

Instruction

THE ASIAN
RESEARCH AND
INFORMATION
CENTRE



COLOMBO

SRI LANKA

ASIAN RESEARCH AND INFORMATION CENTRE

Objective

To promote mutual understanding between the people of Asia and the people of developed countries through an Asian Research and Information Centre located in an Asian Country having communication links with Information Centres in developed countries (DCC). The Asian Research and Information Centre was founded in Colombo, Sri Lanka in 1977 with intent to establish affiliated Information Centres in DCC as and when external resources permit.

The Rationale

Transnational communication at the level of the people has been found, after the experience of the cold-war, to ease international tensions. Tensions arise partly because of a lack of mutual understanding among people of different nations or various groups within nations and concern for each other's problems. There is today an inadequacy of communication between the people of 'the three worlds'. There is, of course, a great deal of communication at Government to Government level, which the World Press gives extensive coverage to, but the Press does not lend itself adequately to communication between the people of the world. So do the other media to a greater or less extent.

The post-war world has witnessed a quick succession of political crises and explosive situations, with armaments piling up. National power politics has always dominated international

relations. Transnational mass-communication is a way to defuse the explosive situation. Information and publicity based on research could promote racial harmony between ethnic groups within nations.

An unfortunate feature of the present world system is that people and public opinion play an insignificant role in international relations. In most countries this is a preserve and prerogative of the ruling elite. It is imperative that international relations should be informed by public opinion in order to ease international tensions. The conduct of international relations should be democratised.

Political tensions between the capitalist and socialist blocks of nations, economic tensions between the developed nations and the less developed nations and social tensions between people of different races, colour and language both at the national and international level characterise the present world order. International diplomacy and official conferences have not eased tensions because the people are not involved in them. Disarmament talks over the last half a century have proved futile for the same reason. And now the North-South dialogue is dragging on inconclusively without appreciably improving international economic relations, because there is no popular involvement in the issues or pressures on Governments. The lobby is a conventional institution of democratic government.

It is a wellknown fact that the people of the developed countries have very little access to information on the people, the economy, and the culture of Asian countries or of Asian migrants in their countries. Very few publications concerning Asian countries and their people are available in the bookshops and libraries of developed countries. The meagre publicity given by the mass media of developed countries to Asian affairs is grossly inadequate to foster an informed public opinion. What little is published consists of the *publications of writers who are nationals of the developed countries*. Most of them publish what scanty material they can procure on a short excursion to one or more less developed countries. Publications concerning Asian affairs by Asian writers are hardly available to the people of

developed countries because of the imperfections of the book-market and the writer's lack of access to publishers in the developed world.

Not for want of material or research or research institutions in Asian has publication gone by default in the developed countries. Despite a growing demand for information about Asian affairs from research institutions, non-government organisations, churches, journalists, creative artists and the people of the developed countries, such information remains scanty. There is very little information available there on the research institutions of Asia their publications, their ongoing programmes and their linkages with organisations in other countries. There is little co-ordinating work in the area. Institutions, scholars, and writers of the developed countries can hardly identify the appropriate sources of information in Asia or establish contact with them and elicit their immediate responses to current issues. This is a serious gap in communication.

There is on the contrary a great deal of misinformation of the public on Asian issues. Fund-raising campaigns of non-government organisations for purposes of relief of distress in Asia, though well intentioned, have grossly distorted the image of the poor countries. The 'tear-jerker syndrome' of starvation, malnutrition and disease dominates their propaganda and does grave injustice to the true picture of those countries and their people. Asians have come to be associated with poverty and international beggary. It is a humiliating picture for Asians resident in the developed countries. Emotion associated with humanitarian aid and charity dominates the thinking of people in the developed countries and clouds the real issues and economic problems of Asian countries. Their approach is not therefore oriented to understanding basic problems or helping to solve them but to rendering immediate relief.

The people of the developed countries have little access to sources of up-to-date information on the current issues of the Asian countries except for "sensational news", an occasional seminar or a short TV programme. Such scanty or distorted information can hardly fill the vast information gap which exists.

