

PJR REPORTS

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Drug war

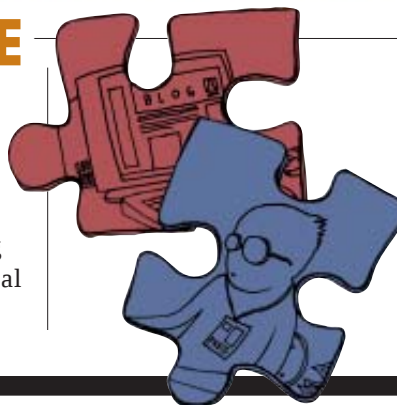
Each side fought a heated battle for credibility and public sympathy, with the press basically taking a bystander stance.

WHAT'S INSIDE



None the wiser

The press failed to connect the dots in reporting the major political crises of 2008.



Clash of values

Blogging was not invented for journalists and may not be an ideal medium for them.



By Debbie A. Uy

HAVE THE Philippine media become more open to criticism of their coverage and reporting? A recent complaint against top broadcasting company ABS-CBN 2 is an instructive study on the media's lapses, improvements in their response to criticism, and what more can be done.

The remark

Last Jan. 8, a coalition of groups held a rally in front of the Israeli embassy in Makati to protest Israel's attacks in Gaza. The program featured different speakers on various topics related to the conflict. The protesters appealed to the Philippine government to take action, and for the US and Israeli governments to stop the violence. They also threw shoes at the Israeli flag.

One of the speakers, preacher Ahmad Barcelon, during his talk said, "Marami ang tumawag sa akin na gustuhin nilang bombahin ang embahadang ito. Ngunit, hindi ko sila pinapahintulutan (Many have told me that they want to bomb this embassy. But I didn't allow them)."

The report

That night on ABS-CBN 2's primetime newscast *TV Patrol World*, a headline said, "Pasasabugin ang embahada (Israeli embassy, threatened with bombing)!" while showing the protestors marching.

In its lead-in, the report said, "Samantala, sumugod sa embahada ng Israel sa Makati

Turn to page 14



Photos by PJR REPORTS

editor'sNOTE

Watch your back

DAVAO BROADCASTER Alexander Adonis was finally released after two years in prison on a conviction for libel. But the circumstances in which he was released are as disturbing as his incarceration and the events that immediately followed it.

Adonis was convicted of libel for a report which alleged that House Speaker Prospero Nograles had been caught in an embarrassing situation in a Manila hotel during a tryst with an alleged mistress, and was sentenced to a prison term of five months to four years. Adonis was paroled after serving nine months of his sentence, but was not told about it until five months after the order was issued. This anomaly was followed by another: the prison warden refused to release him on the argument that another libel complaint had been filed against him—based on the same report, but this time by the alleged Nograles mistress.

The National Union of Journalists of the Philippines and the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility filed a habeas corpus petition before the Supreme Court. Before the Court could act, however, the National Press Club (NPC) apparently brokered an agreement between Adonis and Nograles' friend in which Adonis would apologize in exchange for his release. The NPC has denied brokering the release. Its president claimed, rather disingenuously, that he had merely informed Adonis that Nograles wanted an apology, which under the circumstances was interpreted by Adonis as a suggestion. Adonis in fact complied, and was subsequently released.

What disturbs is the jail warden's cavalier indifference to Philippine law as well as the demonstration of the power politicians have within their turfs. But equally disturbing is the NPC's involvement, which seems to have included

the condition that Adonis attend a press conference with Nograles, during which he would embrace the Speaker and thank him for his liberty. Adonis, who himself provided this information to colleagues, wisely refused to be part of that spectacle.

It would be interesting to know exactly what kind of relationship obtains between the NPC and Speaker Nograles which led it to take advantage of Adonis' understandable desire to be released, even if it be at the expense of defending the press freedom to which the NPC has had a less than consistent commitment. As Adonis' former counsel Harry Roque has pointed out, the apology Adonis made—apparently on the basis of the NPC information that that was what Nograles expected—was totally unnecessary, since he had been paroled and what's more, had filed bail for the second libel suit, which was itself an anomaly since it was based on the same report on the same incident.

Apparently it's not just the politicians, or big business, the military and the police journalists have to worry about as far as defending press freedom is concerned.

Journalists also have to watch their own ranks, and watch them carefully.

* * * * *

This is the first issue of a reformatted *PJR Reports*. The reformat is the third for *PJR Reports*, and is intended to complete its departure from the magazine format that gave it birth.

Luis V. Teodoro

PRESSED FREEDOM

Manix Abrera



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PJR Reports welcomes feedback and contributions on press and media issues.



frontPAGE

A demonstration on the Gaza crisis leads to a heated exchange between TV giant ABS-CBN 2 and a rally participant.

speaking of MEDIA

Spate of killings

"This is a problem that refuses to go away. Last Monday morning, radio commentator Ariceo (sic) Padrigao was shot dead moments after he had dropped off his daughter at the Bukidnon State University in Gingoog City, Misamis Oriental. The two gunmen fled on a motorcycle as Padrigao lay dying from two gunshots to the jaw.

"Padrigao, a so-called block-timer in Gingoog local station dxRS *Radyo Natin*, was the seventh journalist murdered this year. The figure is double the number of journalists killed in 2007, though investigators say not all the murders were work-related. In 2006, at the height of impunity in murdering journalists, 12 were killed, earning for the country the unwanted distinction of being the most "murderous" country in the world for media members, and the second most dangerous after Iraq.

"Amid the outcry over the murders and forced disappearances of journalists and left-wing militants, most of which went unsolved, the United Nations sent a special rapporteur to Manila. After meeting with various sectors and government officials, Philip Alston concluded that the military, accused of extrajudicial killings, was in a state of "almost complete denial" of the murders and disappearances. Following the submission of his report to the UN, there was a marked drop in the number of attacks, with only three journalists murdered last year.

"As the murder of Padrigao shows, however, the problem persists. Though he paid for radio time to air his views, Padrigao was said to be a hard-hitting commentator, tackling corruption in local affairs. A task force formed specifically to address attacks on journalists is still considering whether its mandate covers block-timers and whether Padrigao's killing was work-related. As of yesterday the police could not yet say if it had leads on the case.

"Whether or not the murder was work-related, Padrigao's killers must be caught, together with whoever might have ordered the hit. Every unsolved murder emboldens others to commit the same crime, thinking that they can get away with it. This culture of impunity cannot be allowed to take root."

The Philippine Star editorial, condemning the killing of Arecio Padrigao last Nov. 17 by a killer onboard a motorcycle, Nov. 19

Legislating the right of reply

"In one fell swoop, the proposed Right of Reply law will undermine or take

away the editorial prerogatives of journalists to print what they deem fit. Worse, this proposed law will intimidate journalists and prevent them from performing their watchdog functions because the potential cost of doing their job is rather high—fine, imprisonment or closure.

"It will, in other words, control what the public reads, hears or sees in the media.

"No recent legislative proposal has so brazenly attempted to violate the Bill of Rights—'No law shall be passed abridging the freedom of speech, of expression, or of the press...'—than this one.

"For its own good, the Philippine press should do better, and we certainly don't need a repressive law for us to do better. The best way to counter this proposed law is to prove that its premise is wrong, that regardless of our shortcomings, we have the capacity to be accurate and fair. Never mind balance, never mind objectivity. Just mind accuracy and fairness."

Carlos H. Conde, explaining the reasons why the right of reply bill should not be passed, Philippine Human Rights Reporting Project, Nov. 28

"The fear of media practitioners that the bill on right of reply will curtail the freedom of the press is completely unfounded, based on the following reasons:

"The bill on right of reply merely gives persons to express the other side of a controversy in which they are unduly maligned, with more or less equal treatment as the report being questioned.

"This bill will instill a greater sense of responsibility among journalists, and even boost the credibility and objectivity of the media, while at the same time, enhance the freedom of expression of the people.

"This bill recognizes the fact that the freedom of the press in this country is not absolute. The spirit of fair play and balanced reporting ordains that both sides of the controversy are presented, thereby requiring the corresponding obligation to allow the publication of replies from persons unduly maligned by the media.

"Ultimately, the enactment of the right of reply will redound to the benefit of the media practitioners."

Luzviminda D. Lavarias of the Office of Sen. Aquilino Pimentel Jr., on the right of reply bill passed by the Senate, Philippine Daily Inquirer, Oct. 31. Pimentel is the main sponsor of the Senate version of the right of reply bill.

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CHEERS

MONITOR

JEERS



JEER OF THE MONTH

Trivializing tragedy

 JEERS TO ABS-CBN 2 for stereotyping in its reporting on a rally against Israel's military offensive in Gaza.

Members and supporters of more than 30 organizations protested last Jan. 8 before the Israeli embassy in Manila to condemn the Israeli attack on Gaza, which started last Dec. 27. At least 1,200 Palestinians have been killed, a third of them children, while at least 5,300 have been wounded. On the Israeli side, 13 have been killed including three civilians.

TV Patrol World introduced its report on the event with: "*Samantala, sumugod sa embahada ng Israel sa Makati ang mga galit na Muslim. May nagbanta pang pasasabugin daw ang embahada kapag hindi natigil ang mga pag-atake ng puwersang Israeli sa Gaza city (Meanwhile, angry Muslims stormed the Israeli embassy in Makati. Someone even warned that the embassy will be bombed if Israeli forces do not stop their attacks on Gaza city).*"

The report said that over 300 Muslims rallied before the embassy. It added: "*Babala ng isang Muslim preacher, may nagbabanta na na pasabugin ang embahada ng Israel (A Muslim preacher warned that there are those that threatened to bomb the embassy).*" TV Patrol then showed the preacher, Ahmad Barcelon, as saying: "*Marami ang tumawag sa akin na gustuhin nilang bombahin ang embahadang ito. Ngunit, hindi ko sila pinapahintulutan (Many have told me that they want to bomb this embassy. But I didn't allow them).*" The report ended with an interview with Israeli ambassador to the Philippines Zvi Vapni.

TV Patrol twice showed the



A Jan. 5 rally at the Israel embassy

PJR REPORTS

rallyists with the headline "*Pasasabugin ang embahada (Israeli embassy, threatened with bombing)!*"

Bandila carried a similar report that night. Top Story, the afternoon news program of ANC (ABS-CBN News Channel) also aired the report except for the "bomb threat" angle. All three reports were filed by the same reporter.

In his open letter to the network (that led to several emails between him and network executives), Herbert Docena—who is with the Stop the War Coalition Philippines involved in the rally—raised numerous points against the TV Patrol report.

"Your reporting is dangerous: Portraying us as just 'angry Muslims' ("*Sumugod ang tatlong-daang mga galit na Muslim*") hell-bent on bombing Israel. This fuels the stereotype of Muslims as pathologically irrational terrorists who have no grounds whatsoever for demanding justice; it bolsters the misguided assumption that only terrorists (i.e. Muslims) could possibly be opposed to Israel's war crimes.

Barcelon, the Muslim preacher who spoke at the rally "did not reveal that we **planned** to bomb the embassy, as your reporter explicitly claimed, nor did he or anyone for that matter **threaten** to bomb the embassy, as your headline claimed," Docena wrote. "What Barcelon did say was that he has been receiving calls to bomb the embassy but that he had been restraining his callers." (emphasis by Docena)

"During the program, speaker after speaker explained the historical roots of the violence in the Middle East, refuted the myths and fallacies widely propagated in the media, im-

ported to take action, and appealed to the U.S. and Israeli governments to stop," Docena wrote. "Instead of reporting on the substance of our actions, however, your report zeroed in on one particular statement of a speaker, distorted it, and sensationalized it."

Although most of the rallyists were Muslims, Docena added, "a large number of us are non-Muslims concerned about the war: a quick scan of our colorful flags would show that many of us came from secular progressive civil society groups, non-governmental organizations, trade unions, social movements and political parties. Many of us are Christians."

"Your report is not only patently erroneous and imbalanced, it also fans the flames of hatred and moves the world farther and farther away from peace," Docena wrote.

In her reply to Docena, Charie Villa, ABS-CBN 2 news-gathering head, said that she watched the stories aired on TV Patrol, Bandila and Umagang Kay Ganda and read the scripts of the rally. "Contrary to your claims, I found the stories accurate," she wrote.

