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Introductory Remarks

By

Vijay Menon
Introductory remarks by Mr. Vijay Menon, Amic Secretary-General, at the inauguration of the OANA-AMIC Workshop for journalists on "Economic Perspectives of Asean, November 30, 1983.

Prof. Lee, Mr. Yusof Bador, Mr. Mukerji, Ladies & Gentlemen

It was sixteen years ago that the Association of South East Asian Nations was formed to accelerate the economic and socio-cultural development of the region. There were other objectives. But economic stability in a spirit of equality and partnership has always been one of the principal goals. Recent events and comments indicate that the progress in the last decade and a half has been significant.

A seminar in Singapore a few weeks ago had as its theme TOWARDS THE PACIFIC CENTURY. More recently Time magazine's Pacifc Board of Economists reported that "the economies of the countries bordering the Pacific are once again becoming dynamos this year". The Asia-Pacific region, especially the Asean five have been the subject of increasing media interest and attention. Yet there is reason to believe that within the region, even among Asean journalists, there is inadequate understanding and appreciation of the economies of countries other than their own.

Not many know, for instance, of the Malaysian case study which showed that the output gain of a farmer with access to education as well as complementary inputs can be as much as 20 percent; that enrolment at the primary level is 100 percent or close to it in all the countries; that the outlays of education and health are higher than the average for LDCs. It is to bridge this knowledge gap that this workshop has been organised.

This workshop has been designed as a mutual teach-in, with every participant contributing a paper on a specific aspect of his country's economy. These will be supplemented with talks by experts in the field: M C Agarwal of ESCAP, Bangkok; Aftab Ahmad Khan of the Asia-Pacific Development Centre, Kuala Lumpur; Russell J. Cheetham of the World Bank based in Jakarta; Robert Bakley of the Asian Development Bank, Manila; Augustin Kintanar of the Institute of South-East Asian Studies, Singapore; Graham Newman of the International Monetary Fund, Stuart MacDonald of Queensland University and Y Y Kim of the United Nations Development Programme. The nuggets of information that I quoted earlier on are from the set of background papers prepared by Mr. Dilip Mukerji, Editorial Adviser to the Business Times, Kuala
Lumpur. This seminar is his brainchild and we are happy that he has agreed to make his valuable knowledge and experience available to the workshop as co-ordinator.

We at AMIC are glad to co-sponsor this workshop with OANA as part of our programme of teaching and training activities. It is one of a total of 14 seminars and workshops organised by AMIC in 1983. The current year has seen an increase in the tempo of our activities. As part of our publications programme we will have brought out by the end of the year a total of Occasional Papers and Monographs. Our Documentation and Research activities have also grown. This has been possible due to the support we have continued to receive from the Govt. of Singapore and the Friederich Ebert Stiftung of the Federal Republic of Germany who agreed over 12 years ago to jointly sponsor AMIC. Our debt of gratitude to both these sponsors is indeed great.

This workshop has received generous support from the Asia Foundation whose highly dedicated director, Jon Summers, has been a source of much encouragement. We are happy that the Organisation of Asia Pacific New Agencies agreed to co-sponsor this workshop with support from UNESCO whose Regional Communications Adviser has shown keen interest in our programmes. AMIC’s association with OANA under Yusof Bador has also grown closer.

Even at the risk of making these introductory remarks sound like a vote of thanks, I must avail of this opportunity to express our warm appreciation and gratitude to Prof. Lee Soo Ann for being with us today to formally inaugurate this Workshop.

To our many friends in Singapore and elsewhere in the region, and to those like Syed Rahim of the East-West Centre and Narinder Aggarwal of UNDP who have travelled thousands of kilometres to be with us, I would like to convey our appreciation of the support that they have extended to us and our determination to justify it in the years ahead through our contribution to the cause of mass communications in the region.
The news agencies are also going into economic services in a big way, with a number of them already distributing specialised economic services including real-time stock and commodity prices and exchange rates. This is as it should be. However, there is a great dearth of good writers in this field and we hope workshops of this nature will help stimulate interest and provide the kind of depth a good financial journalist should be equipped with.

We would like to see the emergence of a corp of reporters who can report the financial and economic scene of our countries in the region intelligently and in language that even the layman can understand. ASEAN is on the threshold of some very exciting developments. The five nations of ASEAN have emerged as a formidable economic ground and the future prospects for rapid economic growth is excellent. Bankers have said that it will achieve dynamic growth in the next 10 years. We are already world leaders in many commodities and we are not only entering the manufacturing sector on a large scale but some have even begun going in for higher technology. We need journalists who are experts in these fields. We need writers to cover in depth all these exciting developments taking place around us. You have thus a vital role to play. By focussing attention on regional cooperation, you can in fact act as a catalyst for great cooperation among the ASEAN countries. Workshops of this nature is merely to stimulate interest. A lot will depend on your own efforts to improve your skills.

We, in OANA, want to organise many more courses and workshops, both on financial reporting as well as general courses aimed at upgrading journalistic skills. I would like to take this opportunity to appeal to funding organisations to come forward to help us with some of our training projects. Such help will go a long way in helping media organisations and news agencies in the third world to help themselves raise their professional standards.

This is the first time we have cooperated with AMIC on a project of this nature. On the success of this depends other collaborative efforts. I am confident the workshop will prove a success. I hope you will all endeavour to make this a truly successful venture.

Thank you.

YUSOF BADOR,
OANA SECRETARY-GENERAL