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Workshop Report

By

Victor Valbuena
RURAL REPORTING

WORKSHOP REPORT

Malacca, Malaysia
25–29 September 1989

Prepared by Dr. Victor Valbuena, Workshop Coordinator
Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre
Singapore 1130
Participants and Coordinators of the Workshop on Rural Reporting
INTRODUCTION

Twenty-one Malaysian journalists covering regional and rural news participated in a Workshop on Rural Reporting held at the Ayer Keroh Country Resort in Malacca, Malaysia from 24 to 29 September 1989. The workshop was organized by the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre (AMIC) in collaboration with the Malaysian Press Institute (MPI).

The Malacca workshop is the fifth in a series of rural reporting workshops supported by a grant from the Communication Assistance Foundation (CAF), The Netherlands. The workshops are intended to upgrade the skills of reporters, stringers and correspondents writing rural-originated stories, as well as improve the coverage of rural and development-oriented stories in regional and national newspapers. The four previous workshops were held in Keningau, Sabah; Kuala Terengganu, Eastern Peninsular Malaysia; Kuching, Sarawak; and Penang.

WORKSHOP FACULTY

Haji Zaihan Mahmud, Director of the Malaysian Press Institute was the Workshop Director. He was assisted by Dr. Victor T. Valbuena, Senior Programme Specialist and Coordinator,
Seminars and Institutional Development Programme, AMIC. Senior editors and reporters from Malaysia's leading newspapers, journalism teachers and information ministry officials served as resource persons and workshop facilitators. They included the following:

1. Encik Hamdan Adnan
   Senior Lecturer and Former Head
   School of Mass Communication
   Mara Institute of Technology

2. Haji Nashruladin b. Abdul Rahman
   News Editor
   Berita Harian / Berita Minggu

3. Encik Hasan Shirat bin Hj. Mokhtar
   Copy Editor
   Utusan Melayu

4. Haji Sirajuddin Rafia
   Group Chief Copy Editor
   Utusan Melayu

5. Encik Ibrahim Wahab
   Assistant Director
   Newspapers and Publications Division
   Ministry of Information

6. Tuan Haji A. Kadir Ahmad
   Senior Journalist (Retired)
   Utusan Melayu
   Consultant
   State Government of Melaka

SUMMARY OF WORKSHOP PROCEEDINGS

25 September

Opening. Malacca Chief Minister Abdul Rahim Tamby Chik opened the workshop. He reminded the participants to uphold the ethics of their profession and to discharge their duties with discipline, responsibility and dedication. He also asked them to be sensitive to developments around them so that they will not deviate from the truth in their analysis of these developments.
Haji Taib Ahmad, Member of the Governing Council of the Malaysian Press Institute, also delivered an address. He welcomed the participants in behalf of MPI and recalled the Institute's association with the CAF-AMIC workshops. He said that the workshop series has been most valuable in upgrading the skills of Malaysian reporters, regardless of their working assignment. He told the participants that it is not true that headline-making news are produced only by city-based or metropolitan journalists. Reporters who are assigned in more rural areas can do so also as long as they are efficient, intelligent and hard-working. He reminded them that many relevant news of national significance are actually happening in the rural areas.

Haji Zaihan Mahmud gave the orientation to the workshop and clarified its objectives and expectations. Dr. Victor Valbuena also welcomed the participants in behalf of AMIC.

Rural Reporting. Encik Hamdan Adnan of the School of Mass Communications, Mara Institute of Technology, discussed rural journalism, the role of the rural journalist, and trends and developments in rural reporting in Malaysia. He also discussed the findings of a content analysis on rural news coverage in the Malaysian Press. As workshop exercise, Encik Hamdan divided the participants into small groups and asked them to do a content analysis of one week's issue of local papers, point out the weaknesses in rural coverage, and suggest ways to strengthen it.
Development Journalism. Dr. Valbuena explained the concept of development communication and development journalism, and discussed the development issues and concerns that journalists can effectively cover and report on. He said that development journalism requires the same skills of a regular journalist, but it also requires a bit more, in terms of development-orientation; empathy for people affected by "development"; openness to see development as it happens in rural areas; and willingness to explore all story angles so as to approximate the information needs of its various audiences. He illustrated his presentation with examples of development-oriented stories actually published in Third World media. As an exercise, he asked the participants to read a straight news story and to restructure it into a more development-oriented article.

Interviewing. Haji Sirajuddin Rafia of Utusan Melayu reviewed the principles of interviewing, illustrating it with examples from his own experiences as a working journalist. He also talked about handling and rewriting press releases. He illustrated how follow-up interviews, by phone or in person, can enhance the press release story with new data and clarifications about vague details in the release.