She also claimed that what the network reporter said was: "*Sa kasagsagan ng ulan...nagmartsa ang mahigit tatlong daang muslim, patungong Israel embassy (During a downpour, more than three hundred Muslims marched to the Israeli embassy).*"

In a follow-up letter, Maria Ressa, ABS-CBN 2 news and current affairs department head, reiterated that their story was not anti-Muslim. We did not stereotype them as "angry Muslims," she wrote. But she did agree with two of Docena's points: the presence of non-Muslim groups in the rally and the mis-

Yearning for a past era?



JEERS TO the Philippine press for its insistence on referring to Maria Ejercito, the mother of former president Joseph Estrada, "Doña Mary". When she died last Jan. 13, much of the press kept referring to her as "Doña Mary" instead of just simply saying "Ejercito" or "Mrs. Ejercito."

Was the press just being too kind to the deceased lady or is the country in a time warp and is once again under Spanish occupation? ■



Estrada and Luis Singson at Mrs. Ejercito's wake

PJR REPORTS

leading headline on the supposed threat "without saying it had been defused."

"I've spoken with the newsgathering team as well as the producers who handled this story so we can do a better job in the future," Ressa wrote.

That ABS-CBN 2's top news executives took the time to reply to Docena is commendable as an indication of the network's taking audience complaints seriously. But it doesn't detract from the fact that the fracas was the result of the ABS-CBN 2 reporter's obvious effort to sensationalize, and in the process distort, a story that has earned time and space in much of global media for its humanitarian dimensions and Israel's possible commission of war crimes.

By appealing to the worst anti-Muslim sentiments of most Filipino viewers, the reporter's take on the protest joined the ranks of all those other stories that obscure the real and pressing humanitarian crisis in Gaza, which pander to the worst prejudices of media consumers, trivialize tragedy, and therefore help perpetuate what's happening in that desperate land. ABS-CBN 2 needs to censure the reporter and her/his crew and to lecture them on the responsibilities attendant to the vast powers of the media, especially Big Media.

(For a discussion of the ethical dimensions of stereotyping, see Debbie A. Uy's "When the Media Stereotype" on page 1 & 14.) ■



PRINT



LITO OCAMPO

Exploring alternatives



CHEERS TO the Philippine Daily Inquirer for providing readers a look into an alternative to the prevailing global economic and financial system of neoliberal capitalism.

In a commentary last Jan. 5, University of the Philippines development studies professor Roland Simbulan discussed the Bolivarian Alternative to the Americas (Alba), which he described as "an alternative form of regional integration that is not based on trade liberalization." Alba is "based on the vision and idea of social welfare and equity, advocating a so-



CHEERS

MONITOR

JEERS



cially oriented trade bloc. It is a regional solidarity network whose purpose is to eradicate the poverty of the most dispossessed sectors of society," Simbulan explained. "Its linchpin is to allow the economically weakest countries to gain more favorable terms in trade negotiations, thereby undercutting the prerogatives of profit-driven transnational corporations." Simbulan also enumerated Alba's projects that are currently being implemented in Latin America.

"It represents a new form of international relations that is worth watching," he wrote.



[HTTP://ORANGESQUARED.WORDPRESS.COM](http://ORANGESQUARED.WORDPRESS.COM)

Probing the sad state of education

CHEERS TO the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* for its three-part special on the dismal state of basic education in the Philippines. Published from Dec. 2 to 4, the *Inquirer* featured Antonio Calipio Go, who has decided to briefly abandon his 12-year advocacy against error-filled textbooks because of what he claims is a media vilification campaign against him. It also reported the continued use of problematic textbooks in some schools, and the generally sorry state of education in the country.

Explicit description

JEERS TO The *Philippine Star* for a sensationalized report.

The Jan. 16 article "Couple forces maid to have sex with dog" (p. 18, Metro section) was apparently published to arouse prurient interest.

The crime was inherently sensational, but the report would not have been more disturbing had it provided more details of the incident. Using anonymous court officials as



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sources, it explained "that the couple held their dog and made the animal penetrate the victim."

At the same time, the report would have been more reliable if it had named an identifiable source. The date of the alleged rape was not disclosed either. Clearly, the report was meant to appeal to the reader's worst instincts.

Missing side

JEERS TO the *Manila Bulletin* for an incomplete report on the alleged willingness of the country's three biggest oil companies to show their audit books to the Bureau of Internal Revenues (BIR) as challenged by some members of the Congress.

The Dec. 1 report, "Three big oil firms ready to open books for audit", provided the views of only two of the three players.

Ads for news...

JEERS TO *Malaya* (now known as *Malaya Business Insight*) for surrendering valuable space to ads. *Malaya* has been publishing one-fourth page advertisements on its front page—the most coveted part in a newspaper for advertising—



for months.

To be fair, *Malaya* is just one of several papers that publish advertisements below the front page fold, although it is noted for consistently running one-fourth page ads on its front page.

During these times when issues are aplenty and the people need as much information as possible, the front page is better dedicated to information rather than the vending of this or that product.



...More ads

JEERS TO The *Philippine Star* for choosing revenues over credibility. Last Nov. 30, it published a four-page advertisement printed on bookpaper which it placed in *The Philippine Star* Sunday Lifestyle issue. What is troubling is the paper actually lent its name, banner, and style format to a vitamin water product. The ad appeared exactly like the front page and inside pages of the daily. The articles were also written by *Star* lifestyle reporters. Of course, all articles praised the product's features and why the public needs to buy the product. An article draws attention in particular to the line, "Philippine Star asks... Why put vitamins in your water?"

Manila Bulletin also published a false cover advertisement for a grilled chicken restaurant last Jan. 9. *PJR Reports* already jeered *Bulletin* for disguising an anti-dandruff shampoo advertorial as its front page on Aug. 10, 2007. ■



[HTTP://WWW.TANAUAN-LEYTE.GOV.PH](http://WWW.TANAUAN-LEYTE.GOV.PH)

...And still more

JEERS TO *Teledyaryo* for passing off an advertorial as a feature segment. Last Dec. 24, *Teledyaryo* reported the alleged Filipino "tradition" of eating lechon or roast pig during the Christmas and New Year feasts. The segment opened with a shot of the façade of a well-known lechon supplier. It then went on to interview the owner, prefacing it with the allegation that "Kung walang lechon, hindi kumpleto ang handaan. Tala-gang hindi masaya ang tao kung walang lechon. 'Yan ang nakagawian nating mga Pilipino (The feast is not complete without the lechon. People would not be happy without lechon. That is our tradition as Filipinos)." There were also interviews with customers—who were of course all praises for the products of the lechon supplier.

Background plus

CHEERS TO GMA-7's *Case Unclosed* for its re-examination of the Nov. 24, 2000 killing of publicist Salvador "Bubby" Dacer and his driver Emmanuel Corbito. The December 4 episode featured the witnesses' accounts of how Dacer and Corbito were kidnapped and killed by a group of unknown men. *Case Unclosed* also talked to one of Dacer's daughters, as well as his friends and former clients, on the possible motives behind the killing. From the interviews and documents came the following possibilities: (1) that Dacer was killed for his alleged participation in the plot to oust then president Joseph Estrada; (2)

that his knowledge of allegedly anomalous transactions by BW Resources, a company owned by billionaire and a known Estrada ally Lucio Tan, which was being investigated by the Senate in 2000 could have been another reason; and (3) that it was his adverse relationship with former Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Task Force (PAOCTF) chief and now Sen. Panfilo "Ping" Lacson which led to his killing.

The episode was aired as the press reported that Supt. Glenn Dumlao and Senior Supt. Cesar Mancao, two former PAOCTF members allegedly involved in the Dacer-Corbato murder, were apprehended in the U.S. and will be deported back to the Philippines. *Case Unclosed* also looked into how the return of Dumlao and Mancao could affect the outcome of the Dacer-Corbato murder trial. ■



LITO OCAMPO

Fighting pornography

CHEERS TO GMA News.TV for its November 18 article explaining the legal and social aspects, particularly the lack of a specific law against it, of why and how child pornography remains prevalent in the country, ("Child pornography: Evil that preys silently on poor Filipino children", <http://www.gmanews.tv/story/134282/Child-pornography-Evil-that-preys-silently-on-poor-Filipino-children>). It also mentioned the role of new technologies in the spread of child pornography in the Philippines. ■

The “Alabang boys” controversy WHO BRIBED WHOM?

Each side fought a heated battle for credibility and public sympathy, with the press basically taking a bystander stance.

■ By Edsel Van DT. Dura

THE MEDIA coverage of the suspected bribery of government officials for the release of three drug suspects lacked the critical information needed to help the public form a tentative but intelligent opinion on the allegations.

PJR Reports monitored media coverage from Dec. 23 until Jan. 10, three days after the first two sessions of the House of Representatives probe on the controversy. It covered the three major newspapers (*Manila Bulletin*, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, and *The Philippine Star*); three major television news programs (*TV Patrol World* of ABS-CBN 2 and *24 Oras* of GMA-7 as well as *Teledyaryo* of the government-run NBN-4); and online news organizations (*abs-cbnNEWS.com*, *GMANews.tv*, *Inquirer.net*, *Newsbreak*, *The Daily PCIJ* of the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, and *VERA Files*).

The monitor showed that the press merely depended on statements from the parties involved in the issue and did not investigate the charges on its own. The coverage thus became a heated battle for credibility and public sympathy, with the press basically taking a bystander stance.

Media hype

The *Star* reported the bribery attempt in its Dec. 23 story “Drug suspects’ kin offer Department of Justice (DOJ) P50-M bribe” (Metro section, p. 14). The press soon followed up on the issue. When the *Inquirer* bannered the story last Dec. 28 (“P50-M drug bribe bared: DoJ drops raps vs 3 rich kids in buy-bust”), the controversy became front-page news.

Last Sept. 20, Richard Brodett, Jorge Joseph, and Joseph Tecson—reportedly the sons of rich and influential families—were arrested for drug traffick-

ing through buy-bust operations in Quezon City and Ayala Alabang Village by the agents of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA).

Using anonymous sources, the Dec. 23 *Star* article reported that the Brodett family allegedly offered P50 million to prosecutors to immediately dismiss the case against the three suspects. But the *Star*’s “reliable source” said he was not sure if the prosecutors accepted the bribe.

Two PDEA officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, also confirmed the bribery allegations. The PDEA officials also alleged that PDEA director general Dionisio Santiago was offered a gold Rolex watch to drop the complaint.

Santiago denied the allegation, but said the families of the suspects were determined to exhaust all possible means to secure their release. He said in the *Star* report that some people close to one of the suspects had offered a bribe of P20 million.

The controversy proved an opportunity for the press to review flaws in the justice system. But the press was predominantly hooked on the drama and personalities involved in the issue. The exchanges of accusations and the word war between government officials gained more prominence while discussions on the merits of the case were buried in the inside pages.

Inquirer headlines like “Brodetts vs Brodetts” (front-page Jan. 8) and “PDEA chief, ‘Alabang boys’ lawyer face off on noontime TV” (p. A4, Jan. 6) are among the examples. The



latter (revised *Inquirer.net* headline “On noontime TV: PDEA chief, ‘Alabang boys’ lawyer tangle”) article’s lead went: “It was a phone-patch showdown that fired up noontime news like the climax of a soap opera.”

Another *Inquirer* article, “DOJ lawyer says he’s been having sleepless nights” (Jan. 6, p. A4) was also an example of the way the press appeared to be competing for the best defense story for each camp.

As of press time, the alleged pay-off had not yet been substantiated. Neither did the Senate hearings turn up any clear evidence confirming that the bribery attempt indeed happened.

Major Ferdinand Marcelino of PDEA, did not name to the media his supposed classmate at the Philippine Military Academy who acted as emissary for one of the suspects’ family. He named the person, but during a closed-door hearing after the first public hearing conducted by the House oversight committee on dangerous drugs.

Marcelino disclosed three bribe offers made to him ranging from P3 million to P20 million. Marcelino, a Marines officer, currently heads the PDEA’s Special Enforcement Service which conducted the buy-bust operation.

DOJ Secretary Raul Gonzalez said he had “reservations” about the alleged bribery attempts by



Gonzalez

Photos by LITO OCAMPO

cases, which are capital offenses, should be kept under detention while their cases are pending or under review.

The decision should not have been circulated without his imprimatur, Gonzalez said.

But both Chief State Prosecutor Jovencito Zuño and John Resado said the circular had been ignored by the DOJ for years. The press should have checked if this was indeed the case, but did not.

Resado authored the resolution dismissing the case. Zuño, who has been with the DOJ for 15 years, signed the resolution along with state prosecutors Philip Quimpo and Misael Ladaga.

More importantly, the press should have also made its own assessment of the processes involved in the proper conduct of buy-bust operations or in the handling of drug cases in particular.

