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Speech

By

Awang Had Salleh
SEMINAR: MASS MEDIA & SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGE

21 & 22ND OCTOBER, 1978

SPEECH BY

PROF. DATO' DR. AMANG HAD SALLEH
DIRECTOR,
MARA, INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY.
YANG BERHORMAT DATUK MOHAMAD RAHMAT, MINISTER OF INFORMATION
MALAYSIA, HONOURABLE GUESTS, DISTINGUISHED MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES
FROM ASEAN COUNTRIES, OUR OWN DISTINGUISHED MEDIA PRACTITIONERS,
COMMUNICATORS AND STUDENTS OF MASS COMMUNICATIONS, LADIES AND
GENTLEMEN.

I AM GREATLY HONoured TO HAVE BEEN ASKED TO SAY A FEW WORDS OF
INTRODUCTION TO THIS ASEAN REGIONAL SEMINAR ATTENDED BY PEOPLE WHOSE
PROFESSION DEMANDS THAT IT REFLECTS ITS SOCIETY CORRECTLY AND WITH
DIGNITY, BECAUSE IN REFLECTING THE SOCIETY THE PROFESSION MANIFESTS
ITS OWN REFLECTION.

I MUST SAY AT THE OUTSET, THAT I AM MERELY A LAY MEMBER AMONG THE
LEARNED COMMUNITY OF THE MASS MEDIA PRESENT AT THIS MORNING'S GATHERING,
BUT BEING A STUDENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND A PRACTITIONER AND THINKER IN
EDUCATION, I HAVE COME TO VIEW THE FUNCTION AND ROLES OF MASS MEDIA AS
CRUCIAL IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SOCIETY, ESPECIALLY A SOCIETY LIKE OURS
IN MALAYSIA WHICH IS UNDERGOING DELIBERATE SOCIALIZATION AND RESTRUCTURING
PROCESS IN EFFORTS TO BUILD A NEW NATION.

THE GROWTH OF THE MASS MEDIA IN MALAYSIA OVER THE PAST DECADE
HAS NOT ONLY BEEN RAPID BUT CERTAINLY UNIQUE IN CHARACTER. RAPID,
BECAUSE WE HAVE BEEN CAUGHT UP WITH THE REST OF THE WORLD IN A
MASS COMMUNICATION REVOLUTION; A REVOLUTION OF RISING EXPECTATIONS.
AND UNIQUE BECAUSE OF OUR OWN VERY SPECIAL NATIONAL NEED FOR SOCIAL
INTEGRATION.
WE AND OUR NEIGHBOURS IN ASEAN HAVE BEEN ADOPTING CHANGE IN THE NAME OF PROGRESS. PROGRESS HAS COME TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH ECONOMIC MATERIAL ADVANCEMENT, AND THE SUREST PATH TO PERSONAL SECURITY AND OPPORTUNITY LIES IN THE MODERNISATION OF OUR RESPECTIVE COUNTRIES. ALONGSIDE THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, WE IN MALAYSIA HAVE PLACED A HIGH PRIORITY ON THE SOCIAL CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT AS WELL. THESE TWO DIMENSIONS OF THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT MAY SOMETIMES BE SEEN AS CONFLICTING, AS A RESULT OF FAILURE ON THE PART OF SOME TO APPRECIATE THE RATIONALE BEHIND THOSE DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES. IT IS HERE THAT WE FEEL THAT THERE IS A NEED FOR CONSTRUCTIVE MASS COMMUNICATION TO PLAY ITS CREATIVE ROLE, CORRECTLY AND APPROPRIATELY.

A STRIKING EXAMPLE IN MALAYSIA IS THE WAY IN WHICH THE NEW ECONOMIC POLICY HAS BEEN SUPPORTED AND HIGHLIGHTED BY THE MEDIA, BOTH GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE. AND WE NOTE THAT DISSEMINATING INFORMATION AND REPORTING ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICY ARE BEING GIVEN TOP-LEVEL PRIORITY.

