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ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMICS
WORKSHOP FOR JOURNALISTS

Appendix TWO

WELCOME ADDRESS

By Mr. Vijay Menon
Welcome Address by Vijay Menon, Secretary-General, AMIC

It gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you to this workshop on Economics and the Environment. We at AMIC or, to use our full name, the Asian Media Information and Communication Centre, are happy to partner The Economy and Environment Programme for Southeast Asia (EEPSEA), in organizing this important programme.

A little over five years ago, a report in Newsweek (5-9-94) began as follows: From Shanghai to Jakarta, from Bombay to Taipei, fortunes are being made with every passing year and growth rates leap ever upward. But there is another side to Asia's economic 'miracle'. More than half the inhabitants of the region's cities live in disease-ridden slums, gasping in some of the most polluted air on the planet. Hundreds of workers are incinerated in factory fires from Bangkok to Shenzhen. Generations of families subsist by picking through reeking garbage in Manila. Across the region, traffic grinding to a halt. Drinking water is fouled by untreated sewage. Farmland is devoured by construction. Developers smash their way through ancient cities and buildings. This is the price the city folk of Asia's 'tigers' are paying to live where they are today. And with the populations of many Asian cities doubling every 10 to 15 years, things can only get worse.

That was a graphic, but not untruthful, description of the environmental degradation accompanying 'development' in most of Asia. And the prediction has come true. Things have got worse. Much worse. And that is what makes this workshop so important. Drift means disaster. In the developing countries of Asia, where environmental protection must compete with a host of other urgent and compelling needs for meagre financial resources, environmental economics has a crucial role to play.

The fact is that there has been a consumption explosion in the world in the past century. It is estimated that private and public consumption expenditures reached $24 trillion in 1998, twice the level of 1975 and six times the level of 1950. In 1900, real consumption expenditure was barely $1.5 trillion.

But the inequalities of consumption are glaring. Consumption per capita has increased steadily in the industrialized countries over the past 25 years (about 2.3 per cent annually) and spectacularly in East Asia (6.1 per cent). Yet the poorest 20 per cent of the world population are deprived of basic consumption needs. Of the 4.4 billion people in developing countries, nearly three-fifth lack basic sanitation. Almost a third have no access to clean water. A quarter do not have adequate housing. A fifth have no access to modern health services.* But they do have their aspirations. While these must be fulfilled they must also be properly channeled if calamity is to be averted. Sustainable development calls for sustained effort, by the media no less than by policy makers.
In the six years since its founding, EEPSEA has established a commendable track record through its programmes of training and research, its meetings and grants. AMIC is glad to partner EEPSEA in organizing this workshop.

For the benefit of those unfamiliar with AMIC, I would like to briefly explain that we are a non-profit organization which seeks to foster an exchange of ideas, information and experience, and to aid in the development of skills, so that the potential of communication for socio-economic development is realized in the region. AMIC was founded in 1971 with the support of the Government of Singapore and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation of Germany.

For over 19 years, AMIC has been actively engaged in promoting environmental awareness through a programme of seminars and workshops, research studies and publications. We are associated with several regional and international environmental bodies, such as the South and Southeast Asian Environmental Network (SASEANEE), the Asian Federation of Environmental Journalists (AFEJ) and the World Conservation Union (IUCN). What is particularly gratifying to us is the support we are privileged to receive from institutions and individuals in the region and outside. We are particularly grateful to the Dean and faculty of the School of Communication Studies, Nanyang Technological University, and to Rufus Bellamy of Bellamy Communications for their invaluable assistance to this workshop.

Once again, I would like to say how happy we dare to welcome you to this workshop and I would urge you to make the fullest use of this opportunity. The success of this workshop will be measured not only by the degree of your interest and involvement but, more importantly, by your work after the workshop. We would request you to ensure that the knowledge and insights gained are shared with your colleagues and benefit the region.

* Business India, September 21 - October 4, 1998