Gonzalez claimed that the appointment of Marcelino was unconstitutional. Citing Article 16, Section 5 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution, he said military officers are prevented from holding civilian positions in government.

Does this mean that any drug case filed by the PDEA can easily be junked via a technicality since some PDEA officers, like Marcelino, are also serving in the military?

In this context, the press, as public educator and watchdog of government, should provide more analyses to help expand any discussion on the government’s drug enforcement policies. After all the Philippines has become a major hub of the drug trade in Asia, which makes drug trafficking and all its complexities the stuff of which news is made. ■

adverting to the Court of Appeals (CA) bribery scandal late last year.

“It’s incredible. It seems these people are wealthier than Meralco,” Gonzalez said in a Dec. 30 *Inquirer* report.

CA Justice Jose Sabio claimed that businessman Francis de Borja offered him P10 million in behalf of Manila Electric Co. (Meralco) in the GSIS-Meralco case.

Crucial issues

The allegations, though still doubtful due to the refusal of the supposed whistleblowers to divulge more information, have also caused the weaknesses in the government’s battle against illegal drugs to surface.

The news media were able to touch on them when they reported on other dismissed drug cases and alleged DOJ intervention on other cases. But the press has not been very thorough and particularly enlightening by comprehensively addressing it.

To begin with, there was already a media furor even when the Dec. 2 resolution signed by the DOJ prosecutors was leaked. The decision was not yet final.

Gonzalez cited Memorandum Circular No. 46 which requires an “automatic review of dismissed cases involving violations of RA No. 9165 or the Dangerous Drugs Act.” He said suspects in drugs and smuggling

PING PONG COVERAGE OF A GOLFERS' BRAWL

The press mainly relied on information from the personalities involved. Because of the conflicting accounts of the incident, the public could not make out from the coverage who was telling the truth.

■ By Kathryn Roja G. Raymundo

THE MASSIVE online interest on the fight between the families of Agrarian Reform Secretary Nasser Pangandaman Sr. and businessman Delfin De La Paz at the Valley Golf and Country Club in Antipolo City last Dec. 26 eventually caught the attention of the mainstream press.

Despite the attention, however, the coverage was deficient and biased. The press mainly relied on information from the personalities involved without corroboration from independent sources. Because of the conflicting accounts between the two families and other supposed witnesses on what happened, the public could not make out from the ping-pong coverage who was telling the truth.

PJR Reports monitored three newspapers (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, *The Philippine Star*, and *Manila Bulletin*), three news programs (*TV Patrol World*, *24 Oras*, and *Teledyaryo*), and selected online news sites from Dec. 26 to Jan. 10.

Versions

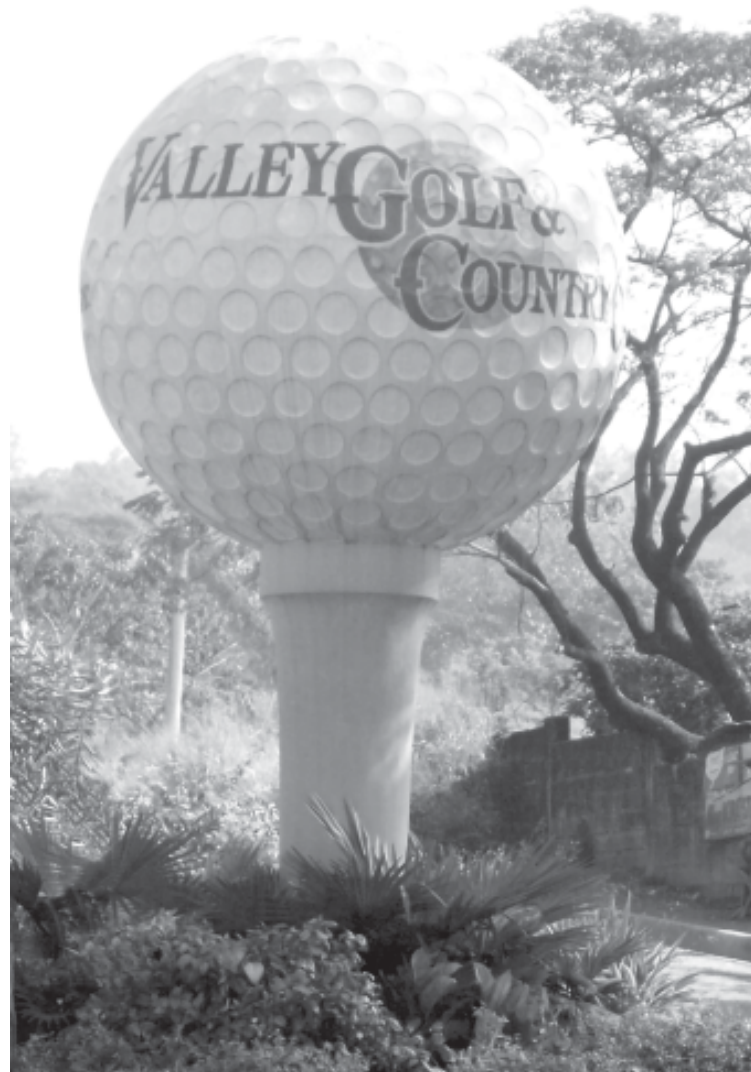
Marie Dhel “Bambee” De La Paz broke the news at her blog *Vicissitude* that the son of the Agrarian Reform secretary, Masiu, Lanao del Sur Mayor Nasser Pangandaman Jr. with other men allegedly beat her 56-year-old father Delfin and 14-year-old brother, Bino Lorenzo over a “stupid misunderstanding on the golf course (<http://vicissitude-decidido.blogspot.com/2008/12/world-is-fucked-up.html>).” Her blog post “The world has gone crazy” told her version of what happened that day, which triggered a massive

Initial reports and commentaries largely favored the De La Paz family because the Pangandamans were not available for comment

reaction by other bloggers and online users.

The press ran the story a few days after. The initial reports and commentaries largely favored the De La Paz family because the Pangandamans were not available for comment (so the reports said)—and because, let’s face it, it’s easy to assume that all politicians, especially Muslim ones, must be at fault.

Unfortunately for the Pangandamans, while they remained unavailable the whole De La Paz family found time enough to talk to the entire Philippine media. Only much later did the elder Pangandaman say that people had been told a distorted and even patently false version of the incident. Pangandaman Sr. said it was the businessman and his children who attacked



Photos by LITO OCAMPO

first and that his family only reacted in self-defense.

Which is a lesson in patience, since before the Pangandamans decided to break their silence, the accounts were so one-sided that *Inquirer* columnist Ramon Tulfo could not resist venting his usual anti-Muslim spleen by claiming that what the Pangandamans supposedly did was typical of Muslim politicians. Before releasing the story, it seems hardly neces-

sary to expect the press to talk to the Pangandaman family and/or the officials of Valley Golf first. Failing this, there were other sources other than the De La Paz family the press could have consulted to verify the story. There were the police blotter and/or investigations, medical records, and independent witnesses available.

The Jan. 1 *Inquirer* report on the perceived “sober image” of the Pangandamans prior to the

incident was an example of how a media organization could have balanced somewhat the resulting anti-Pangandaman (and anti-Muslim) sentiments among readers and viewers (“Pangandamans’ ‘sober image’ soiled”, p. A1). “Before the brawl, the name Pangandaman was associated with a Cabinet member or with a diplomat-turned-governor of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM),” the report said, providing a different look at the Pangandamans.

Generalizations and biases

Tulfo launched his diatribe against Muslims despite the paucity of details on the incident, particularly the absence of the Pangandamans’ version of it. A mere day after the *Inquirer* reported the incident (“Golf club suspends DAR chief over brawl”, Dec. 29, p. A1), Tulfo wrote in his Dec. 30 column: “The mauling incident at the Valley Golf Club in Antipolo involving the mayor-son of Agrarian Reform Secretary Nasser Pangandaman is not surprising given the arrogance of some officials who belong to a cultural minority group.” He then cited instances that showed “abuse of power by some Muslim officials” which he claimed has been abetted by the Arroyo administration.

“Our brother and sister Muslims complain they are looked down upon as ‘second class citizens’,” he added. “But have they bothered to ask why their non-Muslim compatriots look at some of them with contempt?”

“There’s a saying that if one wants respect from his fellowmen, he should respect them first,” Tulfo wrote.



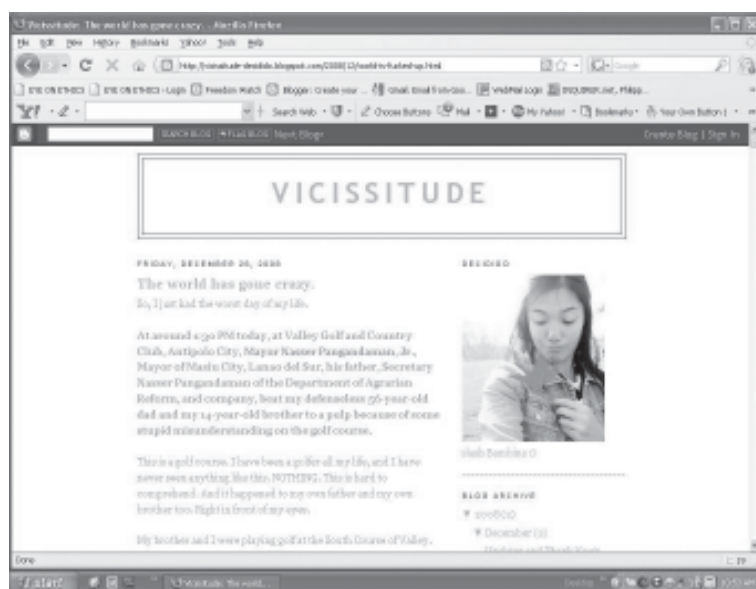
In detail

With the possible exception of Tulfo's, and as expected, the columns and op-ed pieces provided both the perspective and the context lacking in the news reports.

Danilo Araña Arao in his column "Pamublikong galit, midya at 'Valley Golf Brawl' (Mass anger, media and 'Valley Golf Brawl') provided an analysis on why the public was critical of the involvement of the Pangandamans ("Konteksto", *Pinoy Weekly*, January 16-22 issue). Arao discussed the circumstances using the Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees or Republic Act No. 6713.

The incident highlighted "an unequal encounter between officials holding public authority and plain powerless citizens," columnist Amando Doronila wrote last Dec. 31 ("Abuse of power", *Inquirer*). "This abuse of authority has been the stamp of the violence that has defined the response of the high officials of the administration, in which Secretary Pangandaman is a key Cabinet member, to social and political issues confronting it."

Doronila added that the government has "an unabated record of violations of human and political rights in a culture of violence perpetrated by either state security authorities or state functionaries enjoying impunity from accountability." This is the culture which breeds



Screen grab of Bambée De La Paz's blog post which sparked massive public discussion of the incident

the likes of the Pangandamans and law enforcement and justice department officials, he wrote. "It is a culture that propagates arrogance and violence as a response to insurgencies that have now shifted to the parliamentary arena from the mode of armed struggle. It is a culture that has made a monster out of retired Maj. Gen. Jovito Palparan."

In its Jan. 4 editorial, the *Inquirer* pointed out: "As many an outraged blogger and commenter on the Internet has put it, regardless of what actually led to the beating up, the assault on a minor is simply unpardonable. The secondary issue is how public anger over

the incident hasn't led to more than pro forma apologies from Secretary Pangandaman (and silence on the part of his son, the mayor)."

The issue "can be boiled down to that line allegedly uttered by Mayor Pangandaman: 'Don't you know who I am?'" it added. "For older Filipinos, the line used to be, 'What are we in power for?' The line outraged citizens then; its contemporary version outrages citizens today."

The boon and bane of blogging

Some reports chose to look at the role the Internet, particularly blogging, played in the golf club brawl. (Please turn to page 28 for a discussion of this issue

Columns and op-ed pieces provided the perspective and the context lacking in the news reports

by journalist and blogger Carlos H. Conde.)

The *Inquirer* reported how Bambée's blog triggered various reactions online and off, and at home and abroad. "Dela Paz's blog entry drew more than 400 responses from fellow bloggers, many of whom wrote about the story on their own blogs, and linked hers to theirs, with the intention, it seemed, of spreading it in all cyberspace," wrote the *Inquirer* last Dec. 30, just four days after she posted the entry ("Dela Paz blog on brawl heats up Net", p. A5). When the paper reported on her blog entry two days after, the number of comments on her original blog entry had already reached more than 700. On her follow-up entry expressing gratitude for the online support, the number of comments reached more than 140 ("Bloggers whip up storm over Valley brawl", p. A6).

