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Summary Of Proceedings

By

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SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

Introduction

This report summarizes the proceedings of the Seminar on "Media Monitors in Asia" held in Bangkok, Thailand from 29 June - 1 July 1994. The seminar was organized by the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre (AMIC), in cooperation with the Faculty of Communication Arts of Chulalongkorn University with the support of the Swedish International Development Authority.

The objectives of the seminar were to identify the various media monitoring mechanisms in Asia -- their nature, role and impact on the promotion of mass media freedom and promoting professional and ethical standards; to assess the efficacy of media monitoring mechanisms; to identify emerging trends and prospects for development of the media; and come up with actionable recommendations on how to strengthen the role of media monitoring mechanisms in the region.

Twenty-three senior editors, journalists, scholars and communications professionals from 12 Asian countries and one observer from Africa participated in the three-day meeting. The seminar programme included panel discussions and country presentations from Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand. In the final day of the seminar, the participants were divided into two working groups which formulated recommendations based on the seminar deliberations(see **Appendix A** for the conference programme and **Appendix B** for the list of participants).

The seminar was designed to provide a forum to discuss the media situation in Asia and the prospects of evolving independent media monitoring mechanisms. The participants were commissioned to write country papers outlining the nature, role and prospects for development of media monitoring mechanisms in their respective countries.

Day I, Wednesday, June 29, 1994

OPENING SESSION

The seminar began with simple welcome remarks from the principal organisers of the seminar, AMIC and the Faculty of Communication Arts of Chulalongkorn University.

Mr. Vijay Menon, AMIC Secretary-General, in his welcome remarks, expressed the hope that the seminar would examine both the role of the media as watchdogs and the effect of watchdogs on the media.

Dr. Darunee Hiranruk, Dean of the Faculty of Communication Arts of Chulalongkorn University, said in her opening remarks that the virtual revolution in the media, brought about by the introduction of new communication technologies had made the role of media

monitoring mechanisms more crucial. She said that there is a need for more responsibility and professionalism in the media, but the balance must be struck between the need to monitor the media and the essential freedom of expression inherent in the practice of journalism.

Mr. K.S. Venkateswaran, an advocate and manager of the State of Emergency Database Centre, Faculty of Law, Queen's University of Belfast, in his keynote remarks defined media monitoring mechanisms as institutions that perform the role of monitors or watchdogs of the mass media such as press councils or broadcasting standards councils and professional organisations. He enumerated some of the functions of media monitoring mechanisms such as protection of media users, resolution of conflicts between various actors in the media and assistance in research and development of workable codes of ethics. He suggested that the effectiveness of media monitoring mechanisms can be determined by their independence and credibility.

SESSION I: Media Monitoring Mechanisms in South Asia

The seminar began with country presentations on the nature, role and effectiveness of media monitoring mechanisms in the various countries represented. The first session was devoted to presentations from countries of South Asia.

Irwin Weerackody, Managing Director of Phoenix Advertising, in his presentation said that all media monitoring mechanisms in Sri Lanka are state-imposed. This includes the Press Council, the Public Performance Board and the soon to be established Broadcasting Authority and the Media Training Institute of Sri Lanka. He said that there are no code of ethics as such has been formulated by a non-state media group. Thus all norms of proper media practice, professional standards and ethics are determined by the state in Sri Lanka.

Prof. Zakariyya Sajid, director of the Pakistan Press Institute, in his presentation said that Pakistani society has not yet achieved a level of maturity and sophistication to develop institutions that protect the freedom of the press and promote media responsibility. This is evident in the fact that Pakistan has not yet been able to form its own press council due to conflicts between different media actors. Journalists unions have instead taken up some monitoring functions. Apart from the Ministry of Information, security and intelligence agencies perform monitoring functions of the media. Due to the lack of formal monitoring mechanisms, some private research organisations such as Gallup Pakistan have been performing some media monitoring functions through the undertaking of major research studies and surveys of the media.

R.V. Rajan, President of the Madras Advertising Club, discussed in detail the three main media monitoring mechanisms in India, namely, the Press Council, the Advertising Standards Council and various consumer groups. The Press Council has developed a systematic procedure for handling complaints and a code of conduct for the press. Publications also perform some self-monitoring through the appointment of an "ombudsman." The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) has also gained credibility since its inception in 1985 by resolving some high profile cases to the satisfaction of all affected parties. The Consumers' Protection Act of 1986 has given rise to a very active consumer movement, which monitors the media as well.

