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Media And Pluralism In South Asia
SEMINAR ON "MEDIA AND PLURALISM IN SOUTH ASIA"

22-24 March 1994
Hotel Himalaya
Kathmandu, Nepal

Framework

1. Media pluralism is as imperative as democracy in South Asia. The principle of pluralism should be rigorously through education systems, all media, and also through targeted communication with political leaders.

2. SAARC Heads of state or Governments should be urged to officially endorse pluralism in the media in the next summit.

3. Constitutions, laws and regulations of South Asian countries should explicitly facilitate the role of media in promoting pluralism.

4. An environment conducive for media to function in a free and impartial manner without being subjected to pressures from the government and other interest groups (political, business, ethnic, ideological, etc) in the forms of intimidations, threats and closures on most flimsy reasons - should be maintained and ensured at all times. Journalist should be accorded protection from increasing physical attacks and other tactics to muzzle the press. Working conditions of journalists particularly provincial correspondents must be improved.

5. All media organisations should be sensitised to the importance of pluralism in the media.

Action Plan for Strengthening the Role of Media in Promoting Pluralism in South Asia

1. Develop mechanisms for self-regulation and accountability among papers, media unions/associations to assure the highest ethical journalistic standards. This could be done by creating an independent authority or a board with representatives of social groups, NGO’s etc. to monitor all media.

2. Press or media councils should have a degree of autonomy in terms of composition and functions. Their watchdog functions should be strengthened and actively encouraged.

3. Media practitioners and institutions should set up/maintain mechanisms of feedback from networks of the widest range of interest groups (ethnic, women’s human rights, civic pressures, and other social and developmental (NGO’s) in order that the mass media remain committed to the plurality of interests in society.

4. The state control and monopoly of the electronic media should be reduced, and instead liberalisation and privatisation of the electronic media should be encouraged.
Private electronic media must be able to provide multiplicity of views and programming choices, accepting however, moral and ethical standards.

5. Governments should be encouraged to grant subsidies or import duty free facilities to the private media, including equipment, machinery’s supplies (newsprint, films etc.) Where print/electronic media are dependent on state advertising support (or public enterprises) for their sustainability, such support should be fair and equitable.

6. In order to ensure freedom of expression and promote pluralism, the legislative powers in relation to breach of privilege, which today takes the shape of severe punitive measures, should be curbed.

7. Regional and or local media - small, rural community presses, local radio and TV stations, should be developed/strengthen, including the provision of soft loans for their establishment/sustenance and training facilities for the development of skills and capabilities.

8. Existing organisations which protect the rights of journalists should be strengthened and linked in networks.

9. A regional organisation such as SAMA be strengthened to enable journalists to work in an atmosphere of mutual support, and greater mobility in the region.

10. An attempt should be made to promote media pluralism by twinning or establishing links between the different indigenous language media. One aspect of this could be the exchange of journalists among the different media within and across countries.

11. Minority groups in South Asia should be given a better representation in the mainstream media and they should also be reached through the alternative media.

12. The limited accessibility to the media of the majority of the people in South Asia should be overcome by special emphasis on the use of radio.

13. Gender balance in media including in management/decision and policy making levels should be maintained.

14. Research must be used as a planning tool for establishing, monitoring and evaluating the performance of media and media-related institutions.

15. Media education programmes at all audience levels must be initiated to develop the critical ability of media consumers in view of the increasing choices offered by satellite communication. Social and civic groups and media organisations should be encouraged to conduct such media consumer education.

16. An award should be established as a commendation or recognition of media practitioners or institutions for notable achievements in strengthening pluralism.

17. Organisers of various international, regional and local meetings relevant to media and pluralism should encourage follow up activities.