I BELIEVE THAT MASS MEDIA CAN HELP CREATE OR FOSTER THE RIGHT SOCIAL CLIMATE WITHOUT WHICH MODERNISATION IS DIFFICULT THOUGH NOT VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE. SUCH CLIMATE MUST BE CONducIVE TO SOCIAL CHANGE AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, WHICH IN MOST CASES CONSTITUTE A DEPARTURE FROM CONVENTIONAL AND TRADITIONAL APPROACHES.
THE DESIRE FOR A BETTER LOT IN LIFE IN ALL ASPECTS WAS NEVER MORE EVIDENT AND KEENLY FELT THAN AFTER THE TRAUMATIC OCCURRENCE OF THE 1969 RIOTS. IT WAS A LESSON WELL-LEARNED. OUT OF IT GREW THE MALAYSIAN RESOLUTION TO MAKE NATIONAL UNITY THE OVER-RIDING OBJECTIVE OF THE COUNTRY. THE MEDIA RESPONDED TO THE CUES BY VERY RIGHTLY PLACING EMPHASIS ON SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND MORE EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF INCOME AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR HARMONY AND PROGRESS. WE SEE THIS REFLECTED VERY MUCH IN THE THEMES, THE SUBJECT MATTER OR CONTENT, IN THE DIFFERENT MEDIA PRESENTATIONS.

THERE IS A NEED TO DISTINGUISH AND SEPARATE NEWS FROM OPINION. CRITICISM AND OPINIONS THAT HAVE TO BE VOICED SHOULD BE CONFINED TO EDITORIALS AND COMMENTARIES. THOSE WHO CONTROL THE MEDIA AS WELL AS THOSE OF US WHO ARE CONSUMERS OF MEDIA WOULD AGREE THAT TRUTH AND ACCURACY ARE THE HALL MARK OF CONSTRUCTIVE COMMUNICATION. HOWEVER, IN THE CONTEXT OF MALAYSIA'S MULTIRACIAL SITUATION, REPORTING OR REVELATION OF TRUTH HAS A SPECIAL MEANING. IT MEANS, I THINK RESTRAINED REPORTING, GUIDED BY A SENSE OF SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY. UNRESTRAINED REPORTING COULD LEAD TO SOCIAL DISINTEGRATION AND RACIAL CONFLICT. THE MEDIA IN THIS COUNTRY MUST ALWAYS BE REMINDED OF THE PECULIARITIES OF OUR NATION WITH ITS MULTI-RACIAL SOCIETY AND HETEROGENEOUS AUDIENCES, PLUS THE PROBLEMS CREATED BY ECONOMIC IMBALANCES. THIS REALISATION SHOULD CONTRIBUTE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A "MEDIA WITH A CONSCIENCE". A MEDIA THAT TRANSCENDS THE ROLE OF EXPLOITING THE SENSES AND A MEDIA THAT ASSUMES THE MORE MEANINGFUL ROLE AS A CATALYST FOR CHANGE IN CONSONANCE WITH THE GRAND NATIONAL AGENDA FOR DEVELOPMENT. THE MEDIA SHOULD PROVIDE THE NECESSARY IMPETUS IN CREATING THE CLIMATE FOR DESIRABLE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGES.
WITH ALL ITS VESTED PROFESSIONAL FUNCTIONS, THE MEDIA SHOULD PLAY AN INCREASINGLY ESSENTIAL ROLE IN BUILDING A NATIONAL AWARENESS. THEY SHOULD PROVIDE A VALUABLE SERVICE IN THE PROMOTION AND DEFINITION OF A NATIONAL PURPOSE. OUT OF THIS NATIONAL INVOLVEMENT WITH THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGES IN THE COUNTRY, SHOULD GROW SENSE OF ACCOUNTABILITY AMONG MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS. THEY OUGHT TO FEEL RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL THEY PRINT ON PAPER AND PRESENT ON THE SCREEN.

