

Consultation on New Printing Technologies for  
Small Newspapers : Trivandrum, India, 14-17 June  
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**Report**

**By**

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**AMIC-CAF-CMDF-UK**  
**CONSULTATION ON NEW PRINTING TECHNOLOGIES**  
**FOR SMALL NEWSPAPERS**

**Trivandrum, India**

**14-17 June 1988**

**INTRODUCTION**

More than 24,000 daily and non-daily newspapers and periodicals with a combined circulation exceeding 80 million are published in South Asia -- a region where one in every three Asians (excluding the Arab States) live. Although most of these publications are concentrated in India, all the countries in the region have a thriving print media. Even tiny countries like Sri Lanka and Nepal between them have more than 1,000 newspapers and periodicals.

The thriving print industry in the region has employed new print technology quite extensively. But the development of the technologies is by no means evenly distributed. In India, which has perhaps made their greatest use, the latest in new technologies co-exist with among the most antiquated. While several large organizations have turned to computerised photocomposition, new plate-making technologies, new configuration rotary presses, new media, and desk top publishing, large section of the print industry continue to employ hot metal typesetting and letter presses.

Nonetheless, there is recognition in the region of the MacBride Commission's conclusion that, "All indicators point to a further acceleration of automation in the newspaper industry, fostering greater diversification of service to

subscribers." In places as remote as Bhutan, which had been untouched by the first three generations of the computer revolution, the latest in desk-top publishing technology is being employed to publish the national newspaper *Kuensel*.

The explosion in the new technologies has opened up vast choices for consumers. Unfortunately, most printing houses in Asia lack the resources to obtain information and consultation on printing hardware as there is no clearinghouse of information or consultancy service to advise them of their choices. Yet, as the MacBride Commission noted, "The future largely depends upon an awareness of the choices open."

The Consultation on New Printing Technologies for Small Newspapers, organised by the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre in collaboration with the Department of Communication and Journalism, University of Kerala (UK), India, with support from the Communication Assistance Foundation (CAF), The Netherlands, and the Commonwealth Media Development Fund (CMDF), England, was designed to expose publishers of small and medium-sized newspapers and magazines in the region to the technological choices to enable them to make informed decisions on their technological needs and equipment choices.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

Fourteen newspaper editors and publishers from six South Asian countries -- Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka -- participated in the consultation. In addition, the consultation attracted twenty-two observers, nearly a dozen exhibitors and several hundred visitors to the public exhibition on

the new printing technologies. The lists of participants, observers and exhibitors are attached as Appendixes 1-3..

## CONSULTANTS

A team of eminent resource persons drawn from among printing equipment manufacturers and distributors, including Linotype, Macintosh, Bandhu Machinery, etc. served as consultants at the meeting. Consultants from the Printing Technology department of Anna University, the Research Institute for Newspaper Development, as well as from The Netherlands and Japan, served as resource persons. A panel of three users, comprising Mr Viren Chhabra, Deputy Manager, *The Statesman*; New Delhi, Mr Hormusji Cama, Director, *Bombay Samachar*; and Mr George Jacob, Production Manager, *Malayala Manorama*, Kottayam, was available throughout the consultation to provide the user perspective in the different pre-print and print areas. AMIC's Senior Programme Specialist (Training) Dr. Achal Mehra served as Consultation Director. A complete list of resource persons is attached as Appendix 4.

## PROGRAMME

The four-day consultation was held at the Hotel Mascot from 14-17 June 1988 (Appendix 5). The public exhibition was organized at the CoBank Towers, close to the hotel. A part of the exhibition was also held at the Hotel Mascot.

Inaugurating the consultation, Prof. G.B. Mohan Thampi, Vice Chancellor, University of Kerala, said that small newspapers play a critical role in a democracy by providing a multiplicity of viewpoints. He said that the monopoly



newspapers cannot be trusted with providing the public with truth and it was for the small newspapers to challenge the large, commercial newspapers. New technologies will benefit small newspapers by reducing their external dependence and reducing their printing costs, he said.

