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<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>En. A. Kadir Jasin</td>
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Welcome Address

By

En. A. Kadir Jasin
THANK YOU for coming. You are all very welcome here.

The New Straits Times, which I represent, is delighted to be the media host of this conference, because there are few subjects closer to our own concerns than communication technology.

We are here to address fundamental questions that arise from information technology and that have a particular bearing on Asian life.

The key to my own thoughts on these questions is to be found in the second part of the title of our conference — Alternatives for Asia. Why should Asia need alternatives? Indeed, are there any?

This has to do with the reality of the international Information Network without which communication technology would be less advanced than it is now.

As its economic power grows, Asia is making increasingly important contributions to the technology and content of international communications. However, the International Network, that is to say the main end-product, is principally a product of Western technology and brings with it Western cultural codes.

As the influence of information technology takes hold, and as we become more and more convinced of the need for it, so the values encoded within it are more and more represented as valid criteria; the norm.
However, not all of these codes and implied messages are understood in a positive sense by everyone in the Developing World, and this can lead to divisions within the receiving cultures.

The Network was not shaped by Asian requirements. The philosophy that drives it is not Asian. I would suggest that if it had been Asian it would have been better employed, in persuading people of the value of inoculating their children against disease, of breast-feeding, of ensuring clean water, and of ending infanticide.

The peoples of the Developing World cannot all claim to have achieved even these basic objectives, and yet they are expected to cope with a continuous shower from the satellites of information and images that are impossible to decode; the stuff of delusion.

Since the 1970s and the ensuing international debates on the need for a new world information order, there has been no answer to the effects of Western hegemony which, by the way, I define as cultural struggle and the imposition of alien cultural values on indigenous structures.

Then there is the fact of information technology. Its very existence, and the fact that special sciences are needed to understand it, widen the gap between the West and the Developing World.

I know that some of Marshall McLuhan's thinking has been overtaken by developments in your various fields, but I would like to recall his famous and still-valid dictum: 'The Medium is the Message'. I understand this to mean that the social and cultural consequences of I.T. are at least as profound as the messages it transmits.
So, we come back to my original question — are there any alternatives for Asia?

Clearly, radical rejection of the technology is not on our agenda. Clearly, we must have access to fast, strategic economic information. Clearly, we must keep open whatever lines of communication now exist, so that we can understand other cultures and ways of life.

At the same time, we cannot expect those cultures to explain themselves to us in our language and imagery. They don’t understand us either. But if we don’t do something about it, we Asians will continue to listen to a noisy monologue in which cultural codes are scrambled and subliminal messages continue to be misread. Perhaps this conference can provide some of the answers.

Resource people from many parts of the world are here to contribute to our understanding. In order to show the ‘balance’ of views represented here, I would mention speakers from Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Canada, Australia and the United States. We will hear an overview of Western perspectives on communication and views on their relevance to Asia.

Our participants include technocrats, government planners, advertising and marketing executives, community development leaders, and others drawn from the fields of communication, education, urban and rural sociology and related disciplines.

Together, we will review advances in communication technology and their application to development initiatives. We will examine how pitfalls are to be avoided, and how to go about preparing for and coping with change.
Advertising trends, social marketing, satellites and pan-Asian broadcasting networks will be examined over the next three days, along with the importance of community radio, information systems, and alternative media.

Many papers will be presented and parallel sessions will allow for choice of participation.

The New Straits Times and the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre wish you a satisfying and fruitful three days.

Thank you for listening and, once again, welcome.
Welcome Address

By

Vijay Menon
Welcome Address by Mr. Vijay Menon, Secretary-General, Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre (AMIC).

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you, on behalf of AMIC, to this Conference on "Communication, Technology and Development: Alternatives for Asia".

Asia, is today increasingly seen as a continent of change — as the continent of the coming century. It is a continent of increasing literacy and life expectancy, of rising expectations and changing lifestyles, of growing affluence and urbanization, of wider media coverage and greater exposure to the world. The tidal wave of progress which started in East Asia and advanced across Southeast Asia is now lapping at the countries of north and south Asia.

A recent report on Asia in the year 2000, states that the continent which now has half the world's population will have over two-thirds by the turn of the century. All but four of the world's largest cities will be in Asia. The number of affluent Asian households will rise by 50% to over 51 million. And Asian per capita GDP will double.

In step with these changes, and contributing to them, are the Asian media. The number of daily newspapers and magazines show an upward trend. The number of TV households has increased by 70% in the past five years, compared with 6.7% in the U.S. Radio ownership has also registered phenomenal growth. But it is satellite broadcasting, notably AsiaSat I, which has dramatically altered the Asian media landscape, leading to a deregulation of media markets, changing patterns of advertising expenditure and creativity.

The winds of change are clearly sweeping across the continent. We must take stock of the altered situation and examine the new options. This is indeed the
purpose of this conference. To provide a forum for communicators, from within the region and outside, to share thoughts and experiences, review advances and reflect on possible courses of action.

We are glad to be in Malaysia for these deliberations. For Malaysia, in many ways, epitomises the new Asia, keen to preserve its cultural past but eager to embrace the technological future. A country which has broken free from the shackles of its colonial heritage, to surge forward economically and politically, to take its rightful place in the councils of the region and the world.

Our Guest of Honour, the Honourable Finance Minister, Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim, in many ways, epitomises Malaysia — young and confident, pragmatic and purposeful. We are deeply grateful to you, Honourable Minister, for being with us today.

AMIC has organised over 200 seminars, workshops and training courses in the 22 years since its founding. Many of these have been in Malaysia. Our activities have directly benefited over 5,000 mass communicators and many more through our publications, research and documentation activities. We have been aided in our efforts by the steadfast support of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and the Government of Singapore and the encouragement and help of partner institutions, such as the New Straits Times Group and the Danish International Development Agency for this conference. I would be remiss if I did not also mention the contribution of our Committee Members, Datuk Haji Dol Ramli and Datuk Haji Mazlan Nordin and our Country Representative, Zainoor Sulaiman.

We thank you, Honourable Minister, for joining us this morning to formally inaugurate this conference. Your presence will be a source of encouragement to all of us to work for the successful attainment of the conference objectives.

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