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Paper No. 20
Media Ethics in Asia: The Crux of the Matter
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Opening

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is indeed a great pleasure and honour for me to be amongst such a prestigious gathering and to share my modest views and ideas with reputed journalists, media practitioners and academics like you all.

My presentation today will focus on some of the critical ethical issues that confront the media in Asia and examine the structural, political and economic factors that have prevented some of the Asian media and its practitioners from upholding and applying ethical standards in their profession. I have intentionally tried to shy away from a conventional academic paper in this presentation and have essentially penned down my thoughts on the problem of media ethics in Asia with specific reference to the Malaysian situation.

Let me begin my paper by quoting the noted media critic Noam Chomsky, arguably one of the most persistent and powerful advocates of a free and independent media in the U.S.:

"I think the issue, to come back to my original comment, is not simply disinformation and the Gulf crisis. The issue is much broader. It's whether we want to live in a free society or whether we want to live under what amounts to a form of self-imposed totalitarianism, with the bewildered herd marginalized, directed elsewhere, terrified, screaming patriotic slogans, fearing for their lives and admiring with awe the leader who saved them from destruction, while the educated masses goose-step on command and repeat the slogans they're supposed to repeat and the society deteriorates at home."

(Chomsky, 1997: 57)

Relevance of Discussion on Media Ethics in Asia

Firstly, it will be useful to underline the importance and relevance of discussions on media ethics in Asia in a context where media channels are multiplying and the convergence of technologies is progressively leading to the creation of broadband high-speed national and global information networks and infrastructure.

Most Asian and developing nations have witnessed profound transformations in their information and communication sectors and industries over the past decade. With rapid deregulation and liberalisation of the media industries and the emergence of new
information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as cable and satellite, the Asian media have moved from a controlled and public service media environment to a commercial and competitive regime in a very short span of time. Today, most Asian countries have not only public service electronic media but also private and commercial national media as well as foreign channels and networks. The press has also undergone profound transformations with extensive rationalisation of the industry, heavy reliance on advertising, more sophisticated news gathering, printing and distribution techniques as well as a much more attractive look and feel which has often been accompanied by a significant and much criticized change in its role and functions.

All these developments at the technological, economic and political/policy levels have contributed to the commodification and commercialisation of communication and culture (Mosco, 1989). The dramatic increase in the volume, content and channels of information and communication allied to a highly commercial and competitive structure and mode of operation have given rise to media practices which have often been questioned and criticised.

A media system which was once operated and regulated by the government in the name of "public interest", and where the dominant motive was education, information, modernization, national development and only lastly entertainment (let us atleast forget for the moment the extensive use and abuse of the media by members of national governments and ruling political parties to promote their own political and economic interests) now churns out large volumes of entertaining material and content both local and foreign in order to attract audiences who can then in turn be sold to advertisers. The Asian media have thus undergone a sea change, a radical transformation of its role, function and operation.

It is in this context that media ethics is being discussed today. These changes have brought to the fore debate and discussion on media practices and especially on ethical concerns and issues all over the world and more recently in Asia. Commercial and competitive pressures have forced media institutions and practitioners alike to opt for the sensational, for the glamorous, for gory details and sensational crimes and in the process they have often neglected their critical duties and responsibilities towards their readers and the citizenry as a whole. As a consequence of these developments too, the media have in different degrees ignored ethical standards that form an intrinsic part of their profession.

However, debate on ethical standards, issues and concerns has also taken centre stage today because of the systematic abuse, misuse and biases of the media in reporting events and developments both locally and internationally. Some major international cases have highlighted these abuses and the breaches in ethical standards by the media and issues such as the Gulf War and the Princess Diana accident, just to name a few of the prominent ones, have reminded us on the one hand how manipulative and biased the media can be and on the other hand have demonstrated the unscrupulousness of some journalists who do not seem to have any concern for the dignity and privacy of individuals. Most importantly, they have also reminded us that this power if unmonitored...
and unchecked can have devastating consequences on the way we think and the opinions that we hold.

But we do not have to look so far to see these abuses of the media. Every day, in our own countries in Asia, journalists pen down and report stories which distort facts, defame individuals and show a total disrespect for their dignity and privacy and generally reflect the dominant and often one sided views of the powerful political and corporate leaders. The Asian media (in some countries more than in others) are facing a crisis of confidence of their own. This makes our discussions on media ethics in Asia all the more important and relevant although I will argue that it is time to go beyond discussions and put in place institutional checks and systems in order to reinstate ethical standards and practices in our media institutions and practitioners.