IF THEY REALISE THEIR POWER TO INFLUENCE AND SHAPE THE LIVES OF MILLIONS, THEY SHOULD DO SO WITH A CONSCIENCE, USING SELECTIVE RESTRAINTS AS GUIDELINES. INDEED, THEY SHOULD HAVE NEITHER SPACE, NOR TIME, FOR PETTY OR SENSATIONAL ANGLING OF NEWS OR CRITICISM, AND CERTAINLY NO TAKING OF SIDES OR MAKING LIGHT OF ISSUES.

IT IS SOLUTIONS TO THE COUNTRY’S PROBLEMS THAT THE MEDIA SHOULD BE INTERESTED IN, NOT MERE STORIES. AND IT IS THIS HIGHLY COMMENDABLE ATTITUDE, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THAT HAS GIVEN MEANING TO THE GROWTH OF THE MEDIA IN MALAYSIA.

WE ALL FACE. UNLIKE THEIR MULTI-NATIONAL PREDECESSORS OR THE FOREIGN
CORRESPONDENTS, THEY DO NOT HAVE AN OPEN INTERNATIONAL AIRLINE TICKET
IN THEIR POCKETS TO ENABLE THEM TO FLEE THE COUNTRY SHOULD HELL BREAK
LOOSE.

Honestly, the more I observe the operation of the mass media
in Malaysia, the more I tend to join what I call the "School of Cultural
Anthropology" which places emphasis on the concept that all mass media -
be they newspapers, radios, tv or magazines - must serve a need for
society in order to survive. But to merely survive is not good enough.
As products of the social demands of society the mass media must survive
with integrity. And for this they would need to maintain a strength of
character - collectively.

What does the society expect of the media?
In a nutshell, society expects quality performance and an intelligent
approach to mass communications with a greater sense of ethical responsi-
sibility. This means:

- The ability to deal with issues of the day appropriately
- Having adequate knowledge, and efficient exercising, of the
  basic techniques of accurate, objective and readable reporting.
MAKING SOUND JUDGEMENTS, QUICK DECISIONS, UNBIASED AND
DISPASSIONATE THINKING AND, LASTLY
REFLECTING AND INTERPRETING NEWS AND EVENTS SELECTIVELY.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

THE SUCCESS OF ANY PROFESSION DEPENDS, TO SOME EXTENT, ON THE
EFFECTIVE SOCIALIZATION OF ITS WOULD BE MEMBERS. THE STUDENTS WHO ARE
CURRENTLY FOLLOWING COURSES IN MASS COMMUNICATION WILL, AFTER GRADUATION,
ENTER THE BIG FASCINATING WORLD OF MEDIA. HOW CAN WE ENSURE AND ADEQUATELY
PREPARE THEM IN A WAY THAT THEY MAY PLAY THEIR CRUCIAL ROLE WELL?

THE MASS COMMUNICATION PROGRAMME AT THE MARA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
CONSISTS OF THREE COMPONENTS:

- LIBERAL ARTS, I.E. HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCE SUBJECTS
-LANGUAGES
-PROFESSIONAL SUBJECTS.