In his Jan. 7 column, Doronila wrote that the incident showed there is "a new people

power movement, lodged in the Internet, (which) has emerged and has intervened forcefully to seize the public opinion initiative. It has drawn people to take sides on behalf of the victims of injustice and the abuse of power by persons in authority" ("Blog power", p. A11).

Babe Romualdez wrote a similar column last Jan. 4 ("Internet power", *Star*). Romualdez said "Public officials should especially be careful about the way they behave in public because their actions are being closely watched, and the minute they make a misstep, the news can spread easily across the country through text and (can be) reported all over the world through the Internet."

After receiving much public criticism, Pangandaman Sr. appealed to the people, specifically the bloggers, to stop posting unfavorable comments about the family.

The ABS-CBN News Channel talk show *Media in Focus* also discussed the relationship of blogging and journalism (Jan. 15). The guests said while blogging emphasized the faults of journalism in the golf club brawl, the incident also aroused the ire of the blogging community and showed that it can complement the role of journalism in informing the public as well as command the attention of the powerful to address the ails of society. ■

CRISES AND SCANDALS A PUBLIC THAT'S NONE THE WISER

The press hopped from one controversy (and beat) to another without closing the gaps and providing the public the much-needed context to enable it to connect the dots.

■ By the *PJR Reports* staff

THE PRESS clearly missed out on some important points on the biggest political crises that haunted the Arroyo presidency last year, although there were efforts to improve the coverage. Part of the reason: there were just too many scandals for reporters assigned to several beats to cover adequately.

From moves to amend the Constitution to the latest failed attempt to impeach Pres. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo to the fertilizer fund scam, the press thus hopped from one controversy (and beat) to another without closing the gaps and providing the public the much-needed context to enable it to connect the dots.

THE CHARTER CHANGE ISSUE

Given its long life (it's been on the board for nearly a decade), the Charter change (Cha-cha) issue has enabled the press to look into most of the sub-issues attached to it—except one of the most important. The press has so far failed to provide the public any report on why government officials claim to be pushing for the amendment of the 1987 Constitution today—to chuck its “restrictive” economic provisions to address the global financial crisis.

The press deserved praise for discussing a variety of issues on Cha-cha. Most news reports and opinion pieces focused on the following angles: the term extension of incumbent officials, the personalities and organizations for or against Cha-cha, the anti-

Cha-cha rally in Makati last Dec. 12, and which approach to take in revising the Constitution.

However, the press should have provided every information and argument available about the possible motives behind the revival of calls to amend the Charter and its consequences. Armed with sufficient knowledge, the public should be able to decide whether or not it will allow the proposed amendments.

PJR Reports reviewed the Cha-cha coverage three newspapers (*Manila Bulletin*, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, and *The Philippine Star*), three news programs (*TV Patrol World*, *24 Oras*, and *Teledyaryo*), and selected online news sites from Dec. 8 to 19.

Overlooked

On occasion, the press would mention that Cha-cha is supposedly being pursued by some of its advocates for economic reasons. But it has so far failed to look into this angle with any kind of depth.

House of Representatives Speaker Prospero Nograles filed House Resolution (HR) No. 737 which seeks to change Article XII Sections 2 and 3 of the Con-



Photos by LITO OCAMPO

stitution. This is the national economy and patrimony section of the charter. The resolution would “allow the acquisition by foreign corporations and associations and the transfer or conveyance thereto, of alienable public and private lands.” Nograles and supporters said the resolution would be the answer to the threats of recession and global

financial crisis—despite the fact that such an amendment would be in keeping with the neoliberal approach that has led to the crisis.

The *Star* in one of its articles quoted Sen. Miriam Santiago thus: “My point is this, assuming the most innocent motive for Charter change (which) is to advance the Philippine economy by amending or revising our economic provisions, will it immediately produce results so as help the Philippine economy next year which will already be impacted by the (world) financial economy?” (“Speaker: NO GMA term extension”, Dec. 1).

William M. Esposo in his “As I Wreck This Chair” column in the *Star* asked whether the proposed Cha-cha economic reform would deliver “good governance, the rule of law, a predictable judiciary, peace and order, a climate of industrial peace, infrastructure that is at par with ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) competitors, affordable energy and political stability” which he said attract foreigners to invest



Quezon City 3rd District Rep. Matias Defensor Jr. and Albay 1st District Rep. Edcel Lagman, House justice committee chair and vice-chair respectively, at the height of the House proceedings on last year's impeachment complaint against Arroyo.

("Why the biggest crooks are pushing for Cha-cha economic reform", Dec. 11).

Another Esposo column last Jan. 4 also asked what kind of economic reforms the supporters of Cha-cha would introduce and what exactly they mean by "reform". He also enumerated the questions that have troubled the critics of Cha-cha, the best characteristics of the present Constitution, and explained how the present charter came about.

Unfortunately, this kind of contextualization was rare. Much of the press did not ask how the Nograles resolution would help solve the country's economic problems, and what the effect of allowing 100% land ownership by foreigners would be.

For the answers to these questions, and given the current economic crisis, an enterprising journalist could have asked Constitutional and law experts as well as economists to explain the rationale and consequences of the proposed changes. The press could have produced reports citing the experience of other countries which allow full foreign land ownership and studies that show the relationship among land ownership, investments, and economic. Equally crucial is information on the current debate among neoliberal economists and the neo-Keynesians who are divided over the question of whether state interference in economic matters is justified or not.

Other misses

The press barely discussed

how the Constitution may be amended according to that document itself. Some background on constitutional conventions, constituent assemblies, and people's initiatives would have helped.

Instead of amending the Constitution in its entirety, some members of the House of Representatives have proposed to change some of its provisions through the enactment of bills. The press should have also looked into the legality of this move.

In a *Star* report, La Union Rep. Victor Ortega said there are at least 30 Cha-cha resolutions submitted before the House Committee on Constitutional Amendments ("House panel to resume Cha-cha hearing on January 27", Jan. 4). The press did not bother to mention what the most relevant ones were, or even to verify if there are indeed

these many resolutions pending before the House committee.

To stay in power

Most reports on Cha-cha were about the possible term extension of incumbent officials including Arroyo. The press paid appropriate attention to this particular aspect of the issue as a key reason why many oppose amending the Constitution now. It would have helped the public better grasp the concerns of some groups and individuals if the press emphasized the inconsistencies in the statements of the Cha-cha advocates among Arroyo officials.

For instance, if not for human rights lawyer Neri Colmenares, HR 550 filed by Batangas Rep. Hermilando Mandanas would not have been known. The resolution aims to postpone the 2010 presidential



De Venecia and son



elections to 2011 at the same time extend the terms of office of all elective officials including the president by a year. This was contrary to the statements released by several government officials that there were no plans to extend the term of the president and other incumbent officials. Mandanas has withdrawn the resolution.

Forewarning

As what happens often, some reports and commentaries provided the missing pieces in the Cha-cha coverage.

The political year-ender of *Bulatlat.com*, "The Arroyo Government: Struggling to Survive till 2010 and Beyond" by Benjie Oliveros explained why Arroyo would most probably not want to step down in 2010. The analysis included discussions on the different controversies that hound the Arroyo administration and concluded that her probable reason for staying in power is the immunity that protects the sitting president from suits (Dec.

20, <http://bulatlat.com/main/2008/12/20/the-arroyo-government-struggling-to-survive-till-2010-and-beyond/>).

The press kept a watchful eye on the Supreme Court's role in Cha-cha. Several reports noted that with the forthcoming retirement of seven justices, Arroyo's appointments could tilt the balance to her favor before 2009 even ends. Aries Rufo's "Supreme Court: GMA's last card to extend term beyond 2010" explored the possibility of the administration's tinkering with the Constitution and allowing the president to stay in power beyond 2010 with Supreme Court approval. (Jan. 3, <http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/nation/01/02/09/supreme-court-gma-s-last-card-extend-term-beyond-2010>).

UNIMPEACHABLE

The renewed moves to amend the Constitution came on the heels of the most recent impeachment complaint against Arroyo.



More than evident was press fatigue over covering the impeachment complaints that are annually filed against Arroyo

De Venecia, a former administration ally, also linked Arroyo and her husband Jose Miguel to the controversial national broadband network (NBN) deal with Chinese firm Zhong Xing Telecommunications Equipment (ZTE) Corp. De Venecia was ousted as House Speaker in Feb. 2008 after a falling out with Arroyo. During his speakership, the administration-controlled House of Representatives had dismissed all impeachment complaints against Arroyo since 2005.

The Manila newspapers emphasized the views of De Venecia, who endorsed the complaint. His son, Jose "Joey" III, who had earlier exposed alleged irregularities over the NBN deal, joined in filing the latest impeachment complaint against Arroyo.

The press did not pay much

attention to the groups and personalities who had put the complaint together or who co-sponsored it. For example, many reports kept referring to the suit as either the "De Venecia complaint" or "the complaint filed by Joey de Venecia III", even if there were other complainants. These complainants included Karapatan deputy secretary general Roneo Clamor; the Kilusang Mayo Uno's Elmer Labog; missing activists' mothers Edita Burgos, Concepcion Empeño, and Erlinda Cadapan; lawyer Harry Roque Jr.; Iloilo Vice Gov. Rolex Suplico; former government officials; and representatives of various civil society groups.

Except for the NBN-ZTE deal and alleged Palace payoff, the other charges against Arroyo were either not addressed at all or were only minimally covered. These included the rampant human rights violations during Arroyo's watch and the gold reserves contract for Mt. Diwalwal.

In an interview with *PJR Reports*, Roque agreed that most media reports implied that the impeachment was a "project" of the De Venecia father and son. And yet, "*Hindi naman talaga totoo dahil napakalaki ng sektor na nirepresent ng mga complainant* (That is not true, since the

sectors represented by the complainants wide were broad)," he told *PJR Reports*.

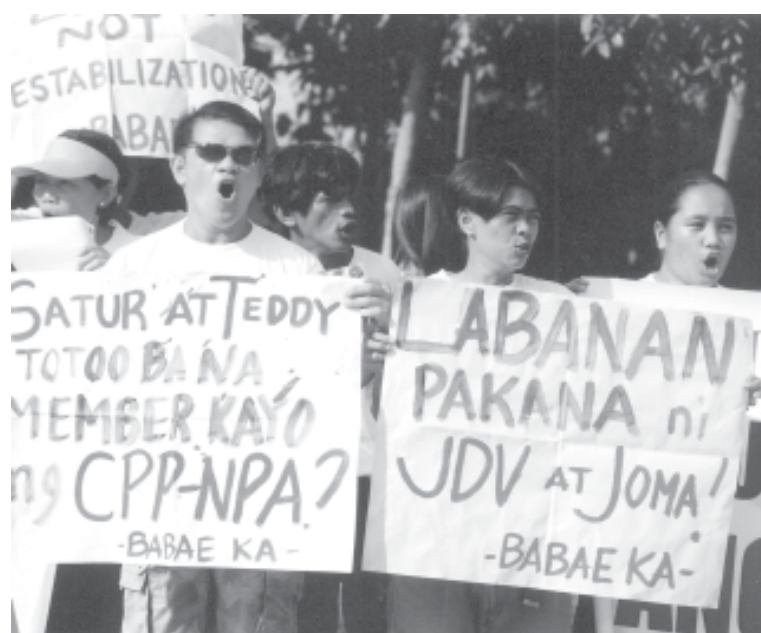
Missing in the coverage of the last impeachment complaint was the presentation and discussion of issues, Roque added, and that the impeachment process was not explained to the people. "*Hindi masyadong na-emphasize iyong constitutional office nung impeachment at naging*, again, personality-oriented *dahil sa mag-amang De Venecia. Marami rin namang pumupuna na parang namarginalize 'yung iba't ibang sector na naghain ng impeachment complaint* (The constitutional office of the impeachment was not given enough emphasis and the issue became personality-oriented because of the De Venecias. A lot of people noticed that the other sectors who presented the impeachment complaint were marginalized.)."

The media should be conscious to the fact that the impeachment complaint was not just conceptualized and filed by one person, Bagong Alyansang Makabayan Secretary General Renato Reyes said. "(The press) should be conscious also that the impeachment was not being advanced by only one person but by many groups, many individuals affected by the Arroyo regime."