The Sword is Mightier than the Pen

I do not want to seem to be indulging in that favourite hobby and pastime which is media bashing. There is enough of it already and it is neither fruitful nor constructive. In fact, I think it is important to understand why ethical standards and practices have been repeatedly and systematically breached by journalists and media institutions in Asia. I will argue that this has something to do with the structure of the media organizations and institutions more than the individual's lack of ethical concerns and standards. Although I will not make any excuse on behalf of the individual journalists and media practitioners who abandon ethical concerns in their profession.

Media ethics have to be discussed in the context of specific media institutions and their structure and organization. At the outset, it is important to acknowledge the fact that there can be no real safeguarding of ethical standards in the media if they are totally controlled. For example, expecting a Chinese journalist to report critically on the affairs of his country knowing fully well the sometime brutal consequences of his action would be nothing more than utopian. The same can be said of journalists who work in totalitarian regimes and countries across the developing world where journalists are threatened, tortured, made to disappear and even executed. In these contexts and situations, it would be more appropriate to condemn in the strongest terms the whole system of governance rather than talking about media ethics.

It is only in a democratic regime, where the media have at least some independence in their functioning, that one can expect journalists and media practitioners to respect and uphold ethical principles and standards and apply them to their profession. In other words, a journalist who lives and works under threat, oppression and fear cannot be judged for his ethical practices. He cannot be expected to sacrifice everything including his life just to uphold his moral and ethical beliefs. This only happens in the concoctions churned out by Hollywood and Bollywood and in rare and exceptional cases where individuals are prepared to defy all odds and threats to seek and report the truth.
This is where discussions on media ethics in Asia become important and relevant. Most Asian countries are supposed to be democratic in their form of governance and in their institutional structure and organization. They also repeatedly profess to be democratic and are declared as such by their Constitutions and statutes. As this is the case then there should be no reason for media institutions and practitioners in Asian countries not to adhere to media ethics. Breach of ethics should be condemned in the harshest terms and continued public debate and discussion needs to be carried on.

How then can we explain the disrespect and neglect of ethical standards and practices by the media in Asia? The problem is that most media systems in Asia, in spite of what they profess or claim, are controlled through state and corporate ownership and often stringent regulations which systematically curb and restrict independent, critical commentary and reporting by journalists. A totally independent media institution and system is merely an ideal that is sought after. The Asian media, especially the electronic media, have moved from a state controlled structure to a mixed media system where both the state and powerful corporate players own and control the media. Privatisation of the electronic media in most countries was greeted with euphoria and the citizens and critics at large heaved a sigh of relief when national governments deregulated broadcasting and allowed private commercial stations to enter the landscape.

However, soon the cracks appeared and although generally there were some significant improvements in media diversity and quality, it became evident that the main benefits were in the field of entertainment where the audience was treated to a rich and amusing fare produced locally and more often internationally. When it came to news and information, competitive and commercial pressures, regulation as well as allegiance to the state and corporate owners and their ideological and material interests dominated the scene. The dream of independent, critical, instructive and investigative news and reporting began to slowly fade away.

From state control, the media in Asia have moved over to state and corporate control. These forms of control still weigh heavily and determine both the contents and the treatment of information. While the state continues to manipulate national audiences with its own original mix of information, propaganda and agenda setting, corporate players exploit the media to further their own interests and ideology, report safe news with a blend of the sensational and the futile and lull the audiences to ignorance while they are silently sold to the hungry advertisers. The following quotations illustrate the inherent weaknesses of both state controlled and commercial media and their implications on ethical standards and practices:

"The structural constraint of state ownership of the electronic media also engenders functional constraints. There is an absence of editorial autonomy for the broadcaster, who is ultimately responsible to the political authorities... For the most part the state in the respective countries uses the public-funded electronic media in a politically partisan manner. The state's justification for such use is that the government of the day needs to project its development activities to the public as an expression of accountability" (Gunewardena, 1999: 166).
"The fact that newspapers (and broadcasting) are in a competitive industry is another functional constraint on the observance of media ethics. Papers not only strive to be first with the news, but also tend to sensationalize it to get the edge on competitors...The link between newspaper circulation and advertising also tends to blur the ethical dimension. Dramatisation of news promotes sales and circulation and helps increase advertising revenue" (Gunewardena, 1999: 174).

