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Terminal Project Report

By

Victor Valbuena
Background/Introduction

Legislatures, national and local, are the core of participatory democracy. Their effectiveness is in part determined by the responsiveness of legislators to their constituents and the extent of involvement of citizens in shaping legislation through interaction with their representatives.

Parliamentary reporting plays a key role in keeping citizens informed about legislatures through the mass media. In the case of ASEAN, large segments of the population rely on radio and television as their principal sources of information. However, many broadcast journalists do not have adequate exposure and training in reporting on government policy-making and legislative processes. This weakens the potential of the broadcast media to address the information-seeking and decision-making requirements of the citizenry.

Weaknesses in parliamentary reporting can weaken the whole legislative process by its failure to provide an appropriate dialogue between law-makers and their constituents. To assist in strengthening this communication process in the ASEAN region, the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre (AMIC) organized this Workshop on Legislative Reporting for Broadcast Journalists.

The Asia Foundation, itself committed to the strengthening of democratic institutions through communication processes, provided the funds for the workshop. Its offices in Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand also assisted in identifying and inviting the workshop participants.

AMIC records its thanks and appreciation to The Asia Foundation for its support to this workshop.
Objectives of the Project

The workshop was designed to:

1. Expose the participants to the analytical tools and methods of political scholars and widen their perspectives and ability to analyse political developments, especially in the legislative field.

2. Sharpen their writing skills under the tutelage of recognised legislative reporters and observers.

Workshop Participants

A total of 12 participants and 4 resource persons attended the workshop. The 12 participants consisted of 3 representatives from each of the following countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand. They included editors, journalists, newscasters and news correspondents.

Resource Persons

The resource persons who lent their expertise to the workshop included a veteran broadcast journalist, respected law and political science scholars and an experienced communication educator.

They were Mr Lloyd R. La Cuesta, broadcast journalist and Bay Area Bureau Chief of KTVU, California and former National President of the Asian American Journalists Association; Mr Shad S. Faruqi, Senior Lecturer in Constitutional Law, School of Administration and Law, Mara Institute of Technology; Dr Sothi Rachagan, Associate Professor of Political Geography, University of Malaya and Dr Victor T. Valbuena, AMIC Senior Programme Specialist and formerly Associate Professor of Journalism and Communication, University of the Philippines.

The directory of participants and resource persons can be found in Annex A.

Summary of Proceedings

Following is a summary of the workshop proceedings. The programme is found in Annex B.
11 September 1990

Opening Session. Dr Victor T. Valbuena, AMIC Senior Programme Specialist and the Workshop Coordinator, welcomed the participants to the workshop. In his opening remarks, Dr Valbuena said that the mass media have a critical role in bridging the gap between policy-makers/legislators and the citizenry. In legislative coverage, the main task of the mass media has been to provide the public with information on what government officials or agencies did or said for the day. He said that it would be better if the mass media could also provide broader analysis and interpretation to help the citizens really understand how government works, and how specific legislations or government programmes affect their lives.

Ms Kathleen O'Keefe, Programme Officer, The Asia Foundation, also welcomed the participants and expressed TAF's wishes for a fruitful workshop.

A video presentation on the various activities of AMIC, including training workshops addressing the knowledge and skills needs of journalists, followed these opening remarks.

Afterwards, the participants were given an orientation on the mechanics of the workshop, followed by a tea reception.

After tea, Prof Shad Faruqi from the School of Administration and Law, Mara Institute of Technology, gave a lecture on "Legislative Institutions and Processes in the ASEAN Region".

Using the Malaysian Parliament as starting point, he discussed the Westminster type of legislative system and went on to examine some salient points regarding constitutional law and electoral processes in the neighbouring countries of ASEAN.

Prof Faruqi emphasized that in a democracy, elections are an aspect of accountability. They facilitate populist expression, influence public opinion, and provide legitimacy to a government. In practice, however, legitimacy of government via elections has not been achieved in many societies. He outlined some of the reasons for this situation.

After lunch, Mr Lloyd La Cuesta, a broadcast journalist and former President of the Asian American Journalist Association talked about "Legislative Institutions and Processes in Western Democracies". He discussed the structure and policy-making/legislative processes of the Presidency and the Cabinet, Congress and state legislatures in the United States.
After the afternoon tea, there was a sharing and discussion by the participants on how laws and public policies in their respective countries were made. Ms Faridla Prilani Arif of Televisi Republik Indonesia discussed the structure and operations of the Indonesian Senate and People's Assembly, and explained how the Pancasila principles permeate government policy-making and legislative processes in Indonesia. Mr M Vadivelu of Radio-Television Malaysia elaborated on the role of the Malaysian King in government policy-making and the powers of the various ministries in setting the direction for political and economic policies. Mr Cesar Chavez of Station DZRH Manila, talked about the law-making process in the Philippine Congress and illustrated it with specific references to some bills enacted by the Senate and the House of Representatives. Ms Yupa Petchart of TV 5 Bangkok likewise described the legislative procedures of the Thai Parliament, the policy-making initiatives of the Office of the Prime Minister, and the role of the military in government. Open discussions followed each of these talks.