Former Arroyo official Corazon "Dinky" Soliman shared a similar view. The press tried to sensationalize the coverage and made it personality-oriented, said Soliman, who resigned as social welfare secretary along with other Cabinet officials at the height of the "Hello Garci" scandal in 2005. The coverage should not have focused solely on Joey de Venecia, but more on the fact that the complaint would not succeed just like previous attempts. The press did not explain that the impeachment bid is a constitutional process that is the right of every citizen, she told *PJR Reports*.

Because De Venecia's statements and reactions were all over the coverage, some readers and viewers could not be faulted for thinking that he was the initiator of the complaint, that he was just getting back at Arroyo for his removal from the speakership by her House allies, and that, over all, it was just another pointless politicians' circus.

Voting 42-8, the House of Representatives Justice Committee dismissed last Nov. 26 the impeachment complaint, the fourth such attempt against Arroyo in three years, with the public none the wiser. ■



The press did cover the latest attempt to oust Arroyo from the presidency, but much of the coverage relied on "high-profile" personalities involved in the controversy and their statements. More than evident was press fatigue over covering the impeachment complaints that are annually filed against Arroyo.

The Manila broadsheets and much of television news

focused on the accusation by Pangasinan Rep. and former Speaker Jose de Venecia Jr. that Arroyo bribed him and other lawmakers during a meeting in Malacanang on Oct. 11, 2007 to support a weak impeachment complaint against her. That complaint, filed by lawyer Roel Pulido, was eventually dismissed by the House of Representatives then headed by De Venecia.



Bolante

■ By the *PJR Reports* staff

QUESTIONS REGARDING the alleged diversion of the P728-million Fertilizer Fund under the *Ginintuang Masaganang Ani* (GMA) Program to the campaign funds of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo in 2004 remain unanswered even with the return of former Department of Agriculture (DA) undersecretary Jocelyn “Joc-joc” Bolante from a failed asylum bid in the United States. Unfortunately, the national media did not provide much help in prodding the Senate to find the answers.

PJR Reports monitored the coverage of the Bolante scandal from Nov. 10 (date of the final medical bulletin) until Dec. 5 (two days after the Senate ordered Bolante’s arrest for being evasive and the day of the filing of Bolante’s complaint about the Dec. 3 arrest). The monitor included three Manila-based broadsheets (*Manila Bulletin*, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, and *The Philippine Star*), three primetime news programs (ABS-CBN’s *TV Patrol World*, GMA-7’s *24 Oras*, and government-run NBN-4’s *Teledyaryo*), and selected news websites.

The news media were able to provide daily updates on the inquiries conducted by the both houses of the 14th Congress and the Office of the Ombudsman. But noticeable throughout the monitoring period was the lack of reports when no committee hearing was held. The coverage on the probe on the P728-million fertilizer fund once revealed the reactive tendency of the

Philippine press.

The press also failed to connect the fertilizer fund scandal with the other issues that have haunted the Arroyo administration, such as the “Hello Garci” election scandal in 2005, the increasingly repressive policies of the administration that undermine civil liberties including press freedom, and attempts to change the Constitution, among others.

Missing context

The P728-million fertilizer fund scam story first came out in March 2004, a few weeks before the national election, according to *Newsbreak* in its timeline “Joc-joc Bolante and the Fertilizer Scam”. It mentioned that *Inquirer* reports on Sen. Panfilo “Ping” Lacson’s claim that Mrs. Arroyo was using the fertilizer fund to buy votes were published as early as March 2004.

In 2005, farmer groups and other militant groups said farm-

A LOT OF QUESTIONS— BUT TOO FEW ANSWERS

The press failed to connect the fertilizer fund scandal with the other issues that have haunted the Arroyo administration such as the “Hello Garci” election scandal in 2005.



Sen. Richard Gordon, chair of the Blue Ribbon Committee, in one of the Senate hearings on the controversy

Photos by LITO OCAMPO

ers never received the fertilizer supposedly released for their use. The 13th Senate headed by the Blue Ribbon and Agriculture committees launched a probe into the alleged scam in Oct. 2005.

Since it has been almost four years since the controversy erupted, most reports and commentaries in the broadsheets and online news sites contained two or more paragraphs on who Bolante is, his alleged role in the scam, and his hurried departure in 2005. Several media organizations published timelines on the fertilizer fund scam (“Helpful reminder”, *PJR Reports*, December 2008 issue, p.4).

Some reports also tried to present the major points of the findings of the investigations

launched in 2005 on the P728-million fertilizer fund. Quoting the findings of the Commission on Audit (COA) and the 13th Senate on the fertilizer fund scam, the *Inquirer* in its Nov. 14 “At A Glance” listed eleven points “Why (mis)use of P728-M fertilizer fund is a scam” (p. A1 & A23).

The Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) also published last Oct. 27 in its blog the highlights of the inquiry by the Senate Blue Ribbon and Agriculture committees during the 13th Congress in 2005 (“Welcome home, Joc-joc”, <http://www.pcij.org/blog/?p=3157>).

But missing in the coverage were a focus on the findings of the COA and the Senate committees in 2005, and more importantly, the controversy’s

connection with the legitimacy issue hounding the Arroyo presidency. Revisiting what happened in the 2004 national elections and explaining why and how Bolante became the center of this scam could have contextualized the importance of Bolante’s return and the re-investigation of the fertilizer fund better.

Where are the others?

Bolante might be the master planner who designed how the funds would be diverted to Mrs. Arroyo’s campaign kitty, but other government officials should be held accountable for the misuse of the P728-million fund or, if we add the amount mentioned in the Feb. 11, 2004 Special Allocation Release Order, more than P2 billion of the taxpayers’ money.

The PCIJ blog report last Oct. 27 also listed recommendations to hold not only Bolante accountable, but also former DA secretary Luis Lorenzo, former DA Undersecretary Ibarra Poliquit, DA Undersecretary Belinda Gonzales, DA Assistant Secretary Jose Felix Montes, and other regional directors under the Plunder law and the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act. The Senate committee also said Arroyo should be charged for “mismanagement of funds”.

During the first weeks of his return, most news reports focused on how Bolante allegedly manipulated the fertilizer fund in 2004. But when the hearings



started, the press began to look at other government officials and private individuals charged before the Office of the Ombudsman and included in the 2006 Senate joint committee report and the COA findings.

Most of the reports carried the denials by these officials that they were involved in the fertilizer fund project. Some reports on the other hand tried to look into the whereabouts of the other accused in the misuse of the fertilizer fund scam. For example, *24 Oras* in its Nov. 12 report “*Iba pang nadadawit sa Fertilizer Fund Scam, nasaan na? (Where are the others alleged in the Fertilizer Fund Scam?)*” tried to find out where Lorenzo, Poliquit, Montes, and Gonzales were. The report also pointed out that the inquiries were focused on Bolante despite the fact that they should also be investigating more than 200 officials involved in the fertilizer fund scam.

But despite providing space and airtime for the officials who denied receiving fertilizer or money or both, the press seldom checked on the veracity of their statements. The so-called national news organizations should have revisited the localities and checked if indeed the district representatives and mayors did not receive or use the funds they received.

Unanswered questions

The press also let several questions raised during the Senate and House inquiries on the fertilizer fund scam simply passed by without explaining them.

For example, the *Bulletin* highlighted Bolante's claim that the budget approved under the General Appropriations Act (GAA) need not go through the Office of the President. But the *Bulletin* did not look into the GAA to check if it was true. Another example was *24 Oras*'s Nov. 13 report which noted several questions Bolante failed to answer in his first appearance before the 14th Senate. But rather than providing answers, *24 Oras* just left the audience guessing.

The news media could have provided a comprehensive discussion of the government's procurement process. How different government departments and agencies as well as local governments secure funds for their projects caught the public's attention when Bolante said Arroyo had no knowledge of the P728-million budget for the Farm Inputs and Farm Implements project of the DA's GMA program. This program of the DA is under the Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act (AFMA).

The press also reported that some officials in Metro Manila



Senators Manuel “Mar” Roxas III, Alan Peter Cayetano, and Joseph Marcelo “Jinggoy” Estrada during the Senate investigation of the fertilizer fund controversy. Roxas is holding the photo of slain journalist Marlene Esperat, who sued Bolante and other agriculture officials for alleged anomalies in the fertilizer fund project.

chose to avail of other products like garbage shredders rather than fertilizer. But the press failed to check if official documents do indicate that garbage shredders are included in the Farm Inputs and Farm Implements program under the GMA program. There was no in-depth look at the GAA and the AFMA.

Some reports however did ask former Department of Budget and Management secretary and University of the Philippines professor Emilia Boncodin if it was really possible that Arroyo did not know about the fund. Boncodin told *24 Oras* that it was possible because not all budget releases need the signature of the president.

Teledyaryo bias

The coverage by government-owned NBN-4's *Teledyaryo* was noticeably biased. Most of its reports during the monitoring period highlighted the fact that Bolante had cleared Mrs. Arroyo and her spouse of involvement in the controversy. (Bolante had even denied that there was a scam at all.) Most of the footage used in NBN reports involving the fertilizer fund scandal were of administration allies in the Senate and Malacañang officials.

When the name of current DA secretary Arthur Yap came out, several reports and commentaries reviewed how Malacañang had handled previ-

The press also let several questions raised during the Senate and House inquiries on the fertilizer fund scam simply passed by without explaining them

ous controversies involving Cabinet members. The *Star*, for instance, discussed how Cabinet members invoked Executive Order 464 to elude Senate inquiries (“Palace says it won't stop Yap from testifying in Senate”, Nov. 16, p.5).

Commentaries and editorials criticized how the Ombudsman was handling the case. Some opinion pieces also tried to explain the implications of the fertilizer fund on the political situation of the Philippines.

The *Star* pointed out the dangers of having a reenacted budget. In her Nov. 14 column, Marichu Villanueva explained that under a re-enacted budget government agencies are allowed to use their savings as a continuing allocation. The column also highlighted the point of Sen. Francis “Chiz” Escudero that under Sec. 23 of AFMA the funds should be released directly to rural banks and cooperatives and not to local government units.

The *Inquirer* pointed out in its Nov. 20 editorial that even if it is true that there was no scam as he claimed, Bolante could still be found guilty of technical malversation under Article 220 of the Revised Penal Code (“Their crime”, p. A12). But the rest of the media did not look further into this possibility.

Although outside of the monitoring period, PCIJ in its Dec. 12 special report discussed the measure taken by the opposition in the House to prevent a repeat of the diversion of the P728-million fund to personal campaign funds (“House Opposition Seeks Caps on Arroyo's spending”, <http://www.pcij.org/i-report/2008/impoundment.html>). It explained how it would have been possible for Arroyo to divert the funds legally. The problem in the case of Bolante, Rep. Teofisto Guingona III said, was how the fund was distributed to farmers. ■

The Gaza crisis NOT AS DISTANT AS THE MEDIA THINK

■ By H. Harry L. Roque Jr.

THE Philippine media have allowed the crisis at the Gaza strip to take a back seat to two on-going domestic issues: the “Alabang boys” and Valley Golf Club incidents.

While the distant location of Gaza and its long history may largely be to blame for the lack of serious media discussion on the Gaza issue, it is imperative that the Philippine media, in line with its duty to educate, accord equal importance to the crisis in Gaza. Perhaps unknown to media practitioners, it involves important rule of law issues equally relevant to the Philippines, what with the armed conflicts involving the New People’s Army (NPA) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), as well as our unresolved territorial controversies that may also lead to further armed conflicts.

Thus far, the bulk of the reportage by Philippine media on the Gaza crisis has been on the plight of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) stranded in the place of conflict. This is a sorry reflection on how Philippine foreign policy has been crafted of late: parochially reduced only to how events overseas may directly affect our overseas workers constituting the Diaspora.

Not much has been said in Philippine media as to why there are mammoth rallies around the globe against this latest instance of Israeli adventurism. And yet, by unilaterally resorting to the use of force, Israel has again showed its defiance of International Law, which prohibits the use of force, and restrictively allows the same only to circumstances constituting self-defense or when authorized by the Security Council of the United Nations (UN).

As imperfect as the UN may

be, it has nonetheless been largely instrumental in preventing what the UN Charter describes as “the scourge of war”. This prohibition on the use of force is in fact the most important rule in the UN Charter and one that has proven largely effective in preventing armed conflicts on the same scale as those that ravaged humanity in the past two world wars.

Why Israel has not opted to have the Hamas issue debated in the Security Council is open to speculation. The fact is that if the Hamas rocket attacks are indeed threats to international peace, the international community has already granted the Security Council primary jurisdiction to deal with these types of threats. For Israel and its ally, the US, to now insist on the unilateral use of force is a blatant disregard of a cardinal rule recognized by all civilized states.