Asian nationals resident in the developed countries seldom have a forum to discuss current issues, and disseminate information about their countries, though many of them have the competence and the desire to do so. Much of their expertise and understanding of Asian issues runs to waste in the developed countries. An institution like a documentation centre is needed in every developed country which could (1) mobilise the expertise and energies of Asian expatriates and concerned interests in the developed world, and organise a continuous exchange of information and ideas, through seminars, lecture circuits, participation in mass-communication and so on; (2) make available to the public the research material published by institutions in Asia; (3) assemble available research material and examine their relevance and implication to the host country; (4) supply such information to research institutions, journalists, creative artists, scholars and ordinary people in the host country and Asian countries. (5) Promote racial harmony between the nationals of D.CC and resident Asians.

II

The Asian Research and Information Centre is an institution located in an Asian country which will co-ordinate the activities of Asian Information Centres in the developed countries as well as function as an information and documentation clearing house for the whole of Asia. Colombo has been chosen as the location of the Asian Research and Information Centre for its communication facilities. It is proposed to establish several Asian Information Centres, depending on the resources forthcoming, in some or all of the following cities: Washington D.C., Los Angeles, Ottawa, Melbourne, The Hague and Bonn. The need for information on Asian affairs has been keenly felt and articulated by nationals of those countries. Incidentally Asian professionals have migrated there in fair numbers.

The Centre in Colombo is manned by Asians as well as expatriates from D.CC. The Information Centres in the D.CC will be manned by nationals of D.CC and Asian expatriates if available.

The Centre will collect from Asian countries information relevant to an understanding of the true economic and social conditions of the people of Asia for transmission to the Information

Centres for translation into the language of the recipient country and dissemination to the public. The selection of material does not have any political bias because the Centre has no political ideology. As the function of the Centre is to supply what material is demanded by its affiliates, there is no possibility of the Centre promoting any particular political ideology.

The institution is based on the premise that it is the people who make world systems and it is the people who can change them. The structure of the institution is outlined below and is illustrated by means of a simple diagram. Functionally the institution is made up of three departments of activity namely :

- (1) Research on Asian affairs
- (2) Information, Publicity and Documentation
- (3) Communication and Promotion of Racial Harmony

The research activity consists of :

- (1) identifying research institutions, non-governmental organisations, scholars, creative artists and committed persons in Asia, their activities, publications and research materials;
- (2) collecting all material which is relevant to an understanding of the economic and social conditions of the people of Asia and their cultures;
- (3) collecting information about Asian expatriates in the D.C.C., their professional status, their ethnic composition, their cultural needs and aspirations and their problems of better understanding their new environment and society;

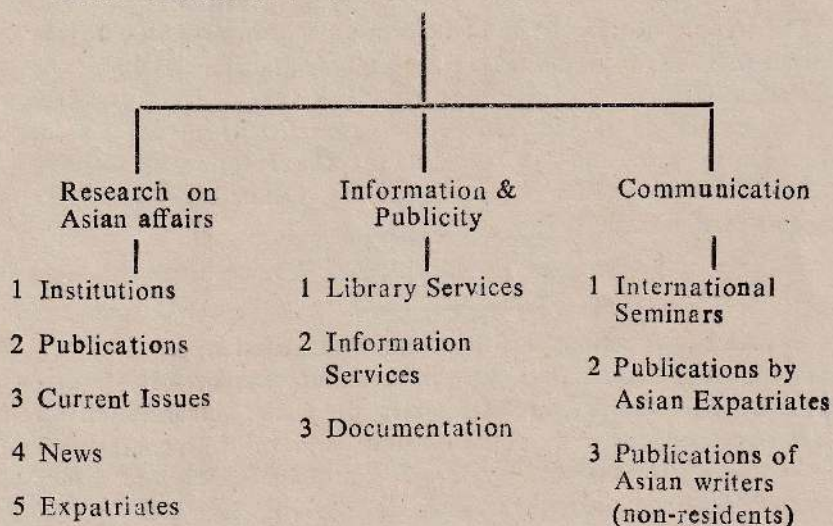
The information, publicity and documentation activity consists of :

- (1) procurement of publications, research material and information from institutions, researchers, scholars and creative artists in Asia and supplying such material to their counterparts in the D.C.C;
- (2) the provision of library facilities and documentation services;
- (3) the dissemination of information through the TV and the radio, the film and the Press;
- (4) the establishment of a news bulletin;
- (5) the organisation of lecture circuits by resident and visiting Asian scholars, Asian politicians and artists;
- (6) the organisation of schools programmes.

