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Speech by Dr. Anura Goonesekera, AMIC Deputy Secretary-General, at the opening of the ASEAN seminar on Managing Radio and Television Broadcasting, October 16, 2000.

Professor Hao Xiaoming, Professor Chua Siew Keng, Delegates from the ASEAN countries, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I join my colleague professor Hao Xiaoming in welcoming you to this six-day ASEAN Seminar on Managing Radio and Television broadcasting. This seminar is organized by the Asian Media Information and Communication Centre (AMIC) and the School of Communication Studies with support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Singapore.

AMIC is one of the oldest regional communication organization in Asia. It was founded in 1971 with support from the Government of Singapore and Fredriech Ebert Stiftung – a German NGO. It is a non-profit foundation and has close links with the School of Communication Studies of the Nanyang Technological University. AMIC is engaged in communication research, documentation, training, consultancy services, institutional development and publications. It is a membership-based organization. Membership is open to individuals and institutions involved in the study and practice of communication.

This seminar brings together senior broadcasters from ASEAN countries. During the next six days they will examine the implications of changes in media technology for the management of television and radio stations in their respective countries. The seminar will also provide an opportunity for broadcasters to share and learn from the experiences of each other. It will no doubt help to strengthen networking among broadcasters in this region and assist the participants to understand and respond to the challenges posed by developments in broadcasting technology. The presentation of country papers, later today, will enable delegates to learn about the situation of broadcasting in ASEAN countries.
As you would see from the seminar programme the organizers have, I think wisely, mixed talks, discussions and presentations with field visits to important media organizations in Singapore. There will be talks on broadcast management given by broadcast media practitioners in this region as well as by persons from the academia. The topics include programming and training, production and transmission, ethical and legal issues, financial management and management of human resources. These are all-important areas of management for radio and television broadcasting particularly in view of the changes that are necessary to profit from new communication technologies.

The field visits to the Media Corporation of Singapore, Safra Radio, Asia Broadcast Centre and the School of Communication Studies will provide the delegates an opportunity to see how new technologies have had an impact upon broadcast management in this region.

An important output of the Seminar is the production of a management-training manual for broadcasters. Professor Chua Siew Keng has kindly agreed to edit it. It will contain inputs from country reports as well as contributions from resource persons.

The subject of this seminar viz. broadcasting management, brings back some old memories to me. Not so long ago I was myself a broadcast manager. I was the Director General of Sri Lanka's national television, Rupavahini. Subsequently I became the secretary to the ministry of Information and broadcasting which again required me to deal with high level managers in the broadcasting industry. I have therefore some personal experience in this field. Perhaps it is appropriate that I share some of my experiences in broadcasting management with you. Anybody who has managed a broadcasting institution will know first hand the variety and range of management questions that can crop up in these institutions. For instance the management requirements of the different professional groups in broadcasting can be quite different. It is my experience that the different professional groups in broadcasting such as the producers, technicians, artists and engineers require different styles of management. In the case of artists and other creative people the need is to have a type of management that brings out their creativity.
This group needs freedom to try out their ideas. Too many administrative controls will not help. In the case of engineers it is different. I find that this group will relate well to managers that they consider to be at par with them in professional standing. Therefore what is important for the managers is to display skills and understanding that would win their respect. This requires the maintenance of high professional standards by the managers. Exercise of authority and power alone would not do. This group could put rings round any manager.

The required skills among top managers may change over time. Initially the top managers may come from among the engineers. This is because they are crucial for the running of the broadcasting station at that time. Later their importance may wane and another professional group may become more important. For instance the marketing people may become crucial for the survival of the station. So they will ascend to important managerial positions. However after some time it may turnout that some other skills are more important. For instance human relations may become a crucial issue for the station. Then people trained in human relations and administration will assume the top management positions. Again on a later occasion creativity may become important. Then the artists and other creative people will assume central management positions. What is important to realize is that there is no one style of management that will work in all broadcasting institutions at all times. Management has to be relevant to the specifics of the institution and to the professionals working in the institution. Management training must be meaningful within the context of the broadcasting institution.

