

SEA REGIONAL COOPERATION AND CULTURE

by

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This meeting of the SEA Study Group on cultural exchange provides a welcome opportunity to take a closer look at our cultural situation and especially at the manner in which its three dimensions interconnect.

We are all of course, aware of the cultural pluralism at the national level in all of our countries. The integration of our diverse ethnic and ethno-religious cultures continues to constitute a major effort in each of our countries. In this process of nation-building we have become all very much aware of the economic, political, social as well as cultural factors that are involved. Especially in the last few years, several of our countries have had to confront the manner in which differentials in the capacity to adjust to the requirements of modernization among the various cultural strains have aggravated already existing social and economic disparities. I do not think we need to elaborate on the burden which this has put on the political system, and the complications that have resulted in terms of national integration.

The pressures of population increase and the need of employment creation for a rapidly growing labor force in the more populous of our countries have important cultural implications which we can only ignore at our peril. In part, the increasing social tensions which inevitably will be part of our lives in the coming decade stem from the discrepancy between the slowness of the development process and the heightened expectations among the general public. In part, it stems from the sluggishness of our political systems in adjusting to legitimate demands for greater and broader participation, and to demands for social justice and human rights. Additionally, it has become obvious that the

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thus avoiding their reduction to becoming mere consumers of an external cosmopolitan communications network.

This need to develop cultural capabilities and patterns that will enable us to maintain our cultural identity and autonomy in the face of the powerful impact of modern mass communications media constitutes the second dimension of our cultural situation in this region. Such a capacity is not only important in terms of the cultural continuity that we need in order not to become alienated from ourselves and our own creative impulses leaving us vulnerable to the disintegrative impact of the cultural crisis in the industrial countries; neither is it important only in terms of shaping a consumption pattern and level that is not dysfunctional to our own development strategy; it is equally important in the light of our need to develop a future perspective and value pattern that will enable us to shape a different kind of society and culture than what is called the industrial high mass consumption societies. We will have to develop alternative societal models, alternative growth paths that are more within our own resources, ecologically less destructive and wasteful, and more capable of providing a meaningful life at what for a rather long time will have to be low levels of per capita income. It is, of course, not only the poor developing nations that will have to learn to grow and develop within their own resources. The rich industrial nations will have to adjust themselves as well to a world of increasing scarcities. The coming decade will also see a movement of industry -- especially labor intensive industry -- from the north to the south of our globe, and it will very much depend on our capacity to stick to our own alternative growth path and life style whether this movement will increase or reduce our autonomy and the degree to which we will be able to control our economic destiny.

emergence in our countries of consumption levels and consumer patterns derived from the rich industrial countries before having developed our own industrial base, is bound to increase our dependence from external economic power, and to reduce the options open to us to develop our own economy in line with our aspirations for a just and prosperous society. The need for self-reliance in our development effort then forces us to think in terms of alternative growth paths, which are not repetitions of the economic history of the established industrial countries, but which are more within our resources. This raises the problem of future expectations and value orientation especially among our young. Because of its large population, a country like Indonesia will have to take into consideration that at a growth rate of 7% a year, it will after 20 years only, be able to double per capita income to a level of \$200.00 per capita. If development is perceived only in terms of increased production of material goods and the expectation of their speedy availability, tremendous social and political tensions threatening the viability of our nation will become inevitable. We will therefore have to pose anew the question of what a meaningful life is at a level of \$100.00 or \$200.00 per capita. The articulation of future expectations that are within the horizon of feasibility will therefore require non-materialistic developmental drives and motivations and an emphasis on sharing and cooperation in the pursuit of development goals that are not an imitation of advanced industrial societies, but autonomous. The capacity to pursue such a course will very much depend on the way in which a nation perceives its purpose and the meaning of life on an individual level. It will also depend on the capacity of its various communities for self-entertainment, for finding continued enjoyment and fulfillment in their own culture and its creations,

The articulation of an alternative growth path and life style is not an endeavor which our countries can work out in isolation. Within the Southeast Asia region we will, each of us, have to work out our own answer in cooperation with each other. This is the third dimension of our cultural situation. In working out the instrumentalities of such regional cooperation, we also will have to take into account the culturally pluralistic character of our region. As on the national level, here too we are confronted with growing disparities as a result of differentials in the speed of economic development and in the capacity to adjust to the requirements of modernization. This raises the dangers of too great varieties in consumption patterns and life styles within the region, thus complicating the process of regional cooperation. The need for regional solidarity, which may well be the essential condition for the autonomy of our region in the emerging international world order, imposes on all of us the obligation not only to know more about each other but also to be more sensitive to each other, especially in a cultural sense. It has become increasingly clear that the problem of national development of each of our countries, of maintaining the integrity and autonomy of this region in a global setting, and the problem of regional cooperation and solidarity are very closely tied together, and that our capacity to come up with effective responses to these problems very much turn around our conception of the purposes of our societies and of man and his values. The future of our region therefore is not solely going to be determined by political and economic factors, but very much also by the strength of our cultural capacities and aspirations. Herein then lies the significance of this Study Group. I am sure that its continuation will contribute to strengthening the foundations for our common future.

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