Israel of course will claim that its recent offensive is but an exercise of self-defense. In fact, it has stated that it will only stop when and if Hamas stops launching rockets into Israeli territory. But the question is: self-defense against whom?

Hamas is a non-state party Israel accuses of operating in the territory of its neighboring states. Without accusing either Palestine or Lebanon of aggression, it has waged wars against both these states solely on the excuse that Hamas operatives are in the territories of these two states.

There is the further issue of pro-



An anti-Israeli rally in Makati

PJR REPORTS

The bulk of the reportage by Philippine media on the Gaza crisis has been on the plight of OFWs stranded in the place of conflict

portionality. Assuming Israel may invoke self-defense against a non-state actor, is the force it has utilized proportional to the rocket attacks launched against its territory? Surely, a complete dislocation of the civilian populations in Gaza belies proportionality.

Meanwhile, the death toll as a result of the crisis continues to rise. Included among the victims are protected individuals under humanitarian law such as civilians, including women and children. What is the sense, for instance, of targeting even the 11 children and four wives of an alleged Hamas leader? Has there since developed a principle attributing criminal guilt solely by virtue of family relations? And what was the logic in targeting not one, but three UN-run schools?

The fact that Israel has been targeting civilian homes is a breach of humanitarian law itself since the Geneva conventions prohibit combatants from targeting civilian infrastructure. And yes, the fact that Israel has been violating the binding norms of humanitarian law apparently with impunity is equally deplorable since these grave breaches weaken the rule-enforcing value of the law.

Why should soldiers in the Armed Forces of the Philippines, or the NPA and the MILF, desist

from targeting civilians when the Israelis have seemingly gotten away with it? It is indeed ironic that while the grave breaches of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) in Gaza have barely been discussed by the media, it is today reporting on another serious breach of IHL: the kidnapping of the three International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) representatives in Sulo.

Ultimately the Gaza issue should be accorded equal importance by the media as the Alabang boys and the Valley Golf incidents because it undermines the rule of law on the prohibition against the unilateral use of force and the ancient norm according the protection of civilians and other non-combatants in times of armed conflicts, the ICRC included.

The Gaza issue could spell disaster to countries like the Philippines. For while Israel may have the confidence to engage in military adventurism and commit grave breaches of humanitarian law owing to its superior military strength, countries like the Philippines can only rely on other countries’ compliance with the rule of law against threats of these nature. Think of the Spratlys. Think of China. Think of Malaysia. Think of terrorists operating in Mindanao. This is why Filipinos should take the Gaza incident more seriously. Unless the rule of law is observed, our *tora-toras* will simply be no match to our potential state adversaries’ military might. ■

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WHEN T

From page 1

ang mga galit na Muslim. May nagbanta pang pasasabugin daw ang embahada kapag hindi natigil ang mga pag-atake ng puwersang Israeli sa Gaza city (Meanwhile, angry Muslims stormed the Israeli embassy in Makati. Someone even warned that the embassy will be bombed if Israeli forces do not stop their attacks on Gaza city)."

The report said over 300 Muslims had marched to the Israeli embassy to protest the Israeli offensive in Gaza which has killed their fellow Muslims and as well as non-combatants including women and children.

The video showed Israeli ambassador Zvi Vapni saying the offensives would continue.

After showing the protestors hurling shoes at the Israeli flag, the report then said: "*Babala ng isang Muslim preacher, may nagbabanta na na pasabugin ang embahada ng Israel* (A Muslim preacher warned that there are those that threatened to bomb the embassy)."

It showed a clip of Barcelona saying that he had received calls from Muslims in Mindanao who were saying that the Israeli embassy should be bombed, but that he had been chiding them.

The report then said that for the Philippine National Police, the situation was under control.

The complaint

Upon seeing the report, Herbert Docena, one of the protestors and a representative of the Stop the War Coalition Philippines, wrote an open letter to ABS-CBN 2. He accused the network of "crass sensationalism" and "bad journalism" for reporting that the protesting groups had threatened to bomb the Israeli embassy.

"Not only does this put one speaker's statements out of context, it totally mischaracterized the nature and intention of our actions.... Instead of reporting on the substance of our actions... your report zeroed in on one particular statement of a speaker, distorted it, and sensationalized it," he wrote.

He emphasized that Barcelona did not agree with suggestions to bomb the embassy "and that he advocated peaceful means to address the situation.... He did NOT threaten to bomb the embassy."

Docena also attacked the portrayal of the protesters as being made up only of Muslims, and as angry ones at that.

"Portraying us as 'angry Muslims' [*sumugod ang tatlong-*

THE MEDIA STEREOTYPE



PJR REPORTS

“Unless your reporting shows more accuracy and respect both for those being covered and for your viewers, your coverage undermines our very advocacy for peace and justice”—Docena

and *Umagang Kay Ganda* (*Beautiful Morning*) and reading the scripts of the rally, “I found the stories accurate.”

“(T)he reporter, Zyann Ambrosio never said nor pictured that the rallyists were just a bunch of ‘angry (M)uslims’, Villa said in an email to Docena last Jan. 13.

“The reporter also never said the rallyists were out to bomb the Israel embassy. It was one of your speakers Ahmad Barcelon who said there were ‘(M)uslims in (M)indanao’ who want to bomb the Israeli embassy,” she wrote.

“Thank you again for watching our newscasts and for as long



Trafalgar Plaza in Makati, where the Israeli embassy is located LITO OCAMPO

daang mga galit na Muslim”] hell-bent on bombing Israel...fuels the stereotype of Muslims as pathologically irrational terrorists who have no grounds whatsoever for demanding justice; it bolsters the misguided assumption that only terrorists (i.e., Muslims) could possibly be opposed to Israel’s war crimes.”

He said that many non-Muslims also joined the protest, as could be seen from the flags the protesters were flying during the rally.

The defense

In response, Charie Villa, Head of Newsgathering of ABS-CBN 2 News and Current Affairs, said that after reviewing the stories which aired on *TV Patrol*, *Bandila*,



The Jan. 8 anti-Israeli protest

[HTTP://WWW.ARKIBONGBAYAN.ORG](http://www.arkibongbayan.org)



Photos from a Jan. 5 demonstration at the Israeli embassy in Makati PJR REPORTS

as your activities are worth covering we shall continue to do so.”

Villa included in her e-mails a copy of the script of the story packages in *TV Patrol* and in their late night news program *Bandila*.

The exchange

In a reply to Villa that night, Docena maintained that “(C)ontrary to your claim, (the transcripts) clearly and unambiguously show how the reporting was distorted and sensationalized.”

“Your transcript makes it evident that your report took a big unwarranted jump from quoting someone (as) saying that he ha(d) been receiving CALLS to bomb the embassy, to saying that there was indeed such an existing PLAN to bomb the embassy, and then saying that a THREAT was made to bomb the embassy,” Docena wrote.

“It takes a whole series of actions for a call to become a plan to become a threat—actions that were never shown nor proven in your report. How calls were turned into a plan and morphed into a threat was therefore clearly

a case of exaggeration...”

Docena wondered why the headlines could not have been: “*Mga aktibista nagprotesta laban sa Israel* (Activists protest against Israel),” “*Mga ralyista nanawagan sa pamahalaan na kondenahin ang Israel* (Rallyists call for government to condemn Israel),” or “*Panawagang bombahin ang Israeli embassy pinigilan* (Calls to bomb Israeli embassy stopped).”

“(W)hile we welcome your coverage of our activities (should they be ‘worth it’ in your judgment, as you say), if your coverage is just going to be as sensationalistic and as distorted, we would actually request you not to cover us. Unless your reporting shows more accuracy and respect both for those being covered and for your viewers, your coverage undermines our very advocacy for peace and justice,” said Docena.

Villa’s reply more than an hour later was short: “You are entitled to air your opinion and views and bring it wherever you wish. I have replied to you and my position remains. Let the public be the judge. I apologize if you took offence to my statement about

covering your activities if we deem it 'newsworthy'. Rest assured we shall not be offended if you don't want us to cover your staged rallies."

The next day, Docena said they had no desire to engage in a protracted exchange with the network.

Their letter "was a small plea—an appeal for those of you who wield the power of media in your hands, the power to decide what is 'worthy' and what's not, the power to shape the public's view of the world, and therefore the power to influence the public's response: please use that power responsibly—not so much for us but for those who are at the receiving end of the missiles.

"It was a small plea that though we may not have as much power as you, please treat us with a little respect."

Villa replied an hour later.

"We are where we are not to bask in glory or power as you charge us, but to try as much as we can to reach out to viewers in the hope they get information they need. Our vision-mission says exactly why we do what we do—excellent journalism to make this world a better place....

"Yes, by virtue of our position and profession we worked so hard to achieve and attain, we wield this so called power to decide which is newsworthy or not. But I know, from years of practice and good fortune of working for *Reuters* news agency, that I must exercise this 'power' with responsibility.... Please review your letters which reek of arrogance and my replies where I contained any emotions to answer your concerns the best I can."

Docena's swift and short response was to back off: "I meant no disrespect nor arrogance and I profoundly personally apologize if this is how my letters reached you...."

The points

Two days later, Maria Ressa, Head of ABS-CBN 2 News & Current Affairs, replied. She thanked Docena for his apology. "Many people, like Charie, found your tone offensive, making it difficult to assess the points you made in the right light. Your apology now sets the right mood for a better exchange of ideas," she wrote.

Ressa acknowledged the validity of two points Docena made. "We could've done a better job if we had kept them in mind," she said.

First, in the video, she saw only "one Muslim banner (Anak Mindanao) among flags from Sanlakas, BMP, Alab Katipunan,



Greater caution should have been exercised in the choice of angle, words, and visuals

Partido Lakas ng Masa and other groups from the rejectionist faction of the Left."

Second, "(i)t was misleading to headline the threat without saying it had been defused."

Ressa noted her reporter's initiative to interview the Israeli ambassador to get both sides.

"She also picked up the most 'newsworthy' aspects of the rally. I think you, as an activist, understand what actions would draw the attention of the public. We merely magnify those actions by helping you reach more people through mass media."

"I've spoken with the newsgathering team as well as the producers who handled this story so we can do a better job in the future," Ressa ended.

The lessons

The complaint and subsequent e-mail exchanges between Docena and ABS-CBN 2 provide lessons and insights on coverage, media accessibility, and communication.



While there have been improvements in their reporting, the media can still do better to avoid common pitfalls, as pointed out by Docena and acknowledged by Ressa.

Prevention is better than correction. It's important to do things right the first time. As Docena said, "Of the public that should be the judge: How many of them watched your damaging report casting us as irrational terrorists? And how many of them would have read our open letter protesting such treatment?"

Greater caution should have been exercised in the choice of angle, words, and visuals. To say that the rallyists were Muslims and that there was a plan to bomb when there was none bolsters views that the media sensationalizes and stereotypes.

Consider: Muslim, angry, bomb. It's so easy for people to make the connection—but it shouldn't be.

It should be said that it is not only media that stereotypes.

People see stereotypes in media because we **have** personal stereotypes. Media just magnifies them.

These stereotypes can hinder deeper coverage of issues. In this case, media coverage on Israel's offensive in Gaza is lacking because of stereotypes against Palestinians, which proceed from existing stereotypes against Muslims. As Docena pointed out, this distracts media consumers "from the real questions (Why is Israel allowed to kill over 1,000 Palestinians with such impunity? Why is our government not saying anything?), and allows Israel to cast itself as the victim in the face of such imaginary angry bomb-lobbing Muslims—instead of the aggressor that it really is."

Ressa added that their competitor, GMA-7, did not run a story on the protest rally. However, *PJR Reports* checked the Jan. 8 episode of *24 Oras*, GMA-7's flagship newscast. It aired a one-minute report on the rally.

"Our coverage of Gaza will show...that we believe this is an important story, and...we would like Filipinos to think and talk about it, to join the global debate and weigh in on what's right and what's wrong," Ressa added. "I think that was apparent in our story, and the motives of the protestors were clear both from Zyann's track and the soundbites used."

Sensationalism and stereotyping are lingering complaints about the media. Both are generally subjective and interpretative, and the media tend to be defensive about these accusations.

With intense competition for more viewers and readers, media will always find ways to grab the public's attention. Sensationalism is a cycle, feeding on itself. Knowing that the bombastic captures media attention, those being covered sometimes give in to the temptation to act or say the shocking to gain or divert media's attention.