In his welcome address, AMIC Secretary-General Vijay Menon noted that advances in new technology alone will not guarantee higher productivity, better service or improved profits. "The technology must be carefully managed and utilized to be beneficial," he said. The sharing of experiences at the consultation, he felt, would aid this process.

Mr P.K. Roy, Editor-in-Chief, *Aaj Kaal*, in his keynote speech said that new technologies can help small newspapers increase their speed, reduce their costs and improve their quality.

Mr Roy, who has been associated with the launching of 14 daily newspapers and several magazines in four languages over several years, advised newspapers introducing new technologies to bear in mind the editorial needs as well, because ultimately it is the contents of the newspaper that are central to success.

Introducing the programme, Dr. Achal Mehra, AMIC's Senior Programme Specialist and Consultation Director, said that the explosion in the new printing technologies opened up a vast array of choices to the 24,000 daily and non-daily newspaper publishers in South Asia. Unfortunately, most printing houses in South Asian countries lacked the resources to obtain information to make informed

decisions. It was the purpose of the consultation, he said, to familiarize participants with the technological choices.

Mr T.R. Vishwanathan, Regional Manager (South) of Linotype, discussed the advantages of phototypesetting to hot metal typesetting, then exposed participants to the range of available phototypesetting equipment for newspapers.

Mr Prem Bandhu Gupta, of Bandhu Machinery Pvt. Ltd., and a small newspaper publisher himself, discussed the flexibility that offset presses offer over letter presses and the relative merits of web and sheet fed printing presses. He then discussed the different machines and manufacturers in the market and his own experience at his family newspaper *Tej*.

Mr Sunil Agarwal, Marketing Director, Raba Contel, distributors of Apple Macintosh, explained the desktop publishing (DTP) concept to participants, saying that. DTP offers small newspaper publishers greater flexibility and independence than phototypesetting. He discussed the quality and page-size limitations of DTP, but maintained that in the South Asian context, the 300 dot per inch resolution quality offered by DTP systems is acceptable.

Discussing new newsroom technologies, Mr Gourang S. Kundapur, Deputy General Manager, Press Trust of India (PTI), said that "information technology is no more a luxury; it is a necessity," by pointing to the advantages in quality, speed, control, flexibility and cost-effectiveness. Drawing from PTI's own experiences in moving over to new technologies, Mr Kundapur advised participants on the selection criteria, and especially on PTI's model of absorbing the staff rendered surplus by the new technologies. In the context of developing

countries, he argued, staff retrenchment is not an available option. He asked newspapers contemplating new technologies to bear in mind the need for air conditioning, uninterrupted power supply and the restricted availability of scripts in local languages. He also discussed PTI's effort to develop indigenous systems through its sister company, National Information Technologies, Ltd. (NITEL).

Mr Yasushi Sekikawa, Manager, *The Shizuoka Shimbun*, in Shizuoka Province in Japan, focused on techniques to improve printing quality with a discussion of the methods and technology at different stages of the production process at his newspaper. He explained the investment and production costs required for quality improvement, then measured their impact in increase in circulation and in sales of ads.

Mr F. Van de Velde, Managing Director, Van de Velde and PZC-Holding, a provincial newspaper publishing house in Zeeland, The Netherlands, then explained new plate-making technologies. He began with an explanation of the plate-making process, then discussed new developments, including direct filmless platemaking systems. He concluded his presentation with a discussion of the range, costs and merits of different plate-making systems.

In his presentation on training for the new technologies, Mr V.S. Krishnamurthy, Printing Consultant, Anna University, Madras, noted that education and training of personnel for the printing industry in South Asia have not kept pace with the advancements in printing technology. He argued that most of the major problems in the process of modernization faced by the printing industry in the region, can be attributed to their failure to pay attention to the training process.



After identifying the training needs for the region, he proposed the creation of an Asian Graphic Training Center.

At the concluding session, Mr K.S. Ramakrishnan, Director, Research Institute for Newspaper Development (RIND), Madras, discussed the pioneer rural press project launched by RIND in Sagara, in Shimoga District in Karnataka. Four rural weekly newspapers for adjoining taluks are published at a central printing facility under this project .