In defense of the state, one should however add that the various states or governments in Asian nations have had to struggle with a plethora of problems in their effort to provide news and information. Crippled by meagre financial resources, burdened by the responsibility of creating a national identity and unity from a diversity of religious, ethnic and linguistic groups which have often been locked in strife and conflict, faced with the uphill task of development and modernisation, the state has generally been unable to rise to the challenge of creating a media system that truly responds to and serves the needs and interests of the public. Added to this was the inability of most states to resist the temptation of exploiting and using such powerful instruments as the mass media to promote their political and economic interests.

It would therefore be appropriate to say that the sword is mightier than the pen when it comes to media ethics even in countries which are ‘officially’ democratic. The Asian media have often been prevented from practising independent, critical, unbiased and ethical reporting because of professional pressures arising from state and corporate ownership as well as regulatory frameworks which provide little scope for dissension and criticism of the political powers, their agenda, their policies and activities. Acts such as the Internal Security Act, the Official Secrets Act and other repressive acts in many Asian countries still continue to function as the sword which blunts the pen of the journalist. Moreover, the absolute powers accorded to some ministries (even ministers) in government, who exert total control over the licensing of commercial media, forces the media institutions to practise their trade with caution for fear of losing their licenses and their livelihood.

The Malaysian Media Scenario: Ethics Sandwiched Between Regulation and Control

In Malaysia, as well as in many other Asian countries, there have been great strides made by the media in terms of technology and financial success. Cable, satellite and other technological innovations have provided a tremendous boost to media institutions both in terms of information gathering and distribution. The media in Malaysia have come of age both technically and financially in many respects. In the early 1980s, there were only a few newspapers and public service broadcasting with two public television networks. Today, the country boasts of a highly developed print and broadcasting media industry with a large number of newspapers in the respective vernacular languages of the various major ethnic groups (Malays, Chinese and Indians (Tamils)) as well as in English, several commercial terrestrial television networks, as well as cable and satellite television. A
large number of popular journals and magazines also constitute a part of this rich landscape.

However, the Malaysian media reflect in many ways the key weaknesses of many Asian media systems, especially when it comes to the adherence of the media to ethical standards and practices. The Malaysian scenario is an interesting example of the functioning of media in Asia. With a total population of 21.7 million people, of which more than 17 million live in Peninsular Malaysia, the country was born with a complex ethnic and cultural environment. The ethnic composition of the population living in peninsular Malaysia is as follows: 10.6 million (57.9%) are Malays and other natives, 4.9 million (26.9%) are Chinese, and 1.3 million (7.6%) are Indians.

Malaysia became independent in 1957 and was faced with the difficult task of building a nation and to reconcile the various ethnic, linguistic and socio-cultural components which constituted the country. As with other nations, which were faced with a similar task, Malaysia set out to create a national consciousness and culture. The media, especially broadcasting, which was extensively used by the British colonial rulers in Malaysia and in other countries for propaganda purposes, very soon became the key instruments for creating national unity and for forging a national cultural identity.

The mass media became the ideal tools for the dissemination of information. The capacity to mobilize and gather all the disparate and diverse citizens was essential to create a sense of shared and common identity. The scarcity of resources as well as the need to use the mass media mainly for the purpose of development, brought about a State controlled media system in Malaysia since the very beginning of its existence as an independent nation. This has been a common trend in Third World countries where it was believed that the media had to be harnessed and used as instruments to promote "national development" and maintain national security (Kok Wah and Anuar, 1996).

The Malaysian media, especially broadcasting, were strongly regulated and controlled by the State with a clearly defined role as an instrument of national political and cultural development (Karthigesu, 1990). A major ethnic crisis in 1969 between the Malays and the Chinese only helped the government to justify its controls and put in place even more stringent regulations. These controls have led many critical thinkers to argue that the media were being used as ideological state apparatuses to promote the political and economic elites.

Malaysia has come a long way since its independence. It has witnessed a dramatic growth in the last few decades and has emerged as one of the most powerful Southeast Asian economies. For over eight years, the average annual growth rate of the country has been hovering around the 10% mark. Real GDP per capita has grown from US$1,110 in 1960 to US$5,649 in 1990. The reasons for this economic success can be found in a series of major policy shifts and initiatives since 1971, which transformed the country. The New Economic Policy (Muzaffar, 1989) followed by the Look East Policy (Jomo, 1985), Malaysia Incorporated and the Privatization Policy, have led to rapid liberalization of the economy and brought about dynamic economic growth.
Since coming to power in 1981, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and his Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition have held on to political power and implemented most of these far-reaching economic reforms. The BN clearly dominates the national political scene and garnered a two-thirds majority in Parliament in the 1999 elections. This political dominance and majority has helped the government to design and implement economic policy and reforms without much resistance from opposition parties.