Dr. M. Tawhidul Anwar, director-general of the Bangladesh Press Institute, said that

in Bangladesh, the main media monitoring mechanism is the Press Council, which was created by an act of parliament in 1974. No such body was created by parliament to monitor the broadcast media. For the broadcast media, monitoring is done by the Film Censors Board. Dr. Anwar said the efficacy of the Press Council has been hampered by its lack of resources and the absence of an "ombudsman" to provide the necessary check and balance. Although a provision of law, calls for the appointment of an ombudsman, one has yet to be appointed by the government.

Dhruba Adhikary of the Nepal Press Institute, narrated Nepal's experience in development a vibrant and democratic press, which he attributes to the installation of a democratic constitutional monarchy in 1990. He said, that although relatively new, the Nepal Press Council and Nepal Journalists Association have been working on the enforcement of a industry code of ethics. The code of conduct for journalists is now being discussed by various media groups including the Nepal Press Institute.

In sum, in most of the media monitoring mechanisms in South Asia, with the exception of India, the state plays a pivotal role in the creation and operation of the mechanisms. As such, the media monitoring mechanisms suffer from a lack of independence and lack of resources. On the bright side, some very important cases have been handled rather well by the media monitoring mechanisms, which in turn, have established their credibility.

SESSION II: Media Monitoring Mechanisms in Southeast Asia

The second session examined the media monitoring mechanisms in Southeast Asia. Mr. Abdul Razak, permanent secretary of the Confederation of ASEAN Journalists (CAJ) based in Jakarta, presented the various media monitoring mechanisms in Indonesia, including the Ministry of Information, the Press Council, the Council of Ethics of the Indonesian Journalists Association (PWI) and professional bodies such as the PWI and the Indonesian Publishers Association (SPS). Mr. Razak narrated a recent example of the closure of three leading publications, *Tempo*, *Editor* and *DeTik* to illustrate the role of media monitoring mechanisms in Indonesia. He said that while journalists are guaranteed freedom of expression in Indonesia, the unique characteristics of the country warrant that government and other monitoring mechanisms regulate the media to ensure that national security is not threatened.

Mr. Zainoor Sulaiman, Corporate Affairs Editor of the Malaysian National News Agency (BERNAMA), narrated in his presentation Malaysia's efforts to establish a Press Council to act as a watchdog of the media -- an idea which was first raised in 1974 by the late Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak. However, due to reservations by media practitioners that such a Press Council might in fact curtail press freedom rather than promote it, no press council has yet been established in Malaysia. At present, a committee composed of 26 prominent journalists, academics, government officials and political leaders has been formed to draft a National Information Policy, which will include guidelines for the establishment of a Press Council. The Malaysian Press Institute and other non-government organisations are also developing a Code of Ethics for Malaysian journalists.

Dr. Teresa Stuart, Associate Professor of the Institute of Development Communication of the University of the Philippines, said in her presentation that in the

Philippines, self-monitoring mechanisms are the norm. Professional organisations such as the Kapisanan ñg mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas (Broadcasters Association of the Philippines) act as a watchdog mechanism for the industry. For film and television, monitoring is undertaken by the Movie and Television Review and Classification Board, a government-initiated regulatory body composed of private citizens representing various sectors of society. Various other non-governmental organisations representing the media and the church perform various monitoring functions. However, according to Dr. Stuart, despite the panoply of media monitoring efforts in the Philippines, stricter adherence to professional and ethical standards need to be enforced.

Dr. Ubonrat Siriyuvasak of the Faculty of Communication Arts of Chulalongkorn University, stated that no formal media monitoring mechanisms for the print media exists in Thailand. However, there have been initial discussions among the Reporters Association of Thailand towards the establishment of a monitoring mechanism for the press. For broadcasting, monitoring is undertaken by the Public Relations Department of the Office of the Prime Minister, which established the National Broadcasting Executive Board (NBEB) in 1974. The NBEB, which was reorganised into the National Broadcasting Commission in 1992, is composed of representatives government as well as non-government representatives, including academics. Representation in the NBC is still problematic, according to Dr. Siriyuvasak, as she feels there is a need to broaden the non-governmental membership.

Ivan Lim, president of the National Union of Journalists of the Singapore, said that due to the size of the Singapore media and the ownership by one large organisation of the major print media and by another of broadcasting, no independent media monitoring mechanism has yet taken root in Singapore. The Singapore Journalists' Union has taken the initiative to explore the possibility of developing an independent press monitoring mechanism, but the nature, role and functions of which are still under discussion.

