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<th>Mass media and society.</th>
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Mass Media And Society

By

Mohd Kassim Bin Ahmad
Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen:

First and foremost, may I express my sincere thanks to the organising committee for inviting me to declare open your Seminar on Communication Training and the Needs of Mass Media Organisations. And to those of you from abroad, may I say Selamat Datang to Malaysia and to sunny Kuala Lumpur. I say "sunny" in the fervent hope that it will not rain in the next few days, thus spoiling your brief stay in our capital city.

I understand that this Seminar, which you will be involved in over the next five days, is a continuation of a similar conference you had in Manila in February this year. I am told that the Manila conference was a successful one and likewise, I do hope this one will be just as successful and rewarding.

As you know, both the print and the electronic media today play a very important role in the life of men and nations. The news of an important event which takes place in one corner of the world one morning can be read in the afternoon paper of another country in another part of the world the same day. And an important speech by a world leader in Europe or the Americas can be heard simultaneously in Asia or Australia over the radio while breath-taking events—be they natural calamities or wars, sports or international conferences—can be viewed live on our TV sets. In short, both these means of communication—the print media and the electronic media—have come to stay and, whether we like it or not, have become part and parcel of our daily life.

It has been said that the newspapers, the radio and television have three major roles to play. The three roles are: to inform, to educate, and to entertain. True, there are many other roles that these three media play but the three I mentioned earlier are the main functions.
The Government of Malaysia subscribes to these three functions, as no country on earth would like to see its people uninformed, uneducated or deprived of entertainment.

But as a developing country with a multi-racial population and a polyglot society, Malaysia would like to see its press, radio and television play more the role of a nation-builder instead of an adversary like the press in the developed countries of the west.

I think I should make it clear here that while the Malaysian Government welcomes criticisms and exposes of its weaknesses and shortcomings, the government also expects the press to contribute to make Malaysia a strong, united, prosperous and perpetually peaceful nation.

Malaysia exercises a parliamentary democracy. Malaysia practices constitutional monarchy. Malaysia is a member of the United Nations. Malaysia believes and respects the freedom of the press. Article Ten of our Constitution guarantees freedom of speech and expression. This means newspapers are free to report news, views, interviews and other matters—but with certain restrictions pertaining to security.

Thomas Jefferson, the third president of the United States, once said that if he were to choose between a government without the press and the press without the government, he would choose the press without the government. This clearly demonstrates how vital freedom of speech and expression is to society.

Mahatma Gandhi looks at it in another light. He was of the opinion that the sole aim of journalism should be service. He also mentioned how dangerous the pen was if it fell into the wrong hand. He declared: "The press is a great power, but just as an unchained torrent of water submerges the whole countryside, even so an uncontrollable pen serves but to destroy. If the control is from without, it proves more poisonous than want of control. It can be profitable only when exercised from within."

To put it in a straightforward language, what the late Mahatma was trying to say was that while it was indeed the right of a journalist in a democracy to write and to criticise, it certainly was not his right to make use of democracy to destroy democracy by giving the excuse that it was his fundamental right to write and criticise when he was fully aware that what he wrote could bring down the democracy he claimed he cared so much.

With that pointer as a backdrop, I would say your Seminar on Communication Training and the Needs of Mass Media Organisations could be of great help to solve some of the problems confronted by the press and journalists as well as by other mass media organisations.
With the rapid advance of science and technology, the world we live in has become such a small planet so much so that the problems of one country often spill over the borders of its neighbours. So reduced in size has the world become that the ASEAN countries, for instance, are only within one jet hop of another. As such, it is impressive that not only ASEAN should continue to be a friendly and prosperous economic grouping, but the entire world itself should always remain a community of peaceful nations. It is in this context that the mass media can offer contributions to achieve the objectives I have just mentioned by emphasising to its readers, viewers and listeners, of the importance of loyalty to one's motherland, respect for the elders, working hard for the country, cooperation among peoples, brotherhood among men and peace among nations.

Once again, I wish your seminar all the success that it deserves and with that sentiment, I take great pleasure in declaring the seminar open. Thank you.