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Welcome Address
On behalf of the Pengarah ITM, Dr. Hj. Maimunah Salleh, and in my personal behalf, I wish to thank the organizers of this Workshop for inviting me to deliver the inaugural address.

I am sure that this Workshop will help to familiarize journalists with the vast network of laws that surrounds the journalistic profession.

The Workshop will also highlight the many important issues in Malaysia and World Journalism that are coming to the fore. Opinion on these issues has not yet crystallised in Malaysia or if it has, it has not made itself felt.

I am sure that you will use this opportunity to focus on the role of the mass media in society.

Journalists are gatherers, writers and editors of the news. As observers, reporters and commentators on the rest of society, journalists enjoy a unique status that amply justifies their occasional designation as "the Fourth Estate" (the executive, the legislature and the judiciary being the other three in our system of separation of powers). The importance of the journalist's function in a free society, his potential for influencing history by reporting the news, has only been gradually recognised in the 20th century.

During the last few decades, the tradition that anyone could be a journalist first came into conflict with a growing sense of professionalism amongst workers for press and radio.

Several important factors influenced this trend: the unionization and organization of working journalists, an increasing sense of social responsibility on the part of journalists and specialized education for journalism. I am proud to note the pioneering contribution of ITM's school of Mass Communication in improving professionalism amongst journalists in this country.

Along with professionalization has come variety and diversity in the field of journalism. There are now five chief fields for mass media experts:

1. Newspapers
2. News Services
3. Magazines
4. Radio
5. Television
Related fields include advertising, book publishing and public relations.

It is generally believed that within these fields journalists must perform four main roles:

1. to inform the public;
2. to protect the public interest;
3. to influence public opinion; and
4. to entertain the public.

The first task — informing the public — is the journalist's chief duty. Reporters represent the public at events that most people cannot observe themselves. Journalists have an obligation to be accurate and to tell all sides of a story. Unfortunately, this is easier said than done because pressmen are subjected to significant restraints under the law and are, in addition, restrained by their editors, who in turn, are shackled by the owners of the publication.

Even if such constraints were not present, there are further difficulties which prevent totally unbiased reporting. Among them is shortage of space which necessitates picking and choosing what to print and what to throw away. "Interpretive reporting" which seeks to explain and analyze is also bound to be subjective and ideologically-oriented.

The second task — protecting the public interest — involves tasks beyond mere coverage of the news. Reporters search out and expose dishonesty, mismanagement and unfair business practices. Newspapers run "actionline" departments to supply the public with a quick, efficient and cheap technique for airing grievances against wrongdoing in private or public sectors. One of the finest examples of "investigative journalism" was in the United States with the Washington Post's exposure of the Watergate Scandal.

The third function of the media — influencing public opinion through editorials, commentaries, exposes and special features — involves the press in advocacy of certain causes. Not only the management of a publication but even individual reporters can indulge in such "advocacy journalism". The way the Malay Mail espouses the cause of consumerism is a case in point.

Entertaining the public is the fourth function. And this is your forte. You do it very well. Some say that you do it better than anything else. Critics of the Malaysian mass media also charge that in the performance of this function, Malaysian TV and newspapers are guided mostly by the liberal, permissive values of the West which are disseminated day in and day out to young and old alike in our society.
In the discussion of the law that surrounds your practice, perhaps some attention needs to be paid to the major issues in world journalism. Among them are the following:

1. The need for a balance between freedom and responsibility and the role of the law in preserving this balance.

2. Protection of the identity of news sources and how this is to be balanced by the power of the state to require a journalist to reveal his sources of information.

3. The need for fair and balanced reporting of opposing viewpoints. In the USA this is called the "fairness doctrine." It requires radio and TV stations to devote a certain amount of broadcast time to discussion of controversial issues in a way that all points of view are aired. Is such a doctrine desirable or possible in the Third World context?

4. How can the "cultural imperialism" of the West be countered by the local media? As things stand there is a one-way flow of news from the West inundating the Third World. This flood from the West brings with it a totally Western orientation, Western points of view, Western biases, Western values, Western ideas and the like. The main news agencies of the developed countries give short shrift to much of what goes on in the Third World. Where they do publicize us, it is mainly on issues of hunger, poverty, tension and violence. Can something be done to reduce the torrent from them to us and to improve the trickle from us to them?

Finally, I must congratulate the School of Mass Communication, ITM and AMIC, Singapore for organizing this workshop. I also notice with pleasure that the bulk of the "resource persons" conducting the sessions are from ITM's School of Administration and Law and they too deserve our congratulations.

On behalf of the Pengarah ITM, I have pleasure in declaring this Workshop open.

We billah - i - taufiq
Wassalam alai'um warahmatullah