SESSION III: Media Monitoring Mechanisms in East Asia

Two representatives from East Asia, Dr. Lee Chang-Keun of Kwangmoon University, and Ms. Kyoko Ito, of the Japanese Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) Cultural Research Institute, presented the status of media monitoring mechanisms in Korea and Japan, respectively.

Dr. Lee enumerated the various media monitoring mechanisms in Korea which included government bodies such as the Press Arbitration Commission, the Programme Review Committee and Commission for Ethics in Public Performance, self-monitoring bodies such as the Newspaper Ethics Committee and organisations such as trade unions and consumer groups. Dr. Lee said that non-governmental organisations such as trade unions and consumer groups have been very active in monitoring the media in Korea. With the increasing democratisation of Korean society, the government statutory monitoring mechanisms are under a great deal of pressure from the media and citizen's groups to relax their stringent regulatory and review standards.

Ms. Ito said that as a result of the negative experience in World War II, when the Japanese mass media became an instrument of government propaganda, the Japanese media has been allowed freedom from government control. Hence the absence of formal government media monitoring mechanisms. NHK, for instance, does its own self-monitoring

through programme advisory councils and a sophisticated programme monitoring system which tracks audience responses and feedback on NHK programming.

Day II, Thursday, June 30, 1994

SESSION IV: The Changing Media Environment in Asia: Perspectives from the Broadcast Media

Two speakers, Dr. Sumita Tobing from Televisi Republik Indonesia (TVRI) and Ms. Nawiyah Che'Lah of Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) spoke on the changing broadcasting environment in their respective countries.

Ms. Nawiyah cited the revolution in broadcasting as a result of the changes in technology characterized by the merging of computer technologies, telecommunications and broadcasting. The changes in the broadcasting environment in Malaysia includes the introduction of more private television stations, satellite programming and cable TV. She said that Malaysia will launch in 1995 it own telecommunications satellite, MEASAT, which will have the capability to provide direct-to-home satellite TV and radio services in Malaysia. She cautioned, however, that the introduction of these new technologies should not forgo the need to regulate the media in order to maintain a balance between economic and social concerns and to take into account the value systems of the major ethnic and other cultural and social groups in the country.

Dr. Tobing in her presentation, cited the heavy investment in new technology of the government television organisation in Indonesia, TVRI. She noted that Indonesia is one of the pioneers in satellite broadcasting with the introduction of the PALAPA satellite in 1976. The government has also liberalised broadcasting by allowing the entry of private organisations in broadcasting. However, while Indonesia has excellent broadcasting hardware, there has been a major lag in terms of software, ie. an acute lack of local programming and trained personnel.

SESSION V: The Changing Media Environment in Asia: Perspectives from the Press

Ms. Sheila Coronel, executive director of the Philippine Centre for Investigative Journalism, in her presentation said that the democratisation of the press in the Philippines poses some problems in media monitoring. She said that a free press creates other problems including unethical practice and irresponsibility. Competition among publications over limited advertising and circulation revenues also encourages violations of ethical standards. Ms. Coronel felt that in a free society, the existence of a multiplicity of media monitoring mechanisms are an effective deterrent to unethical practice in the media. Ultimately, she said, a vigilant public is the best monitoring mechanism in checking media abuse.

Mr. Som Benegal of *The Sun*, India, said that the print media is facing increased competition from the broadcast media, particularly from foreign programming. New technologies are also changing the way news is processed and delivered to people. These changes have resulted in increased pressure on the embattled Indian press. Mr. Benegal, however, sees a very important role for the print media in helping to manage the transition as a result of the influx of foreign values through the electronic media. The media has a

responsibility to present to the people what is necessarily good or bad for them, according to Mr. Benegal.

SESSION VI: The Role and Responsibility of Media Monitors

Two speakers, Sultan Hossain Khan of the Press Council of Bangladesh and R. Patrick de Alwis of the Press Council of Sri Lanka, discussed the role and responsibility of media monitors in their respective countries.

Mr. de Alwis said that freedom of the press is a cardinal virtue in a democratic society. He said the role of the Press Council is to ensure that the press exercises their role and function in society properly. He said that the press must inform the public on important issues and in a developing country, the press has the added responsibility of creating a conducive public opinion towards social and economic development. Sultan Hossain Khan, on the other hand, adds that the Press Council also has an obligation to ensure that the press functions within the social, political and cultural norms of any given society. He said that the press councils should also promote press freedom and responsibility.

SESSION VII: Emerging Trends and Developments in the Media in Asia

The final session was a panel discussion with Ijaz Shafey Gilani, chairman of the Pakistan Institute of Public Opinion, presenting criteria for assessing the effectiveness of the media, including transparency and accountability. He identified three main trends in Asia, namely: liberalisation, the development of an information economy and good governance. These trends require the development of new tools for monitoring the media requiring a more cooperative mode in balancing the needs of the information economy and government regulation.