News Writing/Intro Writing. Haji Zaihan and Tuan Haji A. Kadir Ahmad, two veteran journalists, handled these sessions. They reviewed the principles and techniques of news writing, and devoted a session to the important area of lead or intro writing. They emphasized that writing the lead of the story is a most
important skill to master; in most cases, the intro is really what gives the reader the story.

27 September

**Investigative Reporting.** Dr. Valbuena also handled this session. He likened the process of investigative reporting to the research process, where the investigator needs to be methodical in looking for, sifting, processing, analysing, cross-checking, and writing up data before publication. Using an investigative story on housing, Dr. Valbuena illustrated how to structure an investigative story in order to arrest and sustain the reader's attention. He also discussed sources of data for investigative reports, and the need for familiarity with libel and privacy laws in order to prevent being dragged into court. He emphasized that while investigative reporting holds attraction for many journalists, it has its risks.

**Feature Writing.** Haji Nashruladin b. Abdul Rahman of Berita Harian discussed the principles and techniques of writing news features and other feature articles, illustrating them with examples culled from local publications.

**Field Trip.** The participants went on field visits to cottage industries in the Merlimau Industrial Settlements, Malacca. The objective of these field trips was to gather data for writing development news and feature articles as workshop exercises. These exercises were edited and rated by Haji Zaihan and Haji Kadir. Strengths and weaknesses of the written stories were discussed with the participants.
28 September

Crime Reporting. Encik Hasan Mokhtar of Utusan Melayu handled the session. He discussed how to cover crime stories, sources of information for crime stories, how to access data from difficult sources, and illustrated responsible crime reportage with examples from local newspapers.

The Newspaper and the Government. At this session, Encik Ibrahim Wahab from the Ministry of Information engaged the participants in discussions on the relationships between the media and the government. The participants articulated the various problems they encounter in covering government and politics as well as government-initiated programmes, e.g., restricted access to information sources, censorship, editorial pressures, etc.

Ethics/Laws on the Press. Haji Zaihan reviewed and discussed with the participants the canons of journalism and the code of ethics promulgated by the Malaysian Press Institute in consultation with local journalists. He also reviewed the various laws and regulations that affect the practice of journalism in Malaysia. He emphasized that reporters, whether based in urban centres or rural towns, must adhere to a journalist's basic code of conduct that will show that they are responsible, disciplined members of a respectable profession.
29 September

Closing. Haji Zaihan and Dr. Valbuena reviewed the proceedings of the workshop and distributed the training certificates to the participants. Mr. Arthur Ting, representing the Sabah Ministry of Communications and Works, was awarded a book prize for the best article written during the workshop. The prize was given by Haji Kadir.

With the exception of Dr. Valbuena who made his presentations in English, all the speakers delivered their talks and conducted the workshops in Bahasa Malaysia.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants came from newspapers, government information agencies, and broadcast media based in the states of Johore, Malacca, Negeri Sembilan, Sabah, and the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur.

(The workshop programme, including the list of participants, is found in Appendix A. Copies of the speeches of the Malacca Chief Minister and Haji Taib are found in Appendices B and C. Reproductions of workshop handouts from the different sessions are compiled in Appendix D. A copy of the Certificate is attached as Appendix E. Cuttings of newspaper reports on the workshop are in Appendix F.)

EVALUATION

The participants were asked to rate the quality of the programme and its organization, the presentation by the resource
persons, the selection of participants, as well as accommodations and travel arrangements.

The participants rated the workshop highly; on a scale of 1 to 10, they would place the workshop between 8 and 9. They were unanimous in saying that they "liked it very much" and in their endorsement of the workshop as "very useful" to their work. In fact, all endorsed the idea of a follow-up workshop to further enhance skills in other specialized reporting areas.

Two participants, however, complained that while the presentations of the resource persons were good, more time should have been devoted to actual writing and "critique-ing" of written exercises. They suggested "less time for lectures, more for writing workshops".

###
Malacca Chief Minister, Abdul Rahim Tamby Chik addresses the workshop.

Haji Taib Ahmad of MPI Governing Council listens intently.
Encik Hamdan Adnan discuss rural journalists in Malaysia

Participants analyse rural coverage in Malaysian papers
Participants explore ways to improve rural coverage in media

Group leader presents findings of content analysis exercise under watchful eye of resource person
Haji Zaihan Mahmud gives his critique of written exercises

Haji Zaihan explains provision of laws affecting journalists