The user panel of Mr Chhabra, Mr Cama, and Mr Jacob critiqued the problems with new technologies that they had faced at their newspapers and provided consultancy advice on the selection and economics of the new technologies to several of the participating newspapers contemplating purchases of printing equipment.

The workshop also heard country reports from India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Maldives and Sri Lanka on the technological state and economics of the printing industry.

Participants visited the two leading newspapers in Trivandrum, the *Kerala Kaumudi* and *Matribhumi*. The editors of the newspapers gave them a tour and briefing of their production facilities and answered their questions. Of particular interest to some of the participants was the conversion of eight letter presses to offset presses by one newspaper. Mr. Sekikawa explained to participants that such conversion was popular in Japan.

A public exhibition of new technologies was held by AMIC in conjunction with the consultation at the CoBank Towers. Several leading manufacturers and distributors of printing equipment and services exhibited their products and services at the exhibition. The products on display included Linotype and Monotype phototypesetters, Apple Macintosh and Genicom desktop publishing systems, Agfa cameras, Swifts offset printing presses, etc. Displays were also organized by The Printers House, Printco, J. Mahabeer and Co., Coates of India and Superline Engineering. Several hundred people visited the exhibition.

The exhibitors held individual meetings with several of the participants to discuss their printing technology needs and the economics of their products and services.

## **EVALUATION BY PARTICIPANTS**

Most of the participants rated the utility of the consultation to their work as "a great deal." They all expressed deep satisfaction at both the content and depth of the course. They unanimously agreed that the consultation had "met" or "exceeded" their expectations. Several participants said they had acquired very useful practical information they could utilise to improve the printing quality of their publications.

Some participants from very small newspapers, most notably from Nepal, expressed the view that the technologies discussed were too advanced for newspapers in their country. They suggested that the consultation should also have examined techniques to convert existing printing equipment to improve printing quality, especially letter presses. Several participants remarked that the technologies in Japan and The Netherlands were too advanced to be of relevance to

small newspaper publishers in Asia. However, some others felt it was important to be aware of developments in these countries as the technologies would sooner, rather than later, percolate to the developing countries.

One participant suggested that a model project report for a small newspaper printing plant should be prepared. Another participant suggested a programme to discuss printing techniques and problems printers encounter in the various pre-print and print stages. A couple of participants expressed the need for practical training courses on printing techniques.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In both the choice of participants and the contents of the programme, the consultation was very successful. The users panel was able to alert participants to major considerations and problems associated with the purchase of new technologies discussed by experts in the field. It was also able to provide concrete advice on specific questions raised by participants.

The effort to select participants from small and medium-sized newspapers currently contemplating the purchase of new printing technologies was largely successful. One participant from Bangladesh remarked that he had acquired valuable advice directly relevant to new photocomposition equipment he was in the process of purchasing. Another participant from Nepal contemplating the purchase of his own printing press found the information invaluable, but expressed concern that the economics of the new technologies discouraged him from investing in them.



Similar national meetings will enable the benefits of this type of consultation to be made available to a larger pool of newspaper publishers at a low cost. National meetings would also make possible individual consultancy to the participants. It should be noted, however, that AMIC proposes to follow-up with individual consultancy services to several of the participants to this consultation under its Rural Press Consultancy Project, also supported by CAF.

In a region where most newspapers are locked into letter presses and hot metal type, the consultation was bound to be perceived as too advanced by some participants. Many publications, in Nepal and Maldives especially, do not have the circulation base to make them economically viable. Such publications need consultancy advice on marketing research before they venture into new printing technologies. A programme that will explore ways to adapt and convert existing technologies would be useful to this vast majority of newspaper publishers in the region.

While the objective of this meeting to assist small newspapers is laudable, in the context of some South Asian countries, e.g. Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives, the minimal threshold circulation to justify investment in new technologies is lacking. The full range of technologies discussed is not directly relevant to participants from these countries in the immediate future, although they expressed great interest in DTP systems and said it was important to be fully familiar with the range of options.

A meeting of printers to discuss common problems in the various pre-print and print stages should be considered in the future.