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Welcome Address

By

Vijay Menon
Welcome Address by Mr. Vijay Menon, Secretary-General, Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre (AMIC) at the inauguration of the Deustche Welle-AMIC Workshop on "Audience Research - A Means to Improve Planning and Quality of Broadcasting," on March 10, 1986

Your Excellency, Dr. Richard Louis, Mr. Hugh Leonard, our keynote speaker, Mr. Solbach, distinguished resource persons and participants, ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you, on behalf of AMIC, to the inauguration of the Workshop on "Audience Research: A Means to Improve Planning and Quality of Broadcasting".

We are glad that Deutsche Welle agreed to co-sponsor this workshop. Glad because two years ago, a Deutsche Welle-AMIC broadcasting workshop focussed attention on the importance of audience research. The engineers, programming officials and trainers at that workshop recommended that management should be made aware of the importance of audience research in broadcast programming and that audience research departments should be established where there were none.

The call was timely as there is real need in Asia for greater attention to Audience Research. We are glad that with the assistance of Deutsche Welle, we have been able to organise this workshop.

Leading the global media revolution of the last 3 decades is Broadcasting. Radio has recorded the highest numerical growth: from less than 230 million sets around the world in 1955 to more than 1,500 million. And much of this has been contributed by the developing countries. In Asia, excluding Japan, there were less than 4 million sets 30 years ago. Today, there are over 215 million.

Radio, by transcending the barriers of illiteracy and low purchasing power, has become the most pervasive medium in Asia, with a staggering reach and an awesome potential. But while transmission facilities have grown, there has been no corresponding effort to ascertain the needs and expectations of the audience - with predictable consequences.

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About 3 months ago, a journal reporting on the invasion of China by pop culture quoted the director of the prestigious Chinese Central Philharmonic Orchestra (CPO) as saying, "...Mass culture from the U.S. - from jazz to disco - has conquered the world. China is the last battle-ground - and we are hardly putting up any resistance."

The reasons are not far to seek.

As far back in 1972, a Unesco report pointed out that, "the first essential feature to be observed in audience research is the almost universal dominance of commercial interests, i.e., advertising, as the sponsor of audience research. It roughly estimated that of the total "volume" of communication research (in financial terms) more than two-thirds is commercially sponsored, i.e., sponsored by advertisers and designed to meet their need to know the size and composition of mass media audience. It is probably for this reason that commercial broadcasting in the west seems so much more in tune with the audience - not only in the west but equally in the east.

The fact is that many Asian countries are multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-racial. This makes communication more difficult. And research more critical. It is our hope that this workshop will help to stimulate more Audience Research activity.

It is perhaps a measure of the increasing awareness of the importance of audience research that we have with us today representatives from almost all the broadcasting organisations in Asia.

Adding depth and dimension to the workshop are our visiting resource persons from the Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU), Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD), Australian Broadcasting Commission, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Chulalongkorn University, Singapore Survey Research, Deutsche Welle and Sued Deutscher Rundfunk. We are grateful to all of them.

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We are also grateful to Ambassador Louis for taking time off to be with us this morning. The Federal Republic of Germany has a remarkable record of consistent and concrete support to the cause of communications in developing countries and the Ambassador's presence is further evidence of this.

AMIC owes its very founding to a German foundation, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. The FES, in response to a need voiced by Asian communicators, cooperated with the Government of Singapore in the establishment of this Centre in 1971. And it has continued to support us ever since. In these 14 years, we have endeavoured to help the cause of mass communication in Asia, through our documentation unit and our publication programme, by organising training courses, conferences, seminars and workshops, and by offering consultancy services. We are privileged to receive support from institutions around the world, including Unesco, and we are grateful to all of them. But above all, we appreciate the encouragement and cooperation extended by numerous individuals, which has enabled us to expand the range and volume of our programmes.

Thank you.

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