"Audiences have little concern for who is providing a service or how it is delivered, and have no predetermined commitments to particular service providers. They want quality and variety and are ever willing to migrate to new service providers who offer these. The situation urges radical policy
"changes that might enable national broadcasters to "face the competitive threat. Their strength comes "from operating in home territory and hence a better "capability to produce programming of particular "value to local audiences. This is clearly not "enough, and needs to be coupled with a determined "effort to match the reach, quality, and choice "offered by international service providers. But this "requires new resources and capabilities. Satellite "technology is one such resource that can enable them "to find innovative and cost-effective answers to the "difficult problems facing them."

Therefore I am deeply convinced that under the pressures of economic forces and in the face of the reality of new communication technologies, more and more Asian countries will become more open societies, where the free flow of information will serve as the catalyst of economic and social development. Economic growth will make their current political system increasingly impracticable. Integration into the production system of the world, where competition is merciless, brings about unrelentingly new challenges in the field of human resource development. Innovation and creativity, in other words, individual initiative, are stimulated by international competitiveness. As Kim Young Sam, the newly elected President of the Republic of Korea put it in an interview published this week in the Far Eastern Economic Review: "Realisation of a just society is essential for economic development; democracy is an essential ingredient for economic development. Democracy and economy are two wheels moving together pulling the cart."

The as yet subtle social and political changes that are taking place in several Asian countries are leading policymakers to move towards a more liberal attitude to the press and to re-think their media legislation accordingly. This is the case of Mongolia, but it is also happening in Nepal where a new National Communication Policy has opened the way for experimental privately operated FM stations, TV production by non-governmental organizations and individuals, and more openness with the printed press. Kazakhstan, a newly independent state situated in Central Asia, which was formerly
part of Soviet Union, has called upon UNESCO expertise to transform its out-dated media regulations into a legislation meeting the requirements of a democratic society.

To cope adequately with the new and constantly changing situation, competences are required in research and analysis to grasp these changes and see where individuals, groups and countries should orient their endeavours. And for this, AMIC has already established its record in the region. Just to mention one of its very topical activities, I was particularly interested in the seminar which AMIC organized five months ago in Singapore, with IPDC support, on "The social and cultural impact of satellite broadcasting in Asia". Its recommendations deserve serious consideration, especially its proposal that a "Pan-Asian public broadcasting satellite TV channel" be set up to foster educational and cultural programmes adapted to the needs of the region.

UNESCO "New Communication Strategy"

As for UNESCO, the fundamental principles of freedom of the press coupled with the will and the resources to develop communication infrastructures that are geared to catalyzing development, are the heart of its "New Communication Strategy", the basic philosophy and underpinning of all its work in Asia and in the world in general.

Adopted in November 1989 by the 25th General Conference of UNESCO the so-called "New Communication Strategy" is aiming at better and more efficiently meeting the present challenges of humanity at a moment when profound changes are taking place. The democratic processes which are developing in many parts of the world led UNESCO to rapidly adapt itself to these new realities and to demonstrate its capacity to fulfill some of the immense needs these changes have engendered in the communication field, be it in concretely assisting the newly-independent media, in promoting the fundamental principle of the freedom of the press or in contributing to the transformation of national media legislations into democratic regulations.
The United Nations General Assembly, on 11 December 1990, adopted by consensus Resolution 45/76A which is in accord with UNESCO's "New Communication Strategy".

I wish to stress in this regard the exemplary cooperation between the Department of Public Information of the United Nations and UNESCO in jointly organising the Windhoek and Alma Ata seminars. Our cooperation helped to make these two important meetings a turning point in the international debate on communication. This friendly and fruitful cooperation will continue in setting up the third regional seminar, which will take place in April 94, in Santiago, Chile.

The Windhoek Declaration of 3 May 1991 is seen today as the reference text bridging media professionals from North and South, East and West. Its endorsement by the 26th General Conference of UNESCO in November 1991, at the initiative of the African Group, granted it the moral support of the international community. In February 1992, the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) decided to modify its own rules to suit the Windhoek Declaration's principles. It stressed that "the orientation of IPDC in favour of freedom of the press, pluralism and independence of the media should become a priority concern". Henceforth the IPDC accepts projects emanating from the private sector and gives them the priority when competing with those of the public sector, should they come from the same country.