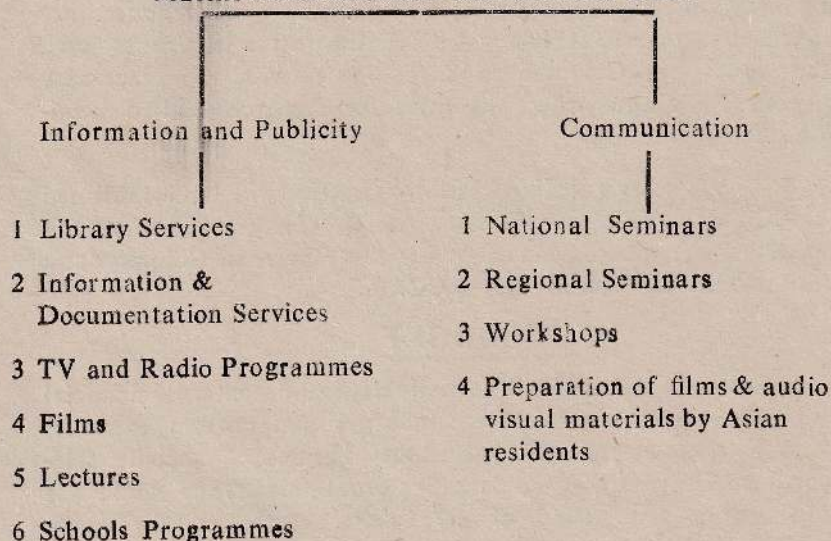
The communication activity consists of:—

- (1) organising (a) international and seminars on Asian issues;
(b) national and provincial seminars in the host country;
(c) workshops,
- (2) preparation of films, audio-visual publicity material by resident Asians and nationals.
- (3) encouragement and assistance to Asian writers and artists resident in the D.CC;
- (4) promotion of contact and communication between Asian institutions, professionals, scholars, researchers and artists and their counterparts in the D.CC;
- (5) promotion of communication between Asian expatriates and their professional counterparts in the D.CC and
- (6) utilisation of the knowledge and expertise of Asian expatriates to foster a better understanding and appreciation of Asian issues by nationals of D.CC.

Asian Research and Information Centre, Colombo



Asian Information Centre in a D.C.



THE ORGANISATION

The Asian Research and Information Centre (ARIC) was incorporated in Colombo as a non-profit organisation under the Companies Ordinance of Ceylon, No. 51 of 1938. The Corporate body is composed of individuals who are citizens of Sri Lanka and contains provision for Directors of the Information Centres in D.CC to be members of the Governing Council. The founder members are named below.

FUNCTIONS

ARIC functions as a research institution a data and documentation bank and an information centre. It undertakes research studies and assembles data and information on Asian countries either in collaboration with or on a contractual basis with institutions in developed countries which are either interested in promoting research in Asian countries or in obtaining data and information about Asian countries. It will also supply data, information and news to institutions and the communication media in developed countries where costs are defrayed by them. It has yet to build up a research staff at the centre in Colombo and equip it with the necessary library facilities and other amenities for research and dissemination of information.

Several Information Centres will be established in D.CC as affiliates of the ARIC. They will serve as channels of communication between the Centre in Colombo and institutions, media etc in the D.CC.

BUDGET

The organisations in D.CC will initially depend on external financial assistance to meet establishment charges and current expenses until such time as the organisations become financially self-supporting. It is envisaged that external assistance could be phased out over a period of five years, at the end of which current income from sale of research publications, data, information and news to developed countries would be adequate to meet current expenses in Colombo as well as the Information Centres in the D.CC and possibly similar centres in other developed countries.

