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Welcome Address

By

Vijay Menon
Today, Asia is increasingly seen as the continent of the coming century; as a region of rising incomes and changing lifestyles, of higher literacy and longer life expectancy, of growing affluence and surging urbanization.

Economists see a direct correlation between economic growth and the level of urbanization. But urbanization has its downside. Unless properly planned and managed, urban growth can become a running sore instead of a source of endless wealth for a country.

The statistics are staggering. As against an urban population of 14.9% or 197 million in 1950, the urban share in 2020, it is estimated will be 54.7% or 2,421.3 million. The Asia-Pacific will earn the dubious distinction of having 14 or more of the world's 25 largest urban agglomerations. And far from being an engine of growth, urbanization may become a device that self-destructs.

As ESCAP's Executive Secretary, Rafeeuddin Ahmed, has pointed out, "Megacities, unless managed efficiently, bring with them levels of environmental degradation which push to the limits their ability to sustain human life". He has urged governments and non-government organizations, various agencies, concerned individuals and the media to focus on the problems now on an urgent basis.

This is indeed what we have been striving to do. Since 1980, when we held the first AMIC workshop on "Media and the Environment", we have organised training programmes and workshops for the media, initiated research projects, studied the scope of traditional media for environmental communication and generally attempted a regional consciousness raising through our publications and periodicals. Despite our limited resources, we have actively participated in various regional initiatives on the environment. And we have invariably teamed up with other organizations to further the environmental cause.
We are glad to have as our partner institutions for this seminar the National Council on the Environment and the Environmental Forum for Communicators of Singapore. We are gratified at the positive response of UNDP and the Urban Management Programme of Asia and the Pacific, the World Bank’s Metropolitan Environment Improvement Programme, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, the World Health Organization, the Inter Press Service and the Sustainable Development Initiative.

Above all, Honourable Minister, we are grateful to you for being with us this morning.

Singapore has accorded the highest importance to improvement of the environment. The many legislative enactments concerning public health, air and water pollution, drainage, sale of food, litter and the like, bear eloquent testimony to what careful planning and determined implementation of policies can do. It is our hope that this seminar, by fostering a sharing of ideas and experience, will serve to stimulate more activities protective of the urban environment in the region.

For the benefit of those who are unfamiliar with our organization, I might explain that AMIC is a non-profit, mass communication organization serving Asia from its secretariat in Singapore. AMIC is supported by the Government of Singapore and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, an independent foundation in Germany, which has given us much material and moral support ever since our founding. Equally important and gratifying to us, is the cooperation that we are privileged to receive from so many individuals and institutions, in the region and beyond. This is best exemplified by our resource persons and participants and the funding support we have received from the Canadian High Commission in Singapore.

We are most grateful to you Honourable Minister for agreeing to inaugurate this important seminar and we would like to thank all of you, ladies and gentlemen, for giving us the pleasure and encouragement of your presence this morning.

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