On many occasions we send our best broadcasters for training abroad. On their return they complain that they cannot put into practice what they have learnt. They are frustrated and think of leaving the station. The training then becomes counter productive. Very often the frustration is caused by the gap between the expectations of the newly trained person and the facilities that could be provided by the station. In many of the poor countries broadcasting equipment and facilities such as cameras, recorders, lights and studios are in short supply. The training is usually in affluent countries where these are easily available. The newly trained person, on his return, has to learn to accommodate to
the realities in his/her country. And for some this is hard. Sometimes the rules and regulations in the broadcasting station stands in the way of using the newly acquired skills. For instance a television producer may learn editing as part of production training. On return to his/her country the producer may finds that it is the technicians who do the editing and producers are not allowed to touch the editing equipment. They can only sit with the technician and tell that technician what he or she wants.

What I am trying to draw your attention is to the importance of the culture within which management has to operate. All broadcasting organizations have traditions or customary ways of doing things. Management is enmeshed in this culture of broadcasting. It cannot be plucked out. Management cannot be easily injected or grafted into broadcasting organizations. It needs to grow with and relate to the rest of the organization. All organizations have informal rules, some of which are set by the workers in the organization. Like in the famous Hawthorn experiment there is the possibility of work norms being set to limit out-put because the workers fear that the management would cut down on the number of persons required for a job if the workers show efficiency and higher productivity. For similar reasons workers in some developing countries would resort to trade union action in order to prevent the introduction of new technologies by the management. New technologies are perceived as replacing workers by machines.

In the Sri Lankan higher bureaucracy, or the Administrative Service as it is called, in which I worked for around 25 years, there is a well-known adage. It says “More work more trouble; less work less trouble; no work no trouble”. This is of course said in a lighter vein. But it is not unusual to find this attitude ingrained among some persons working in government bureaucracies. These persons pay perfunctory attention to what ever they are supposed to do. If such attitudes prevail in a broadcasting station how can management bring about new ways of doing things? I believe that practical experience is crucial for managing such problems in broadcasting institutions. What we learn from books has to measure against the ground situation in the broadcasting institutions in our respective countries. It is possible to talk of management principles. But these principles cannot be applied in a vacuum. As many of the participants in this workshop are
experienced broadcasters I believe that they would be able to relate what they learn in this seminar to the practicalities of their own countries. Otherwise they will be frustrated when they go back and find that what they have learnt has little applicability in their own countries. All of you are experienced broadcasters. In order to make what you learn at this seminar meaningful to you it is necessary for you to bring your experience and contribute to the discussions. It is only through your active participation that the full benefit of the seminar could be realized. This seminar has many presentations by expert resource persons. However only you could make the presentations of these resource persons meaningful to you and to the broadcasting organization in your home countries.

This is the second AMIC activity that has been sponsored by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Singapore. The first was an Expert Group Meeting for Popularizing Science and Technology, held in April 1997. This activity which was also supported by the Education Department of the Commonwealth Secretariat in London, resulted in the publication of a book called “Popularizing Science and Technology: Some Asian Case Studies”. Dr. Sankaran Ramanathan compiled the book. Next year we intend to conduct a training programme on multimedia technologies for broadcasters. We hope this would also attract the support from the Singapore Cooperation Programme of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Several individuals and organizations have assisted us in many of our activities. The present seminar is a joint project of the School of Communication Studies of the Nanyang Technological University and AMIC. Professor Chua Siew Keng is the joint Seminar Coordinator. She will also make presentations and lead the discussions during the Seminar. We would also like to thank the other resource persons from the school of communication studies, from the Nanyang Business School, from broadcasting stations and from the private sector. We also thank the media organizations that have invited the Seminar delegates to visit them.

We have reserved our last word of thanks for our sponsors, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore. We would especially like to thank Ambassador Anthony Ch’ng for
his encouragement and support of this project. We record our appreciation of the officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who have so ably assisted us and ensured the success of this project.

I wish all delegates a rewarding seminar and a pleasant stay in Singapore. Thank you.
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