

**ADDRESS BY THE HON. MINISTER OF INFORMATION  
COMMUNICATIONS AND CULTURE MALAYSIA  
DR. RAIS YATIM  
TO THE TENTH CONFERENCE OF ASEAN MINISTERS  
RESPONSIBLE  
FOR INFORMATION (AMRI)  
IN VIENTIANE, LAO PDR, 5 NOVEMBER 2009**

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*Mr. Chairman,*

*Honourable Ministers, Distinguished Guests,*

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. If I may activate firstly by thanking the government and people of Lao PDR for their warm welcome and excellent arrangement for this meeting. I am honoured by the gracious hospitality and courtesy accorded to me and my delegation in the spirit of ASEAN. “Kwap Jai” to all who have made all these possible.

2. The wonderful dinner and marvelous cultural presentations last night certainly deserve to be mentioned here with distinction and I wish to record my utmost appreciation to H. E. Mounkeo Oraboun, Minister of Information and Culture of Lao PDR for his distinctive personal touch in exquisite Laotian hospitality.

3. Of all the ASEAN Pillars, the one about creating the socio-cultural community perhaps draws us all in to be here as collective colleagues in the area of information and related matters thereto.

*Ladies & Gentlemen,*

4. As ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Information (AMRI), we certainly carry on our shoulders the arduous task of informing our respective governments and people. With tongue-in-cheek, critics of developed countries

have been rather slanted and sly in categorising us Information Ministers as 'Misinforming Ministers'. Whatever they say, we have to carry out our responsibilities because if we don't inform, others will do the job for us. And when they do they do everything except pay us the honour and privilege of doing things right. Nowadays this role is being done by the new alternative media which most of us are being negatively permeated with. And the touchy question nowadays is always those which appear to be convinced by the alternative media. Those materials in the Web do much at times to discredit us and our work but if we adopt the positive attitude of using the cyber world itself in as much as we use the traditional media, much satisfaction could come out of it. Indeed Information Ministers would stand to gain if we learn how to utilise this new media to the advantage of ASEAN and its peoples.

5. As ASEAN still has a responsibility to inform its citizens in the respective Member States whatever the alternative media says about their topics of pursuit. We must therefore strike a balance between resorting to face the new media and a healthy competition via the very media that we call traditional. Bearing in mind that some 60% of our population are represented by those in the 20 - 49 age group, the new media appeals to a bigger majority of people that may not find traditional media attractive or appealing enough. This is the ongoing challenge that this conference ought to face and find solution to.

*Ladies & Gentlemen,*

6. AMRI's 10<sup>th</sup> Conference theme – "**Enhancing Media Cooperation in ASEAN Community Building**," is most apt and timely. Malaysia has always placed great importance of building a prosperous and caring community in the region. The one channel that remains open towards this end is the media which for now is well represented by the electronic and the print media in our various countries. The fact remains ASEAN still depends on the fair and just approach in the media's role to bring about just and fair results. After this conference, it is our hope that news about ASEAN should be on the increase back home. Hitherto news about ASEAN while being on the level has not

been prioritised despite the various resolutions that AMRI has had for the past decade or so.

7. It is also fair to state here that as Information Ministers, we are tasked to find ways and means how to draw our respective people to be ASEAN-oriented and ASEAN-thinking via our various responsibilities. Needless to say, the creation of the ASEAN Community remains as one of our basic goals pursuant to the ASEAN Charter.

8. In this respect, Malaysia remains steadfast in requesting colleagues to allow the free-flow of news about our respective achievements in ASEAN possibly through a more substantive mechanism. For want of a better term, we should be having a more visible ASEAN Media Gateway (AMG), something which should be better than the existing South-South Information Gateway (SSIG) which is now based in Kuala Lumpur. By all means we could re-energise SSIG but at the same time we must make it more pro-active in the coverage and dissemination of events and issues affecting us in ASEAN. Therefore, Malaysia would like to propose a similar approach like the SSIG for ASEAN i.e. to establish a platform called AMG in Kuala Lumpur specifically to enhance media networking and collaborations among ASEAN media practitioners.

9. A selected number of journalists from the region could be seconded to AMG in Kuala Lumpur for short durations to help provide the necessary inputs in terms of back-grounding and accuracy. These journalists could disseminate the footage and information via AMG to participating media networks and organisations in the region so that the news material could be aired and printed for the benefit of viewers, listeners or readers in their respective countries.

10. As this juncture, it may be surmised, indeed lamented, that news about ASEAN nations are really not of priority level in some of our respective capitals. If this be not of concern to us at this Conference, then, we may miss that one opportunity to reach out collectively on subjects like community

building, human rights, trade achievements and other pivotal subjects that are so necessary to our very own collective survival.

*Ladies & Gentlemen,*

11. In fact, Malaysia feels that unless we put up our acts together in the information communication and cultural fields, we may find the missing links too late in the day. For now we are very much surpassed by CNN and BBC, to name two from beyond our shores, which permeate our lives much more pervasively than our local media networks. Perhaps it is timely for our Senior Officials (SOMs) after this session to work out a modest collective scheme in order to realise our endeavour in sharing and disseminating news on a practical basis. To share culture through a communication network will no doubt galvanise our ASEAN flavour and presence. More Asian and ASEAN culture ought to be in the offing of ASEAN media. In this regard, with the assistance of our dialogue partners, we should also consider the setting up of an ASEAN content industry that is capable of supplementing our TV and radio programmes. The proper dosage of our Asian content matters much to our communication needs.

12. This way, we stand poised to survive and achieve both culturally as well as technologically. For our communication and information sectors to be devoid of ASEAN and Asian content the future is unthinkable. Our cultures, our value systems, our civilisation may soon vanish and leave us in a cultural vacuum given the constant onslaught that we in ASEAN are subject to.

13. Lower cost of cellular phone communication charges within ASEAN should be of concern. Telephony charges that keep on escalating may be good for the pockets of certain industry people but not good enough for our teeming millions in the region. When intra-ASEAN celular phone charges become truly affordable with a premium flavour, we could then say that an ASEAN resolve for one vision and one community would have been entrenched.

I end this address with the following Laotian saying, "When you've heard it you must see it; when you've seen it, make a judgment with your heart".

Thank you.