As far as the media landscape in Malaysia goes, it has been profoundly marked by the Privatization Policy which was launched in the early 1980s. This policy initiative essentially led to the reduction of the role of the government and the public sector in the economic arena and the private sector was called to drive economic development by increasing competition, efficiency and productivity (Jomo, 1995). As a result of this major policy shift, the mass media, which were also controlled and operated by the State, were required to move towards privatization.

Privatization has profoundly transformed the communication sector in Malaysia. In 1983, the public service monopoly of broadcasting was ended with the creation of Malaysia’s first private television network, TV3. Since then, the deregulation and liberalization of broadcasting has continued at a rapid pace and today there are not only several private terrestrial television channels such as NTV7 but also ASTRO, Malaysia’s first satellite television service which offers an attractive bouquet of national and international channels.

However, and this is where the Malaysian media and communication landscape is unique, deregulation and liberalization did not really lead to a more independent media system. Nor has the government withdrawn from the media sector. Several developments need to be mentioned here in order to provide a clear picture of the Malaysian media landscape. Although deregulation and liberalization have occurred in the Malaysian media, leading to increasing commercialization and competition within the system, there has been greater state intervention in the workings of the media.

This intervention and control by the government has been achieved by two mechanisms. Firstly, through a series of regulatory measures and policy initiatives, the Malaysian government has strengthened its grip on the media. Acts such as the Printing Presses and Publications Act of 1984, the Broadcasting Act of 1988, the Internal Security Act, the Sedition Act, the Defamation Act, the Official Secrets Act and others, restrict the functioning of the media and maintain the control exerted over the media by the government.

The other important characteristic of the Malaysian media landscape is direct political party ownership of the mass media. All the major mass media in the country, whether it be the Press, or Broadcasting, are owned and controlled by a few political parties, mainly the BN coalition members. In fact, the three main components of the ruling BN coalition, which are all ethnically based parties, each directly or indirectly control the main mass media which cater to these ethnic and linguistic groups through their investment and
holding companies. UMNO (United Malays National Organization) controls the major Malay newspapers as well as the English language New Straits Times and TV3 through its investment arm and companies that are loyal to the party. MCA (Malaysian Chinese Association) controls Chinese newspapers as well as the English language daily The Star. Finally, the MIC (Malaysian Indian Congress) owns some of the leading Tamil language dailies and media in the country.

Through these two mechanisms – regulation and ownership, the Malaysian government has maintained a tight grip and control over the mainstream mass media in the country. The recent political crisis in the country has given rise to new voices of dissent and criticism that have slowly begun to change the Malaysian media landscape. Opposition party magazines and leaflets as well as the advent of the Internet have provided these voices of dissent with a small media space to disseminate their views and ideology. Although the government has already reacted strongly against the opposition party media organs, the Internet has proved a useful tool to circumvent the government’s control over the media. However, PC ownership is still very low and access to the Internet is therefore very limited in the country (about 11% of the population have access to the Internet) and this has prevented the opposition from making a major impact on public opinion.

**Media Ethics in Malaysia: Key Issues, Problems and Possible Solutions**

In this specific media landscape of Malaysia, and more generally in Asia, what then are the key issues and problems when it comes to media ethics? It is clear from our discussion above that there is a lack of independence of the media, which seem to be operating under strong regulatory pressures and the constraints imposed by state and corporate ownership. This problem is further amplified due to the fact that there is a strong complicity between the state and the private media and this makes the so-called independent and commercial media totally subservient to the state. In these conditions, it is difficult to expect journalists and media practitioners to adhere to any ethical standards in their professional practice and self-censorship automatically becomes a normal practice in the media.