THE LIBERAL-BASED SUBJECTS ARE AIMED AT INCULCATING A SENSITIVITY
TO WHAT HAPPENS AROUND THE STUDENT. HE MUST BE ABLE TO GRASP AND
COMPREHEND ISSUES AND INTERPRET THE PULSE OF THE PUBLIC IN THE CORRECT
PERSPECTIVE. HE NEEDS TO BE TRAINED TO LOOK DEEP AND FAR. BE ATTUNED TO
THE SOCIAL DEMANDS AND ATTITUDES OF THE SOCIETY. THE EFFECTIVE SPECIALIST
MUST FIRST BE AN EFFECTIVE GENERALIST IF HE IS TO INTERPRET HIS SPECIALITY
TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC.
THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LANGUAGE COMPONENT IN THE PROGRAMME HAS NEVER BEEN UNDULY EXAGGERATED. STUDENTS HAVE, AS A MATTER-OF-COURSE, TAKEN THE TASK TO BE BILINGUALLY EXPRESSIVE AND PROFICIENT. IT IS A PLUS FOR THE STUDENT WHO CAN READ, WRITE AND REPORT IN MORE THAN ONE LANGUAGE. THE OPPORTUNITY EXISTS FOR THEM TO WORK AND EXPRESS THEMSELVES IN SO MANY LANGUAGES. IN ADDITION THEY HAVE ACCESS TO NEWSPAPERS IN ALL LANGUAGES. AND, INDEED WE REGARD IT A CHALLENGE TO COMMUNICATE WITH SUCH A DIVERSE AUDIENCE.

TO THIS END, SOME OF THE COURSES IN THE PROGRAMMES ARE INSTRUCTED IN BOTH ENGLISH AND BAHASA MALAYSIA. BY WAY OP A FOOTNOTE, AS FOR BAHASA MALAYSIA, OUR TASK HAS BEEN SOMEWHAT EASIER AS ALL OUR STUDENTS ARE WELL VERSED IN THE JAWI SCRIPT AS WELL. THERE ARE PLANS TO INCLUDE AT LEAST ONE OTHER LANGUAGE IN THE CURRICULUM.

THE PROFESSIONAL COMPONENT CONSISTS OF THE CORE SUBJECTS AND THE NITTY GRITTY OF THE PROFESSION. Coupled with trying out the practical aspects of the courses, mass communication students will have to be reminded that without ethics and a sense of responsibility, they would be destroying their own image, hence, their own career.

I AM HAPPY TO NOTE THAT ONE OF THE WORKSHOPS IN THIS SEMINAR WILL DISCUSS THE "ETHICS AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY" OF THE MEDIA. HOPefully, students of mass communication will relate well to this topic. The sooner they are made aware of the need to be ethical and responsible the longer will they last in their chosen profession.
I understand that this seminar, has been designed, firstly, as a 'stock-taking' session for all media to discuss and appraise the kind of role they have played so far. It would be ideal if, in the course of the discussions, a kind of appraisal checklist could be drawn up for each country to go by.

In addition in comparing the levels of expectations of the roles and performance of the media in the different ASEAN societies, another checklist could be drawn up to indicate the similarities in expectations. ASEAN countries share a great deal in common socially and culturally, from the checklist, realistic proposals could be drawn up for more positive and committed role for the media.

I hope Mass Communication students will find the seminar very relevant and contemporary. Being creative does not stop at just being able to draw up the best Public Relations programme, or to write a super news story or even designing a striking logo for an advertisement. Implicit in the statements I have made earlier on in this speech, being creative, in the Malaysian context, includes the ability to relate to the uniqueness of the Malaysian environment and society, with a mind that always probing for solutions to problems, and a mind that concentrates on paving the way for a better life for all.

This is the challenge that greets the students who is tomorrow's media practitioner. His judgement will be tested under pressure in matters of taste, social restraint and fairness. But he will discover that it is the credibility earned and the social and moral accountability sustained, that places him apart as an outstanding practitioner.
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

I CONGRATULATE THE JOINT EFFORTS OF THE SCHOOL OF MASS COMMUNICATION, MARA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY AND ASIAN MASS COMMUNICATION RESEARCH AND INFORMATION CENTRE FOR ORGANISING THIS SEMINAR, AND I WISH THE SEMINAR PARTICIPANTS ALL THE BEST. I DO NOT HAVE THE SLIGHTEST DOUBT THAT YOUR DISCUSSIONS WILL BE FRUITFUL AND MEANINGFUL TO ALL IN THE MEDIA WORLD.