12 September 1990

Dr Sothi Rachagan from the Department of Geography, University of Malaya, discussed the topic "Analysing and Reporting Legislative Events: The Case of Consumer Law". Dr. Rachagan traced the development of consumer legislation in Malaysia and highlighted his presentation with specific examples of consumer protection laws that refer to housing, hire-purchase of appliances, and media advertising. The discussion with participants also highlighted other examples of consumer legislation from the other ASEAN countries.

After tea, it was Mr Lloyd La Cuesta's turn again to present. In his topic "Covering and Reporting on Government and Legislative Affairs", he pointed out the tasks of government reporters as follows: separating the significant from the insignificant, pegging story angles to issues of interest to readers and piecing together stories that explain complex issues in a way average readers can understand.

He said that reporters must work hard to provide complete background information and other details on each important item being considered by a governing body. At the same time, reporters have to understand the state and its people so as to know what are the information needs of the people.

Mr La Cuesta also stressed the importance of building up a dependable network of sources.
After lunch, the participants shared their "Experiences in Covering and Reporting on Government and Legislative Affairs". The discussions focused on such issues and concerns as access to the President and/or Prime Minister; protocol and decorum in covering highest-ranking state and/or government officials; formal and informal press conferences by politicians; officials as sources of "leaks" on impending legislation; and experiences in handling libel suits from government officials and political leaders.

After tea, Mr La Cuesta presented some "Examples of Broadcast Reporting on US Government and Legislative Affairs". The video presentation included excerpts from news programmes by the national and regional networks in the United States. It illustrated television techniques in news gathering and presentation: on-the-spot coverage and interviews, trailing of news sources, press conferences, anchoring, follow-up stories, etc. In his presentation and commentary, Mr La Cuesta pointed out and showed video examples of now common network practice of hiring women as anchor persons, the increasing use of Asians as part of the anchor team, and the practice of some journalists to use themselves as part of the story.

One of the most interesting videos was a Public Broadcasting Service programme by Bill Moyers on media and politics in the United States. The programme discussed and illustrated with media examples, the issue of creating illusions of reality on American broadcasting media. Later, the participants shared their own comments on some of the points raised in the presentation.

13 September 1990

The morning session was devoted to video presentations and commentary by participants on examples of broadcast reporting on government and legislative affairs in the ASEAN Region. The Malaysian group presented a video on the opening of Parliament, which illustrated the very formal approach to coverage by local newsmen. The Philippine participants showed an excerpt of an on-the-spot coverage of Senate debates on the national budget, as well as an informal interview conducted by one of the workshop participants. The Philippine example illustrated the very informal approach of local newsmen to covering Congress, and the easy accessibility of the Congressional floor to the journalists, allowing them to video politicians and their activities at close range. The Thai presentation illustrated samples of covering their Prime Minister, including informal interviews with him upon leaving his residence.

The presentations were followed by discussions further comparing professional practices in covering and reporting on important political personalities.
After lunch, a writing cum video workshop was conducted. Mr La Cuesta showed rough footages of news events and asked the participants to write stories out of them. Later, he asked them to read their stories as if they were doing it for television. These news readings were recorded on video for critique purposes.

In the evening, a working dinner was held during which the participants explored further the issue of media and politics via a television documentary on "Television and the Presidency". The programme showed how advertising and the mass media, particularly television, changed the nature and color of the electoral processes in the United States.

14 September 1990

In the morning, Prof Shad Faruqi discussed "Laws Relating to Covering and Reporting Government and Legislative Affairs". In his discussion, Prof. Faruqi covered the concepts of Freedom of the Press and Freedom of Information, and how they are operationalised in various countries. He discussed the provisions of Press and Publications Acts, Newspaper and Printing Acts, Internal Security Acts, laws on defamation and libel, etc... and how they impinge on the professional practice of broadcast journalists.

After Prof Faruqi's presentation, the rest of the morning and early afternoon sessions were devoted to "Critique and Discussion of Workshop Outputs". The videotaped reading of the participants news reports were played back before the entire group and subjected to a critique in terms of news approach, structure and organization, and on-camera presentation, among others. This was a most lively session, as the videos showed many "bloopers" (homorous/embarrassing mistakes on camera).

After the critique sessions, the workshop participants decided to enliven the discussions further by reviewing more U.S. videotapes of "bloopers" committed by broadcast journalists.

The discussion papers distributed during the workshop can be found in Annex C.

