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Speech

By

Leo Michael Toyad
Speech of Dr. Leo Michael Toyad, Deputy Minister of Education at the Opening of the Seminar on "Communication Education and the Needs of the Media" held in Kuala Lumpur, September 29 - October 1, 1994.

Distinguished participants,
Ladies and gentlemen.

It is indeed my great pleasure to welcome you to Kuala Lumpur and the opening of this seminar of "Education Communication And The Needs Of The Media" organised by the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre or AMIC.

This seminar deals with a very timely and relevant topic. The communication industry and environment in Malaysia is undergoing rapid changes as a result of changes and developments in the regional and global communication environment.

This is especially so when the Malaysian public will soon be able to receive television programmes from almost all satellite network and cable stations. This invasion from the sky will pose a greater challenge to media planners and practitioners to ensure that the Malaysian public are adequately prepared and protected.

New communication technologies are changing the way we live and work. News and information can now be received through computer linkage on-line or dialled-up. Subscribers are now demanding for more up-dated news and real-time financial information. These changes are profoundly affecting the print and broadcasting sector in Malaysia.

Faced with increasing competition from various media outlets and channels, media organisations must be able to adapt to these rapid changes. These would require openness to new ideas, new skills and new ways of doing things.

Human resource development plays a key role in this process. Ultimately an organisation’s best resource is its people. True to the old adage, investing in good people is the best investment an organisation can make, and this applies even more in media organisations.

However, the training of personnel, while an important function in any organisation, actually begins in the early period of formal education. The basic foundations are set in school.

Our educational system therefore, has a very important role in preparing to provide the media industry with the necessary personnel appropriately trained, groomed and equipped to face the challenges in the ever changing media field.
Communication Education, in order to be relevant must be able to respond to the needs of the media industry. This should be the main objective of communication education.

Within our own Malaysian context we have seen that technological breakthrough in the last decade, which sees the emergence of various sophisticated communication techniques, has made our country totally exposed to foreign media bombardment which may not necessarily be all bad.

Nevertheless, experience in many countries, including our own country, shows that the cultural invasion brought by the western media has corrupted many aspects of our time-honoured traditional values, notably among the younger generations.

It is not our intention to shield ourselves completely from the foreign media because they are also useful and instrumental in bringing to us latest information on what goes on around us and elsewhere.

What we want is to sieve out the bad elements, especially those which pollute our culture and way of life, the decadent culture based on the so-called individual freedom and rights, which erode our own values and norms, insult our religions and beliefs, and destroy the very foundation of our family blocks.

No, I am not proposing a blanket censorship on foreign media output for it would be an exercise in futility. Neither am I suggesting that we put a blinker on our own people.

Having said that I must quickly point out that there is a need, however to protect our own society from external decadent culture. The new technologies that have changed our world into what communication experts termed as "Global Village" are here to stay. There is nothing we can do about that.

But we can immunise ourselves, especially our younger generation, from the unwanted influence through communication education. This I think, should be our approach.

All this while, when we talked about communication education we are referring to the need to provide appropriate training and professional grooming for our future communication experts: The Media Workers.

This, no doubt is a correct approach and is being done by our many institutions of higher learnings. But what I mean by immunising our people from external bad influence is to start educating our youngsters from tender age when they are still in school, on the finer points of communication - as sources as well as receivers.

I feel it is worth pondering to see whether communication can be made a subject in secondary and high schools to impart proper knowledge to them so that they will not only become good communicators but also better judges of foreign inputs coming their ways either of their own choice or forced upon them.
I believe the ability to evaluate information learned from a young age will make them better communicators, even if they don’t choose to become media workers in later life.

As for the future media workers the lesson learned will be of great value in pursuing further education in that field. We are churning hundreds of communication graduates yearly and yet the country is still short of media workers.

We need more. But more than that, we need media workers who are capable of selecting and utilising fully, information that is not only relevant but also specially tailored to the need of the country and in line with our norms and values.

The need for this cannot be over-emphasized when we take into account how often we are forced to see things not our way and not in line with our views and thinking, but from the viewpoint of the source be they the western countries or other foreign interests.

I hope this suggestion merits some thought as you deliberate the subject of communication education which is the core-issue of this seminar.

This seminar, I believe, will provide an opportunity for educators and the media people to exchange views and establish contacts that will form an effective partnerships to develop a strong human resource-based media in Malaysia.

Communication experts should reasses and examine their present curriculum and programmes in this field to see how relevant and effective they are to the present needs.

Media representatives at this seminar can play a very supportive albeit important part in providing feedback and making known their projections for current and future human resource needs.

Finally, I would like to emphasize the need for orging closer co-operation and consultation between communication educators and the media. Let this seminar be a bridge for closer co-operation between you.

Dengan kata-i-ta ini saya dengan sukacitanya erasmikan “Seminar Pendidikan Komunikasi Dan Keperluan Media”.

Terima Kasih,