The goal

When the media fall short of their own ideals, the aggrieved can shrug it off, grumble privately, or write a letter like Docena did.

That Villa and Ressa replied personally to Docena's complaint is commendable, even if it is expected of them. Villa's inclusion of the transcript is also a sign of transparency and respect. But was there really any need to suggest that rallies are "staged" (Villa)? And what was the point of the claim that the protestors were from "the rejectionist faction of the Left" (Ressa)?

With most news organizations operating without an ombudsman, are grievances addressed promptly, if at all?

As the exchange between Docena and ABS-CBN 2 shows, these encounters can be heated and emotional. But it is important that despite disagreements, the accused as well as the offended treat each other with respect and humility. When heads are cool, it is easier to understand each other, admit mistakes, and propose solutions.

After all, at the heart of these disagreements should be a common desire for peace and justice by shedding light on issues and providing the right information for people to decide and act. ■

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Terror in Mumbai

LIMITED VIEW, NARROW PERSPECTIVE

Without thorough investigation and providing comprehensive background, the press became a party to the blame-game.

■ By Kathryn Roja G. Raymundo

THE LOCAL media coverage of the three-day terror attack in Mumbai, India showcased the problems of reporting conflict and crisis situations. The coverage provided a limited view of the intricacies of a country's history, the issues of religious and political conflict, and terrorism.

On Nov. 26, 2008, armed men attacked 10 locations across Mumbai, India's financial capital, killing at least 170 people and wounding more than 300. The targets included two luxury hotels, a train station, and a Jewish center.

PJR Reports monitored the coverage of three newspapers (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, *The Philippine Star*, and *Manila Bulletin*), three TV news programs (*TV Patrol World*, *24 Oras*, and *Teledyaryo*), and selected online news sites from Nov. 26 to Dec. 2.

Narrow perspective

Local coverage mostly carried reports and analyses by wire agencies. This may be logical for news organizations because of their lack of resources for separate coverage, but this also posed several complications.

The wire reports were written from perspectives which mirrored the biases of the international media. The local relevance of the news was lost in the discussions by the wire agencies. The stakes at risk were hardly even mentioned in the reports Filipinos were getting from the Philippine media.

For example, the reports focused on the growing tensions between India and its neighbor, Pakistan. They unwittingly conveyed either anti-Pakistan or anti-Muslim sentiments because most of the sources quoted

were making unverified accusations against one or the other. Without thorough investigation and providing comprehensive background, the press became a party to the blame-game.

India and Pakistan have already fought three wars since 1947. A fourth war nearly erupted when the Indian parliament was attacked in 2001. It is almost a reflex to accuse Pakistan whenever something wrong happens in India.

To avoid worsening the tension between the two countries or fanning anger and discrimination towards the Muslim community, a sentence or paragraph providing background for a single report was perhaps not enough to make the public understand. The press has to discuss and monitor the dispute over Kashmir and explain the socio-economic issues in India which could have contributed to the violence in Mumbai.

Instead of focusing on the tensions or unwittingly taking sides, the reports should have focused more on why and how the attacks happened in the first place. Local media reports or commentaries did little to explain the purpose of the attacks and its effect on the people of Mumbai and India as a whole.

The reports by local reporters were limited to the usual "localized" stories: updates by the Department of Foreign Affairs on the situation of Filipinos in

tionality. Articles also shared the experiences of the hostages, victims, and heroes. The commentary by M. J. Akbar, a former member of India's parliament, "Terror in Mumbai: A shameful collapse of governance" discussed the administrative incompetence and political malfeasance of India's government that contributed to the tragedy.

There were echoes of efforts such as this in Philippine media. Maria A. Ressa, ABS-CBN 2 senior vice president for news and current affairs and author of *Seeds of Terror: An Eyewitness Account of Al Qaeda's Newest Center of Operations in Southeast Asia*, wrote an analysis on the increasing evidence and links

clear proof. *Inquirer* last Nov. 29 published the editorial "Hasty Conclusion" which explained the consequence of India's possibly attacking Pakistan. It asked for India to seek the cooperation of its neighboring country instead. Last Dec. 4, William M. Esposo in his *Star* column "As I Wreck This Chair", provided an excerpt of CNN's Larry King interview with New Delhi-born Dr. Deepak Chopra on the Mumbai attacks ("Barack Obama could have unwittingly caused the Mumbai attacks"). Chopra emphasized the importance of cooperation among world leaders in addressing the problems of terrorism and holding those accountable to justice. Chopra is one of *TIME Magazine's* 100 heroes and icons of the century.

Breaking the news

With the Internet and cable TV, news comes 24 hours a day, seven days a week to people across the globe. The attacks in Mumbai demonstrated the power of 24-hour news coverage.

Various online tools and social networking sites (Twitter, Flickr, Facebook, etc.) provided reports of the attacks. Personal accounts, photos, and videos flooded the Internet while the events were happening. The aftermath was not excluded as several sites paid homage to the victims. The fly in the ointment: the reports were sometimes inaccurate and insensitive, and bordering on sensationalism and war-mongering.

Although the new technology contributed to providing the public the information it needed, many scored news organizations for taking data from the personal accounts and reporting them without verification. Some of the reports also included gory images and inflammatory remarks encouraging retribution against Pakistan. Other reports were careless, among them video footage which revealed security operations, and live contacts with hostages and/or attackers.

The Mumbai coverage should teach news organizations to process events better while still adhering to journalism standards and principles despite the pressures of breaking news. The Mumbai tragedy should force the press to take a hard look at itself and realize the great stakes involved in ensuring that it sticks to its duty of providing relevant information especially in times of crisis and to serve as an instrument of peace rather than a tool of further violence. ■



Mumbai Taj Mahal Palace and Tower Hotel

[HTTP://WWW.BANGALOREBUZZ.BLOGSPOT.COM](http://www.bangalorebuzz.blogspot.com)

Mumbai, the reactions of government officials, and their preparation to prevent similar attacks from happening in the country. The news programs were able to interview Filipinos living in Mumbai as the attacks were going on and while two Filipino hostages were trapped in a luxury hotel occupied by the armed men. The coverage declined when the Filipinos safely got out of the hotel and were declared out of harm. The airport siege in Bangkok, Thailand later took the media's attention away from the tragedy of Mumbai.

Better reports and analyses

The Straits Times last Nov. 29 dedicated a section called "Prime: Mumbai terror attacks" to several articles and commentaries explaining the attacks. It included information on the attackers, who they were, and how they did it. The articles also noted the clues which emerged suggesting that the militants had support within India as well as abroad to launch the attacks. The article included graphic information on the attack sites and the deaths classified by na-

that those who initiated the Mumbai attacks are connected to Al Qaeda ("Mumbai attacks: Al-Qaeda methods & ideology", Dec. 1). Ressa broke down the history of Al Qaeda tactics and methods and related it to the coordinated attacks in Mumbai. But these were rare and far between.

Outside the monitor coverage period, *abs-cbnNEWS.com* published last Dec. 10 an interview with Philippine Institute for Peace, Violence and Terrorism Research executive director Rommel C. Banlaoi ("Mumbai-type attacks unlikely in RP, says prof"). Banlaoi said although there were fears of copycat assaults occurring in Southeast Asia, including the Philippines, attacks like those in Mumbai are unlikely to happen in the country because of the lack of capable and experienced paramilitary-intelligence commando fighters among the armed groups. But he warned government officials against complacency.

Some opinion pieces also called for restraint on the side of India regarding any untoward moves against Pakistan without

BOMBERS INTO HEROES

Observers said media reporting about the bombers only served the bombers' purpose.

■ By Warief Djajanto Basorie, Jakarta

(Long a site of bombings and other terrorist acts, Indonesia executed the so-called Bali Bombers last November. The coverage of the run-up to that event as well as the event itself provides invaluable lessons on the coverage of crisis and terrorism.)

INDONESIA'S AMROZI, his brother Mukhlas (also known as Ali Gufron), and Imam Samudra faced a firing squad 15 minutes past midnight last Nov. 9. Their execution took place in Nirbaya valley, two kilometers south of the maximum security Batu Prison on Nusakambangan Island off the south coast of Central Java. These were the first executions under Indonesia's anti-terrorism laws.

The Denpasar District Court in Bali tried them and reached separate common verdicts in August, September and October 2003. The court sentenced them to death for planning and carrying out the bombings of the Sari Club and Paddy's Pub on Kuta Beach in the tourist island on Oct. 12, 2002 that killed 202 people. More than 340 people were injured. Many of the dead were overseas holidaymakers including 88 Australians.

Last Oct. 24 the Attorney General's Office announced the execution would take place in early November, but without giving a specific date. In the run-up to the execution, Indonesia's media covered the continuing story day by day.

Martyrs and holy warriors

Reporting ranged from Australia issuing a travel advisory to its citizens against going to Indonesia to anti-terrorism units fanning out to guard public venues in Jakarta, Bali, and East Java amid concern of retaliation from firebrand militants.

Last Nov. 4, the press reports East Java police have been conducting weapons searches in areas bordering Lamongan, the home district of Amrozi and Mukhlas. In their home village of Tenggulun, uniformed and plain clothes officers patrolled the area.

Security was increased at the major steam-driven power plant at Paiton in East Java, Bali's ferry ports at Gilimanuk to the West

and Padangbai to the East, and the resort island's Ngurah Rai International Airport.

Last Nov. 8, the papers reported that officers from the district prosecutors' office and the local police had submitted last Nov. 7 written notices to the families of the sentenced trio informing them that they were to be executed. By law, the execution must take place within three days after the delivery of the formal notice.

Last Nov. 9, morning papers carried an unconfirmed report that the execution had taken place very early in the day. *Jakarta Post*, under the page one headline "Bombers' execution unconfirmed", reported that hard-line Muslim cleric Abu Bakar Ba'asyir spoke at Tenggulun, home village of two of the bombers. Ba'asyir, a co-founder of the Jamaah Islamiyah network blamed for a number of bombings in Indonesia and who himself had been jailed, lauded the three on death row as "holy warriors".

"We should emulate their fighting spirit. They are ready to sacrifice their lives to fighting for Islam and they will not surrender. That's what a holy warrior is," Ba'asyir declared.

The papers on Nov. 10 gave further details of the execution and the reactions it provoked. *Jakarta Post* ran a five-column front page headline: "Govt, media blamed for bombers' martyrdom". It quoted observers as saying the reporting about the

bombers only served their (the bombers') purpose.

Political observer Fachry Ali first blamed the government. The months-long repeated delays of the execution through a series of unsuccessful appeals allowed for wide media exposure. Further, the authorities gave the media, particularly Indonesia's numerous private TV stations, access to the convicted bombers, broadcasting their activities in prison and airing their defiant statements without any remorse. This in turn drew support for them from Muslim radicals, Fachry said.

The wives of the three were also interviewed and were asked the sympathy-generating question of how they were coping with the deaths of their husbands.

Indonesia's mainstream Muslim organizations justified the executions. The Indonesia Ulema Council (MUI, Majelis Ulama Indonesia), denounced the three bombers. "They didn't die as *syuhada* (martyrs). Those who kill others can never die as martyrs unless they are at war in the name of religion," said MUI chair Umar Shihab.

Nahdatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, the nation's two major Muslim groups, went further. In an apparent rejection of Ba'asyir's earlier statement, calling the three bombers martyrs would only inspire other Muslims to follow in their un-Islamic steps and give rise to more bombers, the two groups said.

"Glorifying the three Bali bombers as *mujahid* (martyrs) is a grave mistake. It stems from a delusion that such an honor can be achieved through bombings and shouting 'Allahhu Akbar' (God is great)," said NU deputy chair Masdar F. Mas'udi. Meanwhile Muhammadiyah chair Din Syamsuddin said achieving goals through violent means "is not part of Islamic teaching that promotes blessings and peace for the universe," he said (*Jakarta Post*, Nov. 11).

The Jakarta daily *Republika*, played up last Nov.

10 a four-column front page story on the execution with the headline: "Overcome the roots of radicalism" last Nov. 10. It quoted a call from a chief of the Islamic political party PKS that the government must be more serious to overcome the numerous problems that potentially provide fertile soil for the growth of radicalism.

"May there be no quarter that would cultivate radicalism using violence," said PKS parliamentary faction leader Mahfudz Siddiq.

Republika's editorial on the same day was a prayer for the three executed convicts that their sins be forgiven and that the families of their victims have strength and patience. "The most important lesson of this whole affair is no bombs should ever explode again in the country," the paper declared.