It is envisaged that funding organisations in D.C.C which are committed to promoting research or communication or racial harmony or international cultural activities or international harmony and peace will grant funds for the establishment and operation of the Information Centres in the D.C.C.

FOUNDER MEMBERS

- 1 Lorna Wright (Mrs.) — Journalist, Author
- 2 V. Manicavasagar — Former Justice of the Supreme Court of
Sri Lanka
- 3 E. O. E. Perera — Former Vice-Chancellor of the University
of Sri Lanka
- 4 M. Rajanayagam — Former Secretary, Ministry of Labour,
Sri Lanka
- 5 Ashley Halpe — Professor, University of Sri Lanka, Colombo.
- 6 C. J. Eliezer — Professor, La Trope University, Melbourne,
Australia
- 7 D. L. Jayasuriya — Professor, University of Western Australia.

NATIONAL STATE ASSEMBLY

August 12, 1977

Mrs. Lorna Wright

Convenor

Asian Research and Information Centre

Melbourne

AUSTRALIA

Dear Madam,

Let me congratulate you and other founder members of your organisation for undertaking a venture, for which there is a need. I agree with you that there is, in the developed countries, inadequacy of information on Third World issues. There is also mis-information.

The last Conference of Heads of Non-Aligned States saw the need for establishing new sources of information on the Third World.

I welcome your effort to establish a communication link between research institutions, professionals, scholars, journalists and creative artists in Asia and their counterparts in developed countries. It may bridge a communication gap.

Yours sincerely,

Anandatissa de Alwis
SPEAKER, M. P. for KOTTE

MINISTER OF INFORMATION & BROADCASTING

7, Sir Baron Jayatilake Mawatha,
Colombo-1.

18th August 1977

Mrs. Lorna Wright,
Chief Organiser,
Asian Research & Information Centre,
Melbourne,
AUSTRALIA

Dear Mrs. Wright,

I have great pleasure in sending you a message of good wishes for the success of your organisation on the occasion of its inauguration. The organisation appears to me to have very great potential in these years of international economic, political and social disharmonies, to bring together the people of different countries at non-governmental level and thus provide them with the scope for a better appreciation of their mutual problems. This is an effective method of ensuring international harmony.

I have no doubt that it will, even in a small way promote the current North-South dialogue and help to usher in an era of greater international, economic and social co-operation.

Let me take this opportunity once again, to wish your organisation and your endeavours all success.

Yours sincerely,

D. B. Wijetunga
Minister of Information and
Broadcasting

AUSTRALIA

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

The Office of the Commissioner,
Box E280, Canberra, ACT 2600

16 August 1977

Dear Mrs. Wright,

I write particularly to warmly commend the project outlined for the Asian Research and Information Centre.

I can testify strongly that knowledge of the Third World in Australia is inadequate and in most cases distorted. It is a sad commentary that an impression is held that since independence the nations of the Third World have failed to make any progress at all. We know how untrue this is but as a result of inadequate teaching material, distorted and/or inadequate news presentation and inherent prejudice, this is a widely held view.

As the outline states so vividly and truly "Asians have come to be associated with poverty and international beggary".

It comes as a shock to Australians generally to understand that the Indian, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka population in Australia has the highest percentage of professionals of any component part of the population.

There is another urgency about the project and this is associated with Australians' perception of themselves in relation to Asia. There is a totally inadequate recognition of the fact that against a background of 40,000 years of Aboriginal history and 10,000 years of Asian history, European experiment in Australia is still just that, after a mere 200 years.

Another powerful fact in favour of the institute is the fact that Asian migration has significantly expanded in recent years and in fact migrants from Asia have shown the greatest percentage increase of all groups as recorded in the last 25 years. Against this background there is an urgency for something of Asian language, culture and heritage to be recognised and understood within the context of Australian society.