In the open forum, participants agreed that privatisation is an increasing trend, especially in the broadcast media. The entry of new players in broadcasting will put more pressure on government media to improve the quality of programming and to relax regulations. The print media is also facing stiff competition from the electronic media. There is also an emerging trend towards regionalisation in the media. All these trends pose challenges to media monitoring mechanisms.

RECOMMENDATIONS

After the presentations, the participants were divided into two working groups that called for action in the following areas of priority:

1. The need for a multiplicity of media monitoring mechanisms at three levels, namely: (1) statutory/official bodies; (2) trade organisations; and (3) public interest groups. Media monitoring mechanisms should be democratic, representative and autonomous.

2. One of the functions of the media is to promote a competitive environment and thus prevent monopolistic tendencies by government or private enterprises. Wherever there is a possibility of conflict between media ownership and commercial interests,appropriate mechanisms should be put in place to ensure that media freedom does not suffer.

3. Media monitoring mechanisms should be continually updated and strengthened in terms of training, research, and resource inputs with the view of upholding and promoting ethical standards.

4. Regional organisations should be encouraged to carry out comparative research on media ethics in the various countries of Asia. The output of such research should be widely publicised.

5. International linkages and information exchanges should be pursued among media monitoring bodies wherever possible. These activities should provide a basis for agreement on regionally acceptable ethical standards and for updating and strengthening capabilities for media monitoring.

6. Transnational producers in the media should be encouraged to follow regionally acceptable standards of ethics on issues such as violence, horror, and sex.

7. AMIC and other appropriate regional organisations should compile and circulate a recommended framework drawn from codes of ethics from various countries and invite communication practitioners to define the framework in operational and actionable terms within their national contexts.

8. A follow-up seminar/workshop should be organised on the practical aspects of media monitoring and to delineate the roles of media monitoring mechanisms by the government, trade organisations, and public interest groups.

9. Existing monitoring mechanisms in most Asian countries are inadequate, falling short of the need to protect the media from inroads into their freedom and to provide corrective mechanisms for the citizens against media excesses.

10. No single model is universally applicable to all countries in the region. Even so, we believe that there are certain essential features that all effective media monitoring mechanisms should have, regardless of the cultural and other conditions existing in each country. These features include:

- independence;
- accessibility;
- transparency;
- fairness;
- simplicity of procedures;
- integrity and competence of members.

11. Looking to the experience of the various countries in the region, the seminar was of the view that:

(a) No single body can effectively monitor the media in a given country and it is desirable that there be a plurality of institutions performing this function.

(b) Such institutions should be as representative as possible. In addition to media practitioners, they should include relevant non-governmental representatives, academics and

members of other professional bodies drawn as far as possible from all sectors of society.

(c) Members should be chosen for their proven competence and integrity. The selection process should be as transparent as possible.

(d) The mandates of these bodies should be wide enough to accommodate reasonable concerns relevant to all the media. They should include effective remedies for the redress of complaints concerning breach of professional and ethical standards, unfair practices and cases of factual inaccuracies and bias in reporting and presentation.

(e) The redress procedures of the mechanisms should be as simple and as accessible as possible.

(f) The mechanisms should be insulated from pressures of all kinds, including those from funding sources.

(g) These bodies should assist the media in performing their functions without fear or favour.

Evaluation

Overall, the participants rated the quality of the programme very highly. On a scale of one to five, where five is the highest, 56 per cent gave the overall value of the conference a 5, while 39 percent gave it a 4 and the rest a 3. The participants likewise gave very high ratings to the presentations and discussions. 56 percent gave the overall relevance of the presentations a 5 and 45 percent gave it a 4, and no one gave it a rating below 4.

The seminar was generally regarded as a success in meeting its objectives. The participants particularly noted the opportunity for networking and to keep abreast of the emerging trends and developments in the media. The seminar also provided a forum for the discussion of very important issues.

Follow-up

The participants suggested regular follow-up seminars on the subject in order to keep up with trends and developments in media monitoring. A training course on media monitoring techniques was suggested as well as seminar on developing models of media monitoring mechanisms. A number of the participants suggested follow-up seminars on developments on new communication technologies and changing patterns of media ownership in the Asia-Pacific region.

Conclusion

In sum, the discussions were comprehensive and stimulating. The conference achieved the objectives it set. In-depth discussions on a very important issues of concern to the region. Follow-up activities were identified for action.