There has also been a strong tendency in Malaysia and other Asian nations to use the media as an instrument for development by relaying and reporting government policies and activities as well as helping to carry out important processes of social change and development. This form of journalism, which has come to be known generally as development journalism, has also through a process of subversion come to mean that journalists should in no situation criticize the government and its actions. However, as Michael Kunczik (Ed., 1999: 11) has rightly noted:

“Many politicians want the press to be an instrument functioning as a government-controlled transmission belt, so to speak, helping to carry out important processes of social change...But to be effective development journalism can in no way be “government-say-so-journalism” – journalism has to be critical. Critical does not mean destructive, but positive about development, for no planning and no government is
infallible. There is corruption and mismanagement everywhere and in the interests of the public they must be exposed”.

Journalism and media coverage or reporting in Malaysia and other Asian countries suffer from several weaknesses. The most important duty of the journalist is to report any event or development fully, accurately and as objectively as possible. This implies that a journalist makes sure that all news and reporting are checked thoroughly before they are distributed with attention paid to the truthfulness and accuracy of the information, the reliability and diversity of the sources of information as well as the neutrality/objectivity of the interpretation. Journalistic practices are however a far cry from this basic norm and standard with many journalists systematically reporting events inaccurately, without consulting a diversity of reliable sources and manipulating information through their biases or those of their institutions.

Another important ethical issue confronting the Malaysian media is the systematic sensationalisation of news and information (this is also true about the media in many other Asian and even Western countries). Every day, the media in Malaysia churn out stories of violence and crime with no regard to the implications of such reporting. In the first place, such news is of no relevance whatsoever to any individual especially when the information is totally decontextualized (“Train Accident in France Kills One Hundred” or a recent example of a title “Neighbour Warned for Trying to Have Sex with Sow”). Instead of covering stories which have national or global relevance, the media continue to report sensational events, stories of crime, sex and violence and thereby neglect their responsibility as educators and as an institution which informs, explains and represents the world to its audience.

Often this trend towards sensationalisation has other extremely negative implications. On the one hand, reporting of violence, crime and social conflicts could intensify those conflicts in society by presenting them as everyday occurrences. On the other hand, such reporting often leads to the total disregard of the victims and their families as well as their dignity and privacy. This has led all over the world to one of the most important ethical breaches by the media which is the disrespect and lack of concern for the individual’s privacy and dignity. This constitutes at the same time a breach of fundamental human rights and that is why many scholars and critics have suggested that the principles of Human Rights be used as a basis for journalistic ethics.

Media practitioners have often argued that they only provide their audience or readers with what they really want to read, see and hear and that if the public is interested in stories of sex, crime and violence, they cannot be blamed for providing them with these stories. Although this argument is not altogether relevant, it points to another important dimension of ethics which is the absence of a public ethic based on a concept of morality and respect for human rights. The public also has to play an important role in the adherence of the media to ethical standards by functioning themselves as the watchdog of the media. They can and must create the necessary “flak” or pressure when the media indulge in gross violations of ethical concerns, decency and human rights. In many countries, the most sordid tabloids lead the sales because of the public’s own lack of any
ethical standards. In fact, I would argue that Princess Diana’s death is as much a result of
the hunger of journalists who had no respect for her dignity and privacy as the same
hunger of the public which demands more and more sensational news, information and
coverage. An articulate public ethic could act as an important and even crucial
countervailing force to both the state and commercial media institutions in Asia.

Many other ethical issues can be discussed here with regards to the media ranging from
irresponsible reporting, biased and partisan journalism, outright provocation to political,
ethnic and religious conflict, rumour mongering as well as the problem of journalists
succumbing to financial as well as other forms of bribery and incentives. However, I
think that these issues have been amply discussed and debated all over the world and that
now it is important to try and find solutions to this very significant problem.

Although there is a real and unquestionable need for codes of media ethics in Malaysia
and other Asian countries, it is evident that these codes of conduct alone cannot be
effective in elevating the ethical standards of the media. It must also be noted here that
many, if not most, Asian countries already have in place codes of media ethics (see
appendix for the Malaysian Codes of Media Ethics). Often these codes present very broad
and imprecise formulations of ethical standards and practices which are not grounded on
any real situation or context. That is why many of the ethical codes resemble each other
across the world and attention is given to issues such as responsibility of journalists to the
public, defence of the rights of the public, responsibility with regard to information
sources and of course freedom of expression, truthfulness and accuracy in reporting, etc.
(For a comparative analysis of the various European codes of ethics, see Laitila (1995)).