Joint researches to trace the links between Australia and Asia are very desirable and while some work has been initiated in the Philippines, little or nothing has been done generally outside the context of the various European Empires.

I stand by to support in every way a far sighted project which could have far reaching influence in the region in the future.

Mrs. L. Wright,

C/- Col. The Rt. Hon. Sir John Kotelawala,
Kandawala,
Kotelawalapura,
CEYLON.

Yours sincerely,
(The Hon) A J Grassby
Commissioner for
Community Relations

MINISTER OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

212, Baudhalyka Mawatha,
Colombo-7.

SRI LANKA

6th September, 1977

Mrs. Lorna Wright,
Chief Organiser,
Asian Research and Information Centre,
Melbourne,
AUSTRALIA

Dear Mrs. Wright,

I have perused with a great deal of interest your document 'A Project Outline' of the proposed Asian Research and Information Centre. Please let me congratulate the organisers for their political sensitivity in perceiving the need for such an institution. Their objective to promote a better and realistic understanding of the problems of the Third World in the Developed Countries is very commendable and will render a signal service to the Asians resident in Australia.

The countries of Asia with their long heritage of rich traditional cultures have different motivations and aspirations from those of the Developed World. A proper understanding of these cultures is therefore of fundamental importance even for the selection of the strategies for their development. The project could make a significant contribution to the promotion of mutual understanding among the peoples of these countries and achievement of international harmony.

Please accept my best wishes for the success of this project.

Yours sincerely

E. L. B. Hurulle
Minister of Cultural Affairs

MINISTRY OF SOCIAL SERVICES

14, Barnes Place,
Colombo-7
Sri Lanka.

17th August, 1977

Mrs. Lorna Wright,
Convenor,
Asian Research & Information Centre,
Melbourne,
AUSTRALIA.

Dear Madam,

I am extremely pleased to hear that you together with a few others of the same mind are devoting your time and energies to the task of setting up an Asian Research & Information Centre.

Political Leaders and Administrators in the Third World Countries have realised the serious implication of the communication gaps between the Third World and the developed Countries. They have come to the conclusion that there is an urgent need to set up an independent Third World mechanism and strategies to meet this situation.

The inadequacy of information applies not only to the areas of priority-concern for the Third World Countries, such as economic development but also to other very important areas such as Social Services

I believe that your Centre would be very useful in the collection and dissemination of information relating to Social Services.

I wish you and your Organisation all success.

