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DR. MAHATHIR OPENS TENTH GENERAL CONFERENCE  
OF ASAIHL AND SEMINAR ON SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING

Speech by the Hon'ble Minister of Education, Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad, on the occasion of the official opening of the Tenth General Conference of ASAIHL and Seminar on Scholarly Publishing in Southeast Asia at the National Institute of Public Administration, Petaling Jaya on Thursday, January 16, 1975 at 9.30 a.m. :

I am happy to welcome all of you to Malaysia. I understand that besides the members of ASAIHL who are representing the leading universities in each of the seven member countries and the ASAIHL region, there are scholars and editors among you who have come from as far afield as Canada and Australia to participate in the Seminar on Scholarly Publishing.

You are here to discuss Scholarly Publishing in Southeast Asia. Before I touch on that I would like to say a few things about education, in particular higher education in Malaysia, which I think is relevant. I do this because I know that academics have a highly developed sense of fraternity that cuts across borders and ideologies. You must therefore be as interested in education and its problems in Malaysia as you are in your own countries.

Malaysia is a developing country that has implicit faith in education as a means of achieving development goals. This faith is reflected in its budget of which 24% is allocated to education. This figure does not include the numerous scholarships and education provisions by Ministries other than the Education Ministry. Of this fund a healthy slice goes towards higher education.

At this stage in her development Malaysia cannot afford disruptions in her educational programmes. The developed countries can have fun and games at their universities but here we are very much inclined towards insisting that universities play their traditional roles i.e. they should teach and they should do research.

I say we are inclined because we are not that rigid in our attitudes. The universities of today cannot help but be closely identified with the community and the nation. Consequently students and faculty tend to become embroiled in matters other than learning or teaching or research. By and large this is a good thing. Indeed the Malaysian Government have stated again and again that universities should not be ivory towers.

But a line has to be drawn between what is healthy and what is sick. Interests which do not obstruct the primary functions of the universities are laudable but acts which obstruct or distract bona fide students and academics from pursuing their primary objectives do not only infringe on personal liberties but hurt the development of the nation. This we cannot afford, at least not at this stage in our development.

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We are therefore still of the view that universities should concentrate primarily on teaching and doing research. All else must be regarded as secondary and incidental. And certainly all disruptive activities must be regarded as abhorrent, undesirable and unworthy of being permitted to take place.

If our universities are to fulfil their two main functions adequately, it is clear that they must have an adequate quantum of books of the right quality. Books are needed as texts for the lecturers to lead their students through complex fields of knowledge. Books are necessary to be readily available as references to obtain definitions and explanations, to find out up-to-date facts, and even the correct spelling of words. Books are necessary to transmit knowledge from one generation to the next, or from one region to another, or from one culture to another.

If we look back we must admit that the greatest single contribution to the spread of knowledge is the discovery of printing. From then on all sorts of publications have been made possible. And academics have seized on this discovery not only to record and disseminate knowledge but also to carry out a time and space-extended dialogue and debate on their teachings. Learned journals have played this role with an effectiveness that is truly phenomenal. Because of this I am convinced that your deliberations at this seminar will contribute positively towards the development and advancement of education in this region for a long time to come.

Of course your work will effect the progress of education at a lower level too. The experience gained by academics in publishing will contribute towards the writing and production of text-books for schools. Malaysia is keenly interested in this.

For years we have been faced with problems of qualitative and quantitative shortages of text-books. We have tried to overcome these by commissioning the writing and translation of books and doing our own publication. And lately we have decided to loan free text-books to our students. With some 2½ million children in schools, most of whom are poor, the Free Loan scheme will cost the Government initially M\$62 million. We hope that this scheme will help the poor especially to get the education necessary to move out of their unenviable economic situation.

Turning to higher education, I am happy to say that all our universities are keenly interested in academic publication. The Education Ministry is supporting their worthy efforts, wherever feasible. For example, from this year in the University of Malaya a sum of \$35,000 has been provided for the development of academic journals in the Faculties of Science and Law. If other faculties come up with concrete proposals for publishing journals in their respective fields then I am sure the necessary financing will be made available since a revolving fund of \$100,000 has been provided by the University of Malaya.

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There are several interesting features of this scheme which are worthy of note. The scheme is in fact a challenge to the academics to produce scholarly papers of satisfactory international standard for a journal under their own faculty's editorship. The funds that are ultimately provided by the university administration are tied to only one piece of string, namely, the requirement of high academic quality in content and presentation. There will be no interference in the editing of these journals. The staff in the respective faculties shall decide their topics and their presentation. The editors and the editorial committees shall select and edit articles for final publication. In the case of the University of Malaya from that point onwards all the business affairs of each journal will be taken care of by the University administration through the University of Malaya Press. The academics will not have to worry about such problems.

From bitter experience we know that while professors may be excellent teachers and superb writers of outstanding scholarly papers, they have neither the time nor the inclination to indulge in the numerous aspects of publishing, such as collecting monies that are due or marketing advertising space. In future, such tasks will be efficiently performed by the professional staff of the Press. In this way it is hoped that a series of academic journals will be brought out during the coming year.

Before concluding, I would like to take this opportunity to say a few words about fostering the spirit of regionalism in Southeast Asia. As many of you may be aware Malaysia is among the foremost in efforts to strengthen regional solidarity. We are strong supporters of ASEAN, ESCAP and the Asian Development Bank. In the field of education we participate fully in the work of SEAMEO and RIHED. A relatively high proportion of our institutions of higher learning are members of ASAIHL.

It is my sincere hope that as a result of your wise deliberations during the next three days you will be able to further strengthen the bonds of regionalism by bringing together scholarly publishers and editors in the region and by creating the infrastructure for a greater flow of regionally oriented academic publications especially under the aegis of ASAIHL which has taken such a positive interest in this matter.

Ladies and Gentlemen. It gives me great pleasure to declare open this Tenth General Conference of ASAIHL and Seminar on Scholarly Publishing in Southeast Asia.

Thank you.

KUALA LUMPUR,  
15hb Januari, 1975.

(dikeluarkan pada pukul 8.30 malam)

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