In many situations and contexts, codes of ethics act merely as a public relations device
intended to establish the fact that the media do have some notion of their responsibilities
and the need to adhere to ethical standards. The key problem however is that of
implementation and of the legal status of these codes. In the first place, breach of these
codes by journalists are generally not punishable as the codes do not have any legal
authority. The Press Councils and Commissions which are generally responsible for
monitoring the respect and adherence of the media to these codes also do not have any
real powers legally and professionally. They can at best order the offenders of these
codes to publish a correction or an apology but have no real penalty powers.

If codes of ethics for the media were to have any real impact on the adherence of the
media to certain minimal ethical standards and conform to them in their practice, it is
inevitable that firstly, the Press Councils or bodies that monitor media ethics and their
codes of conduct be turned into genuinely independent bodies and secondly, that they be
 accorded statutory powers to impose penalties on offenders. These councils should also
comprise of “respected media practitioners and eminent persons from public life chosen
through a mechanism ensured by appropriate legislation” (Gunewardena, 1999).

There is also an urgent need in Asia to create professional bodies of media practitioners
which would be recognized both by the state and the social community. These
professional bodies would be given the responsibility to promote the observance of
ethical standards among the media practitioners. These bodies would also operate as watchdogs of the media and create a greater sense of social responsibility among media institutions. Such professional bodies could contribute significantly in promoting self-regulation of the profession as is the case with other professions such as law, medicine and engineering.

Concluding Remarks

The media in Malaysia and in some other Asian countries have been characterised by a lack of ethical standards and practices. State and corporate ownership of the media have to a great extent contributed to this non-adherence of journalists, media practitioners and institutions to ethical norms of conduct. Stringent regulations, in line with a development journalism approach and total subservience to the state, have also curtailed the free and independent functioning of the media. Moreover, commercial and competitive pressures have significantly compounded this problem and in the scramble for the audience and the advertisers, the media have often neglected their responsibility as a central public institution.

Public discussions and debate on this critical issue must continue all over Asia. However, it has to be coupled with a fundamental realisation that ethical practices can flourish only when the media are free and independent. Pressures, whether from the state or the corporate owners of the media, weigh too heavily on journalists and media practitioners to enable them to provide the public with accurate, responsible and unbiased information. One of the first struggles for the Asian media is therefore to find its own ground and independence. For this, both the state and the corporate owners of the media have to realize how important the freedom of the media is to real development and to the creation of a civil society. However, when one considers the tremendous power of influence of the media and its contribution to the promotion of political and economic interests, then one wonders whether public interest can ever be a serious consideration for media owners.

In this context, the existence of a strong public ethic acting as a countervailing force to the lack of ethical standards and practices of the media becomes crucial. Public pressure if properly mobilised can also become a powerful commercial argument for the media institutions and advertisers. Sometimes, and in the long run, and when such a public ethic exerts its influence, adherence to ethical standards can become a strong selling point for an industry which has turned information, communication and culture into saleable commodities.

At the same time, there has to be a strong public demand for the creation of independent Press Councils and Commissions which, if provided with adequate status, powers and responsibility, are essential for the observance of media ethics by the media. Powerful and not powerless public institutions are necessary to monitor the media and impose severe penalties in case of breach of ethical codes and norms of conduct.
The advent of New Information and Communication Technologies (NICTs) has begun to alter the very basis of information gathering and dissemination. The Internet has allowed individuals, non-governmental organizations, radical groups and all kinds of people and institutions to participate in the process of information production and dissemination. In Malaysia, several online services are striving to present alternative views and opinions and are growing increasingly popular and prominent. These new media services are increasingly threatening the mainstream mass media and are reminding them in no uncertain terms that alternatives are available for those who care to search for them. Although access to personal computers and the Internet is still very low in countries such as Malaysia, there are new and imaginative means which are being discovered to download and circulate the contents of these alternative web sites to the public.

When the Internet and other ICTs reach a critical mass in terms of access and reach, then the mainstream mass media would find it extremely hard in continuing to breach ethical standards and norms. If they were to stay in contention for audiences and advertisers, it would perhaps be useful if they began the long process of transformation which will hopefully lead them to become responsible and ethical public institutions. It is time the Asian media found a middle ground between extreme forms of so-called development journalism where there is no room for criticism and objective reporting and an excessively commercial system where commodification, sales and marketing considerations triumph over all other considerations. It is important for the media practitioners and institutions to remember that they are neither the slaves of government nor the pawns of the market. It is to citizens and not to consumers that they are responsible above all.

References


Regional Seminar on Media Ethics  
September 11-13, 2000  
Malaysia  

DAY THREE  
September 13, 2000