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Welcome Remarks

By

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

It gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you, on behalf of AMIC, to this joint DEPPEN-AMIC Seminar on "The Impact of New Communication Technologies on Rural Society in the Asia-Pacific".

We are glad to be in Jakarta and happy that the Minister for Information, H.E. Mr. Harmoko, is here with us today. He warmly endorsed the idea of an agreement of cooperation between DEPPEN and AMIC. This agreement was signed on 14th May, 1992. This is the second joint seminar since the signing of the agreement.

The present time is marked by change, rapid change. While the whole world is affected by change, the pace and scale are perhaps greatest in the Asia-Pacific region.

At the forefront of change, and contributing to it, is communication technology. Broadcasting, computing and telecommunications are converging, and accelerating the rate of innovation and change. New communication technologies, interactive and multimedia, digitization and compression are spawning an unimagined range of products and services and transforming our lives.

But change is not uniform. There is an urban-rural disparity which is disturbingly wide. While the rural sector accounts for over 70% of the population in most Asian countries, its access to such basic services as health, water and sanitation is alarmingly inadequate. UNDP's Human Development Report 1993 mentions that in South Asia rural access to sanitation ranges from 3 to 8%. It is better in the Asean countries - at 45% and more - but the gap is still wide. Such gaps in living standards and incomes act as a spur to urban migration which creates a different set of complex problems.

There is urgent need, therefore, to examine the nature and impact of change and the role of new communication technology in the context of rural Asia.

Today's seminar is an attempt to do this: to review advances in telecommunications and the media and to relate them to education and health, communication and culture, as agents of rural change.
Indonesia is a singularly suitable venue for this seminar. The World Bank's report on Sustaining Rapid Development in East Asia and the Pacific singles out Indonesia for special mention. It points out that over the twenty-five years since 1965 per capita income has grown by 4.5 per cent a year and, by 1990, Indonesia had succeeded in reducing the incidence of poverty from 60 to 15 per cent. It is a commendable achievement.

AMIC has organised over 200 seminars, workshops and training courses in the 22 years since its founding. Many of these have been in Indonesia. Our activities have directly benefitted 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.

We are grateful to the Information Research and Development Board, Department of Information, Republic of Indonesia, for its inputs and assistance, to our participants for accepting our invitation, often at short notice, and to The Asia Foundation for its generous contribution which has given this seminar its regional character. Above all, we are grateful to the Honourable Minister for his unfailing and invaluable encouragement, interest and support.

We look forward to two days of purposeful and productive discussions and practical recommendations so that we can look back with satisfaction on a successful seminar in Jakarta.

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