Yours sincerely,

Asoka Karunaratne
Minister of Social Services

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Department of Social Work

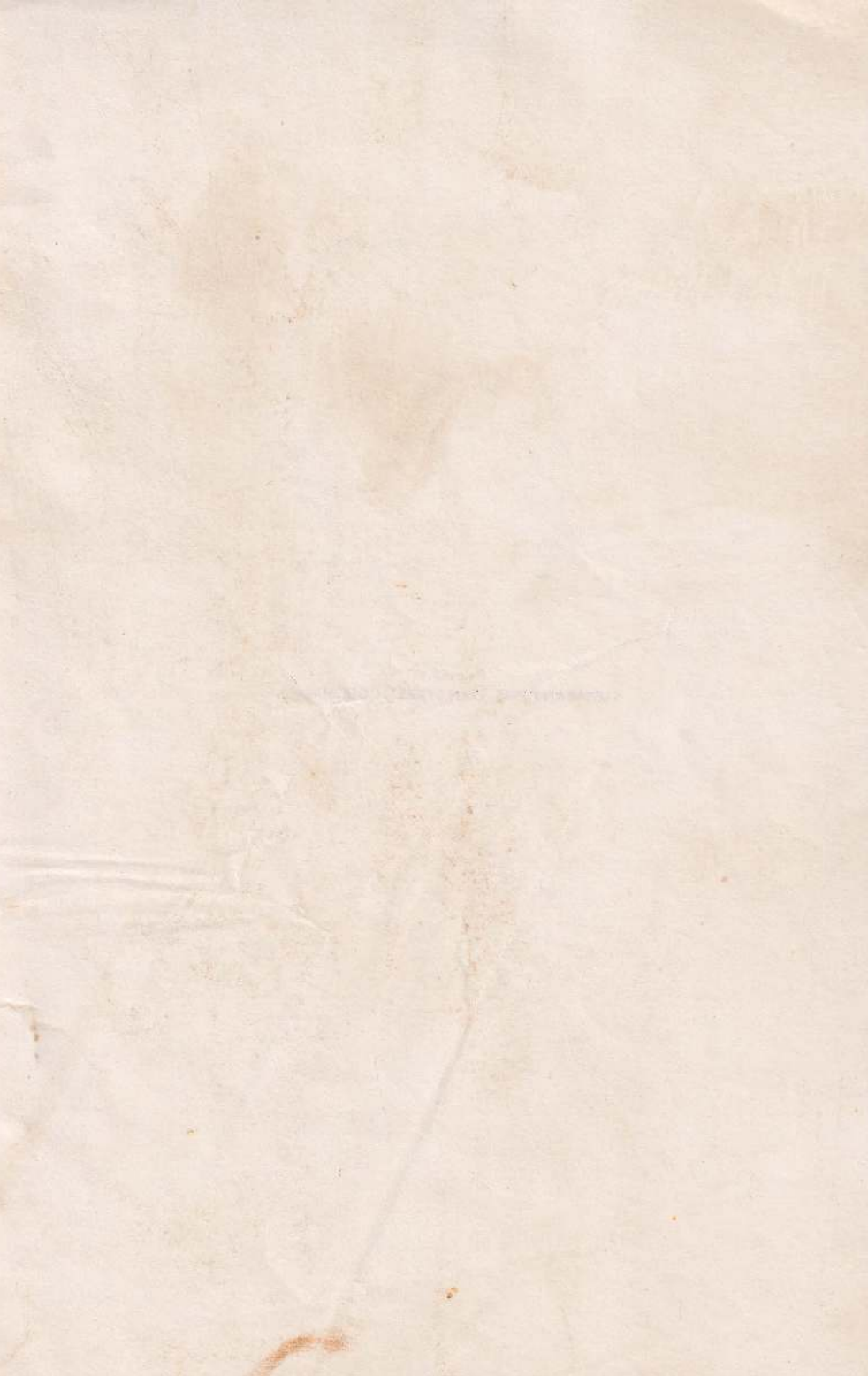
Nedlands, W.A. 6009
and September, 1977

*Extract from a letter to Mrs. Lorna Wright,
Asian Research and Information Centre,
Colombo.*

THE ASIAN RESEARCH AND INFORMATION CENTRE project represents an innovative proposal worthy of support because it endeavours to meet an urgent need in the developed countries for research information about the developing countries. Its initial location in Australia is perhaps most relevant and significant. As an Asian expatriate who is actively engaged in development studies and related activities such as work with voluntary aid agencies, I have been mindful of the lacunas of knowledge about Asia within Australia. I was instrumental in getting together a group of Perth to set up a somewhat similar centre and we were able to bring out, as a first effort, an information bulletin about Third World Resources available in the city of Perth. Those of us involved in compiling this bulletin were quickly made aware of the deficiencies of knowledge in this area at the national level, and also the absence of a co-ordinating documentation centre at the national level. Australia, in this regard, despite its geographical location and its professed commitment to Asia, lags far behind such countries as Canada and the U. K. Australia's credibility in Asia is seriously at stake and this project may be a small step in the right direction to salvage at least some good will.

I believe that the project as outlined for an Asian Research and Information Centre will act as a powerful catalyst in generating new thinking about the Asian mainland in Australia. Its multifarious functions have been well presented but I would place priority on its function as Research and Information Centre, especially in the matter of being a documentation centre for literature relating to Asia. In this connection the CLEARING HOUSE ON MIGRATION ISSUES in Melbourne provides an admirable model along which lines the proposed Centre could be developed. I am happy to support this project unreservedly as a challenging idea which needs urgent support.

D. L. Jayasuriya (Prof.)
BA (Syd), Phd (Lond), ABPsS
Head of Department.



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