This being said, even though we may be very pleased with this evolution, I consider it necessary to share with you some of UNESCO's present major matters of concern.

1. In most of new democracies the situation of independent media is still very precarious:

   a) the economic viability of these new media is very much depending on the situation of the national economies which are, in most cases, in a disastrous state;

   b) the lack of professional experience in particular in the field of media management, out of date printing equipment, the non-existence of efficient channels of
distribution, the shortage of newsprint, prohibitive taxes on the sale of newspapers, etc. very often represent insurmountable obstacles;

c) in general, the national media legislations are not adapted to the new democratic principles prevailing at the political level; therefore the temptation is great for the new political leaders, who, before acceding to power, claimed their attachment to the fundamental freedoms, to make use of the old legislations to limit the freedom of the press and to take control of the electronic media, which in many countries, remain state monopolies.

Should these problems not be rapidly tackled with the assistance of the international community, there is a great risk of seeing the new democracies drifting back into some forms of authoritarian attitudes towards the media.

2. In most of the developing countries and in the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe, the involvement of the "civil society" or, in other words, of the people at the grassroot-level, in the communication process is the prerequisite for any social and economic sustainable development. Communication, participation and development form part of a continuum.

The struggle against poverty, the fight against AIDS, the preservation of the environment, the promotion of human rights and of a culture of peace, the education for all, all these great and noble causes for which the international community is mobilizing its human, intellectual and financial resources, will remain idle words if the people directly concerned in the villages, in the rice fields, in the valleys, in the suburbs of the megalopolis, do not themselves consider these causes as their own. Therefore they should be given the means and the skills to participate in the communication process, in order to voice their opinions and aspirations through their own mass media or, at least, through media with which they can identify. The "International Programme for the Development of Communication" (IPDC) was precisely created to help those who have little or no access to the communication process, both at the national and international levels.

UNESCO, which is today totally committed to ensuring not
"artists, writers and journalists all working in or working toward a culture of democracy, a culture of civility.

"That democratic culture will have to evolve within the larger culture; the esthetics and the tastes of those who will make that democracy work in their everyday life. Democracy, as the main ingredient of daily life, as a force for equity and solidarity is not merely given; it is happening and being achieved every day by every citizen.

I thank you for your attention.

Alain Modoux
Director, Communication Division
UNESCO
Paris, France
Inaugural Address

By

YB Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim
INAUGURAL SPEECH
BY ANWAR IBRAHIM
MINISTER OF FINANCE MALAYSIA
AT THE CONFERENCE ON COMMUNICATION, TECHNOLOGY
AND DEVELOPMENT: ALTERNATIVES FOR ASIA
KUALA LUMPUR, JUNE 25 1993

I congratulate the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre and the New Straits Times for their collaboration to address such a far reaching subject. One can admire the initiative of the organizers seeking to explore alternatives to the present information order. Coming from established mass communication and media organizations such boldness is even more commendable.

For decades, information technology has been accepted as value-free. If it was judged, it was purely from a utilitarian perspective. Information technology has contributed immensely in transforming Asian societies into what we are today. Not only are we more prosperous and independent but also more open and dynamic.

Nevertheless, no matter how successful we are in harnessing information technology for development, the process cannot go without critical evaluation. A conscious effort to explore alternatives is now profoundly felt as Asia emerges as the crucible of economic growth. Not only is Asia more prosperous now, but in the realm of ideas that success story has demolished the proposition that there is only one path to development, that is the path trodden by the Atlantic societies. As the global society is
inhabited by many cultures, likewise we must accept as fait accompli that development is also pluralistic. This is essential, because in development our quest for prosperity and material comfort will interact with our values and norms. Conflicts and tensions will invariably surface whose solutions require us to summon age old societal wisdom as well as new experiences. Thus the question of imitating others, advocated by some of the best mind of the developing societies, has become irrelevant. Our societies now have the confidence in their own positive values and traditions that will provide the guiding ideas for further development.

In our eagerness to explore new alternatives, we should not fall into an equally fallacious position, viewing ideas and values from non-Asian societies as harmful and irrelevant to our development. Neither should we react to superficial views from across the ocean, that a war of civilizations is looming across the horizon. Such a position, expressed for example by Samuel Huntington of Harvard University, only strengthen the belief of some that the Atlantic civilization initiated by Columbus has only a limited ability to deal with the realities of a multicultural world.