Closing Session

After a brief summary and recapitulation of the workshop sessions by Dr Victor Valbuena, the workshop formally ended with the distribution of certificates of participation. Mr Julio Andrews, Representative of The Asia Foundation, Kuala Lumpur, and Mr Mohd Hamdan Adnan, AMIC Representative, Malaysia, handed out the certificates. In addition, Mr. Andrews also distributed books on U.S.broadcast media and politics to the participants.
Workshop Evaluation by Participants

The participants were asked to evaluate the seminar in terms of 18 areas, using a scale of 1 to 5 where 5 is the highest score.

Following is a summary of the 18-item evaluation, including the numerical ratings and comments from the participants.

1. Quality of Programme. Average rating is 3.8. Most of the participants found the programme good. 2 participants felt that the workshop focused more on the Malaysian context rather than ASEAN.

2. Presentation by Resource Persons. Rating : 3.7. Only one participant gave a low rating. He felt that there should be more resource persons in the workshop. One said that the lectures by the resource persons were informative.

3. Workshop Facilities. Rating : 4.0. Most of the participants were satisfied with the workshop facilities.

4. Production Facilities. Rating : 3.5. Of the 12 participants, 6 indicated that they were satisfied with the production facilities while 2 did not respond to the question.

5. Field Trips. Rating : 1.5. This is one of the lowest ratings. Four indicated that there should be more field trips such as to a local network or Parliament sessions. (Some of the participants went on an observation visit to TV 3 Malaysia.)


7. Hotel Accommodation. Rating : 4.0. Most of the foreign participants were satisfied with the hotel accommodation. (The local participants did not stay at the hotel.)

8. Time Allocation for Presentations. Rating : 3.6. Most of the participants were satisfied with the time allotted to the participants' presentations.

9. Time Allocation for Productions. Rating : 3.0. 3 participants did not respond while most of the others were not satisfied with the time allocation for productions.

10. Time Allocation for Field Trips. Rating : 1.4. This was the lowest of the ratings.
11. Participant Contribution to Workshop. Rating : 3.5. Most of the participants were satisfied with their contribution to the workshop.

12. Discussions. Rating : 4.0. Most of the participants were satisfied with the discussions. However, 4 said that there should be more time for discussions.

13. Opportunities for Exchanging Ideas with Fellow Participants Rating: 4.1. 2 said that there was a good exchange of ideas among the participants.

14. Opportunities for Exchanges with Resource Persons and Team Leaders. Rating : 4.2. Most of the participants were satisfied with the opportunities for exchanges with the resource persons and team leaders.

15. Cooperation with Your Group. Rating : 4.3. This was the highest rating.

16. Quality of Media Production. Rating : 3.6. Most of the participants were satisfied with the quality of media production.

17. Relevance of Workshop to Your Work. Rating : 3.9. Only one participant indicated that the topics were not applicable to his work. However, he found the workshop informative.

18. Overall Value of the Workshop to You. Rating : 4.2. 4 participants said that the workshop was "fruitful" and "productive".

Other comments by the participants:

1. On the question of whether the right target group selected for the workshop, 8 participants said "Yes" while 4 said "Partly". Of the latter group, the comments were
   a) Radiomen were invited but TV things were discussed.
   b) The participants should have been restricted to reporters only.
   c) There should have been a better mix of senior and new correspondents.
   d) Singapore was not represented.

2. On the number of participants, 11 responded. Of these, 1 said "too few", 9 said "just right" and 1 said "excessive".
3. Comments on the Programme

   a) 1 said too short.
   b) 2 found the programme focussed on Malaysian context rather than ASEAN.
   c) 1 said it was a good programme for young journalists.
   d) The lectures by Prof Shad Faruqi was too academic.

4. Comments on the Organisation

   a) 9 said it was excellent.
   b) 1 commented that longer advance notice should be given for participants to prepare for the workshop.

5. Suggestions to improve future programmes

   a) More interaction among the participants.
   b) More field trips.
   c) 1 asked for an expert on TV journalism as a resource person. Another participant wanted an expert on ASEAN as a resource person.
   d) Give participants more details of the programme beforehand so that they know what resource materials, such as video tapes, to bring to the workshop.
   e) The workshop should be longer.
   f) Have name tags for participants.
   g) Specify whether workshop is for radio or TV broadcast in the future.
   h) Give more examples (via video tapes).

Conclusion

Judging by the evaluation and comments of the participants, the workshop was largely successful. There were weaknesses identified, such as the predominantly Malaysian orientation of one resource person, the heavy emphasis on television, and the lack of field observation visits to relevant institutions, among others. However, these criticisms, did not detract from the workshop’s becoming “fruitful” and “productive”, over-all.

A consistent comment from participants in TAF-AMIC workshops is that the invitations sent to participants come at such short notice that the participants do not have adequate time to prepare papers, and/or other materials properly in time for the workshop. Both AMIC and TAF would do well to review their procedures and timetables relative to workshop programme planning, budget approval, and identification and invitation of participants to minimize this recurrent criticism.