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Increasing Media Capacity To Promote Public Health
And Nutrition In Asean

By
Santokh Singh Gill
Santokh Singh Gill
Head, Public Affairs Service,
Radio Televisi Malaysia,
Angkasapuri,
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Roundtable on "Increasing Media Capacity
to Promote Public Health and Nutrition

Background

Radio Malaya first began its broadcasts on April 1st, 1946 in Singapore and after independence in 1957 it moved to its new studios in Kuala Lumpur. Today Radio Malaya's transmissions cover the whole of peninsular Malaysia and Sabah and Sarawak. Apart from reaching the whole Malaysian population, we also cover most of Asia though our main thrust is the Asean region. Radio Malaysia broadcasts in 24 languages and dialects and independent survey and research organisations have shown that most of the adult population, as well as the younger group, is being reached by this medium.

Television Malaysia was inaugurated on 28 December 1963, and colour transmissions began in December 1978. About 7 million Malaysians tune in to Radio Malaysia daily and the number watching television total slightly less.

Objectives of RTM

RTM is governed by five objectives, but the two main ones are:

a) To explain in depth and with the widest possible coverage, policies and programmes of the government in order to ensure maximum understanding by the people.

b) To stimulate public interest and opinion in order to achieve changes in line with the requirements of the government.

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Despite ownership and control by the government, RTM has been acutely conscious of its role as a public service. This sense of responsibility has been behind the proliferation of programmes pertaining to law, science and medicine. Radio programmes carry health messages, discussions on diseases and medical advice on a daily basis. Talk shows, magazines and documentary programmes perform the same job on television. During periods when endemic diseases like cholera and dengue fever make their deadly appearance, health messages are given high priority.

Television Malaysia has also screened series like Marcus Welby MD, Dr. Kildare, Trapper John MD and Quincy. The media has long realised that the field of medicine provides excellent dramatic potentialities and has exploited them very successfully. In Malaysia however, these series are screened partly, to create greater awareness of health and health problems. There is also the awareness that unlike radio, health programmes have to be packaged together with other programmes. The exceptions would be mediagenic events like medical breakthroughs, the birth of quintuplets, transfer of organs, etc. But clearly there is a need to search for solutions to this problem as television is today the more popular medium. There is thus an awareness of the fact that perhaps more can be done. But the commitment is certainly there.

The relationship between RTM and the Ministry of Health is excellent. We felt that RTM has played its role in promoting public health and nutrition given our constraints, though changes could be made in emphasis. The commitment to a better life is evident and it would certainly be enlightening to study and witness the use of the mass media by other nations to promote the objective of health for all by the year 2000.

Thank you.