It is our conviction that, for us in Asia, our quest for continued prosperity does not only call for development that is sustainable but also a reinvigoration in the cultural sphere. Asia needs to achieve material prosperity, with a re-flowering of culture at the same time. This will contribute to the heritage of
mankind in the same way we have seen the West, since its ascendancy in the 16th century, produced some of the most remarkable cultural achievements in human history.

Among a gathering of media experts and practitioners, one need not have to labour on the crucial role of mass communication in the transmission of values and culture. The mass media does not carry information innocently. It is the most powerful agent of cultural transmission. Thus when one seeks an alternative to the present information or communication order, it is because of the fact that the real dispute is about a whole range of issues involving values and culture transmitted via the media to a mass audience.

Since the publication of the McBride Report, we have realized the reality of the imbalance of information flow. One can appreciate the strong contention by some quarters that the information revolution, which had shrunk the world into a global village, could also result in the erosion of cultural plurality, leading to sterile uniformity and conformity on a global scale. Extreme this proposition may sound, a global communication audit would actually reveal that more people are being barraged by the same images, fed the same information, and drilled by the same opinions than ever before in human history. Fortunately for us in this part of the world, we have been able to resist the tendency towards uniformity because of the basic strength of our values and cultural heritage. In this respect, the indigenous media provide a potent counter movement against globalized conformity.
We seek alternatives because of our desire for greater freedom, to liberate ourselves from the limitations inherent in the structuring of the present global information order. The search is not and must not become a means to perpetuate the tyranny of a ruling minority upon the ignorant masses. An alternative information order must not be a cover up for corruption, decadence and misrule. It must not be the channel for narrow vested interests or ideological posturings.

It should be quite obvious why previous efforts to reform the global information order met with failure. We should not bemoan the fact that the West seems to be impervious to the cultural output and information originating from Asia when our own societies are equally impenetrable to the works of our fellow Asians. Indeed there are actually more barriers to the information flow across Asian borders than between Asia and the West. There is less candour and honesty, at least as far as the media is concerned, in the relationship between neighbouring Asian societies.

We must not be afraid of information. If we seriously want to pursue an alternative to the present information order, we must be more tolerant of the diversity of opinions and views within and across our own borders. If we can liberalize trade barriers and promote the flow of goods and capital across the region, one sees no reason why a similar liberalization could not be extended in the domain of ideas and information. We must see
this as part and parcel of the process towards regional integra-
tion. After all, economics and information are so intimately
related that one cannot really envisage a separation between the
two.

The global network of the present information and communica-
tions system is by and large a function of global economic ar-
rangements. As the centres of the world economy shift, so will
the centres of the information network relocate. Thus we are
confident that the present imbalance can be corrected with the
growing strength of our economies. In the near future we can
happily see a balanced flow and interdependence in the realm of
information and ideas on a global scale. Only such a state of
affairs can truly reflect the multicultural realities of the
world.

It would be highly desirable if the impending transformation
of the regional information order could be achieved through the
willing collaboration of all our partners in the region. We
believe that the growing maturity, openness and sense of con-
fidence among Asian societies will enable us to forge viable
alternatives to the present order. We must work collectively, not
to suppress information or to excuse our failings, but to see to
it that our values, opinions, cultures and history become in-
tegrated into the mediums of communication.

The pace of the revolution in communication technology will
accelerate in the years to come. It will involve not only the
medium but also the content itself. In the famous words of Marshall McLuhan, "The medium is the message." Inevitably, our lifestyles and even values will be subject to pressures and transformation resulting from the rapid pace of technological developments. We must not be swept along in the impending tide of change. Rather we want to be able to respond creatively and purposefully to direct its path to our advantage. It requires no less than a genuine commitment to our societal ideals, as well as being a supreme challenge to our intelligence and ingenuity. In the final analysis, the communication order that we seek must not only expand our mental horizons, increase the range of our choices, facilitate our decisions, it must also enrich our cultural experience and enlarge our freedom.

It now gives me great pleasure to declare this conference opened.

Thank you.