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Paper No. 5
PRESS FREEDOM AND PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS IN ASIA

I am indeed honoured to be here today in this gathering of senior media and communication practitioners, and educators from all over Asia to officiate the opening of this seminar on Press Freedom and Professional Standards in Asia.

This beneficial for "all people in Media" seminar is organised by the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre.

To all distinguished guests, both local and foreign, welcome and "Selamat Datang." To the organisers, my heartiest congratulations on your effort in putting together this seminar for the needy recipient and provider of the wide and increasingly challenging media world.

The topic on freedom of the press and its professional standards in the Asian region is both timely and highly relevant. These issues have brought concern to the society and the authorities. The press have always been asking for more freedom of speech.

The media practitioners are actually mediators of current issues on both good and vice. They have the responsibility to disseminate information to the society, to bring realisation to the society of their need to work towards success and improvement, and also to allow the society to think on ways to develop their environment without jeopardising the peace of others around them.

It is pertinent here to remind the media practitioners not to lose sight of their social responsibilities. This is because in the midst of commercialising the media industry, journalistic standards can sometimes be subverted by sensationalism in the interest of greater sales. This would inevitably bring "ringgit"$ and "sen"$ to celebrate the success of the media but what about the media's original role in bringing further development to any developing society and country?

Media operators, both printing and electronic, must be prepared at all times, serve the increasing demands and expectations of its users. The society must be equipped with developing knowledge. They must be made to realise that the authorities are doing their level best to ensure the best for the people.
The truth shall make all free. The media must choose a path that will channel information from the authorities to the people and in return receive feedback, in response to the knowledge provided.

The people of Asia are responding more and more to the latest hi-tech innovations of the electronic media world. Internet and its wide network coverage is appealing to Asians from all walks of life. Thus the task of the media practitioners grows as rapidly as the technology involved in information dissemination.

The media is responsible for the introduction of new technologies, scientific findings and all that the society should know. This will definitely contribute to the demands of a developing Asia, a region all geared towards total development in the near decade.

The media and the people must realise the Press Freedom is merely a guide for telling the people "what is right and not the right to tell them whatever we like". The overall interests of society at large should however, remain undisturbed.

Professional standards, on the other hand is the ability of the press to allow the rights of the majority to stand out without allowing the views of the few to champion the situation, thus upsetting the norm.

I am certain that many views and opinions will be expressed and discussed by the media practitioners and scholars on this important subject during the course of this seminar. Nevertheless, most importantly, the seminar will help nurture an effective co-operation and partnership between the media practitioners and educators in developing a strong foundation and preservation, for the strengthening of professional journalistic standards in this developing region.

On this note, it is now my pleasure to declare open this seminar on Press Freedom and Professional Standards in Asia. Wishing you all a fruitful and successful session, deliberating on issues to help the region and individual Asian countries acquire development, for the development of the mind and the people.

Thank you.