A lot of space and time

The media, particularly television, come under strong criticism on two counts for their coverage of the bombers. The first criticism is that the media had given so much print space and broadcast time to the bombers in the run-up to their execution. At least five TV stations sent crews to Nusakambangan and the prison authorities gave them access to the inmates. Coverage of their home towns with sympathetic interviews with relatives and neighbors gave the trio added celebrity status.

Indeed, the media seemed to have been duped into become unknowing, willing partners to the trio's cause. In a Nov. 10 editorial, *Jakarta Post* did not hesitate to censure its media peers. "Now that they have been executed, we hope there will be some soul-searching by those who run our prisons about the concept of high security prisons, and by those who run the national media about their complicity, deliberate or not, in this whole fiasco," the paper lamented.

An op-ed writer in the Jakarta daily *Kompas* also reproached the media last Nov. 11. The media coverage gave the public the perception that what Amrozi and his associates did was right and that they have been sacrificed for the interest of international politics, wrote Khamami Zada, religion affairs analyst at NU's research institute. "This condition would only fertilize acts of terrorism because they have been characterized as warriors for religion and guaranteed martyrdom," he said. "Isn't this the biggest challenge we face in creating tranquility and peace as

a pluralistic nation and country?," he asked rhetorically.

The second criticism against the media was non-compliance with the hallowed reporting principles of balance and comprehensiveness. By extension, their coverage did not contribute to social peace-building and appreciation for different views and beliefs.

The media gave only token coverage of the survivors and the families of the dead. How they coped in the bombing aftermath, what judgment they had on the bombers, were details that did not make the front page, if at all they were reported.

Tempo, the Jakarta-based weekly news magazine, said as much in a Nov. 16 editorial. "Application of the cover both sides principle should require the media to also present the victims' side of the story by interviewing their families."

Tempo did just that. Among four stories about the execution in its Nov. 16 issue, it carried a one-page piece on several survivors of the bombings. It told of how I Gusti Ngurah Anom was on his way home from his work as a restaurant security guard. The heat wave from the blast burnt his skin. Glass splinters disfigured the left side of his face. His hearing is permanently impaired. Although physically he has recovered, Gusti is often moody and angry when reminded of the bombings. His 12-year-old son is often frightened and secludes himself in his room. Gusti became unemployed as no restaurant would take him in. But a pharmaceutical firm gave him a job in late 2008.

After the executions, another Jakarta paper interviewed Tumini, an employee at Paddy's Pub where the first bomb exploded. She required plastic surgery for her face and hands burnt from the blast. With magnanimity, she said she harbored no hatred for the bombers. "I don't hate them. I just don't want any more bombings," she told the *Jakarta Post* (Nov. 10).

To measure public thinking on the media coverage, *Tempo* asked its readers in a poll: "Do you think the news reports on the execution of the Bali bombers made them look as if they were heroes?" Of 1,907 respondents who emailed in their reply, 59.52% said yes (*Tempo* English Edition, Dec. 1, 2008). ■

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■ By Hector Bryant L. Macale

AS EXPECTED, media closely followed the Dec. 6 fight in the United States between boxer Emmanuel “Manny” Pacquiao and the boxing world’s “Golden Boy”, Oscar de la Hoya. But for its focus on trivia, much of the coverage, particularly by television, was as predictable as politicians’ promises.

PJR Reports monitored the coverage of three major newspapers (*Manila Bulletin*, *Philippine Daily Inquirer* and *The Philippine Star*), two flagship news programs (ABS-CBN 2’s *TV Patrol World* and GMA-7’s *24 Oras*), and several news websites (*abs-cbnNEWS.com*, *GMAnews.TV*, and *Inquirer.net*). The period covered reports from Dec. 4 to 12.

Trivia—and a lot of it

As in Pacquiao’s previous matches, the news organizations monitored bombarded the public with reports on the event prior to the fight, but especially after Pacquiao won over De la Hoya. The newspapers and online sites ran lengthy reports and updates on pre- and post-fight events, while *24 Oras* and *TV Patrol* devoted substantial

airtime to it.

GMA-7’s *24 Oras* ran as many as five reports on the bout before Dec. 6. It aired at least ten reports on Pacquiao’s victory on Dec. 8, gushed over the by now predictable reaction of Filipinos, issued the usual analyses on why he won, and reported on Pacquiao’s political plans among others. Six of these ten reports were aired as the program’s top stories for that day, and ran for about 28 minutes. The ten reports consumed over 34 minutes of the hour-long newscast. *24 Oras* also had numerous updates on Pacquiao’s victory and homecoming in the days that followed. It’s no accident: Pacquiao has a program in GMA-7.

But *TV Patrol*, aired over GMA-7 rival ABS-CBN 2, also

Covering Pacquiao PREDICTABLE, TRIVIAL AND TEDIOUS

Trivial information overload marked the coverage of Manny Pacquiao’s December boxing bout with Oscar de la Hoya.



Pacquiao, upon his return to Manila after his victory against De la Hoya

Photos by LITO OCAMPO

devoted chunks of airtime to the match, running as many as five reports (with at least three minutes each) on the bout before Dec. 6. On Dec. 8, it ran at least ten reports on the bout, focusing at tedious length on, among others, why Pacquiao won, the number of Filipinos at home and abroad who watched the fight, and even on amateur boxers who could follow Pacquiao’s footsteps.

Some of the reports went so far as to provide such detailed trivia as the arrest of vendors selling bootleg copies of the Pacquiao-De la Hoya match, souvenir Pacquiao items, and even what Pacquiao ate upon his arrival in the Philippines. When Pacquiao was, as usual, paraded around Manila last Dec. 10, *24 Oras* di-

vided its report into several segments, milking the event for every piece of trivia it could yield, including a focus on its own “Grand Kapuso Welcome” event in honor of Pacquiao, during which it interviewed network officials more than eager to claim that the boxer is a “Kapuso”. (GMA-7 refers to its viewers and talents as “*Kapuso* [with the same heart]”, having been preempted by the ABS-CBN 2 reference to its own viewers as “*Kapamilya* [part of the family]”).

The result of this excess was not only information overload, but *trivial* information overload. Worse, the coverage devoted to the match relegated a host of public issues, among them the anti-Charter change campaign

and the fertilizer fund controversy, in the back burner. What’s that about bread and circuses as a means of diverting the masses’ attention from the things that matter most?

The usual suspects

For all that, the reporting of every Pacquiao fight does include references to who among Philippine officials are flying off to wherever the fight’s going to be so they can watch it. But the media—mostly represented by sports reporters, true, but overseen after all by editors who should know better—gloss over the key question of whether these officials use taxpayer money for their expenses.

Some of the public officials seen watching Pacquiao fight in Las Vegas were Vice-President Noli de Castro, House Speaker and Davao City 1st District Rep. Prospero Nograles, Sen. Ramon Revilla Jr., environment secretary Lito Atienza, and deputy national security adviser and former Ilocos Sur Gov. Luis Singson. Among the congressmen reported in Las Vegas were Ilocos Sur’s Eric Singson, CIBAC’s Joel Villanueva, Anak Mindanao’s Mujiv Hataman, and Pangasinan’s Jose de Venecia Jr.

The reports merely mentioned their presence and used sound bites from them, but did not ask why they were there in the first place, and more importantly, if they used public funds for their expenses in the United States. Officials can claim—and some of them did—that they watched the fight in the United



Everybody loves Manny

Just how popular—and crucial to media revenues—is Manny Pacquiao these days? Enough for TV giants ABS-CBN 2 and GMA-7 to spar in public, apparently.

An interview by ABS-CBN 2 reporter Dyan Castillejo with Pacquiao, a prized GMA-7 talent, last Dec. 22 provoked a minor word war between the two stations. Mostly on Pacquiao's difficulties in his early life and his later success as a boxer, the interview was aired as part of the Jan. 6 episode of *The Correspondents*.

The episode became controversial because Castillejo's interview with Pacquiao, which happened at a victory party thrown by Ilocos Sur Gov. Luis Singson, forced guests to wait for the boxer for three hours while Castillejo was asking him such earth-shaking questions as what his life's inspiration was.

A television executive from GMA-7 accused Castillejo's camp of lying when ABS-CBN 2 said that the reporter interviewed Pacquiao for only 35 minutes. The executive told entertainment reporters that the interview lasted for "about three hours".

GMA-7's senior vice president for entertainment Wilma Galvante, however, clarified in a report that GMA-7 was not making a big deal about it. It's just that Pacquiao is a network talent and that they're "taking care of him."

ABS-CBN 2 insisted that Castillejo interviewed the boxer for only 35 minutes. In a statement posted on abs-cbnNEWS.com last Jan. 21, ABS-CBN 2 corporate communications head Bong Osorio also refuted reports that the interview had lasted three hours.

"In fact, Castillejo and her team waited patiently for two hours before they were asked to start the interview, which was done with the prior knowledge and permission of Pacquiao and the host of the party," Osorio said in the statement. ■



Another concern the press should have looked into was whether a Pacquiao fight justifies politicians' leaving their duties and responsibilities as public officers just so they can see and be seen at the fight

late last Dec. 8 due to a lack of quorum, because—what else?—some congressmen who had watched the fight were still in the United States.

The press could have also at least asked, if it was too pre-occupied with Pacquiao mania to check, what the source of funds was of government institutions and local government units which have started showing Pacquiao's fight in large venues at no cost. Several local government units as well as military officials announced they were airing the match free in town halls or other large venues. Did they use public funds for these? If the match was going to be aired over pay-per-view venues, or free TV (GMA-7), did government units and institutions have to mount such efforts, obviously so the government could earn brownie points from a public skeptical of it?

Now, the exceptions

To be fair, some news organizations did try to provide meaningful coverage of the event. And for all their transparent efforts at self-aggrandizement, *TV Patrol* and *24 Oras* reports did manage to sneak in a report or two that actually meant something.

Inquirer also had a story on the revenues from airing the match, which showed that it's not just national pride at stake but millions of dollars too, a point the media rarely mentions. ("Biggest fight on TV with 50 sponsors is 'RP World Cup', Dec. 7). On the other hand, perhaps to serve those who're into these things, the *Star* had, also last Dec. 7, a story on the fight records of Pacquiao and de la Hoya, detailing their wins and losses, among others ("The Tale of Two Fighters").

But these were the exceptions among a by now tedious rule. ■

States using their own money, which is easy enough to check.

Another concern the press should have looked into was whether a Pacquiao fight justifies politicians' leaving their duties and responsibilities as public officers just so they can see and be seen at the fight. Some TV reports did point out that Atienza was in the United States when the Senate was deliberating over the 2009 budget of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. But they merely mentioned the mild ribbing Atienza got from senators when he later appeared in the Senate, and his clumsy excuse to reporters that he could not help but go to the United States as a long-time Pacquiao supporter, and that, anyway, his undersecretaries could explain details of the department's proposed budget. If Cabinet secretaries and other government officials don't take governance seriously, neither does the press, apparently. They'd all rather watch two grown men beat each other to a pulp.

Despite the need to deliberate on bills that they themselves claim are vital to this country's governance, economy and security before it went on holiday break, the House of Representatives began its sessions

Keeping focused **FIGHTING IMPUNITY**

To get people to care, the press should comprehensively explain the state of press freedom in the country.

■ By Melanie Y. Pinlac

THE PHILIPPINE press prides itself in being one of the freest in the world, but the high number of killing of journalists and various press freedom threats and attacks belie that claim. Six journalists/media practitioners were killed in the line of duty in 2008, bringing the number of work-related cases since the restoration of democracy in 1986 to 77.

On the eve of International Human Rights Day last Dec. 9, in “An Update on the Killing of Journalists and Other Attacks on Press Freedom”, media organizations and practitioners as well as legal experts reiterated the need to fight the culture of impunity which encourages the continuing attack against journalists. The forum was organized by the Freedom Fund for Filipino Journalists (FFFJ) with support from the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists and the Open Society Institute. (Dec. 9 is also the day of the UN Universal Declaration for Human Rights Defenders.)

FFFJ is a coalition formed in 2003 to combat the killing of and other attacks against Filipino journalists. FFFJ is composed of the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR), the Center for Community Journalism and Development, the Kapisanan ng mga Broadcaster ng Pilipinas, the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, the Philippine Press Institute (PPI), and the U.S.-based news organization *Philippine News*. CMFR, which has maintained a database on the killing of journalists since 1991, serves as the FFFJ secretariat. (Its current database on

the killings may be accessed at www.cmfr.phil.org/map/index_inline.html.)

The “killing of the messenger (principle) is in effect, denying the people a basic right,” FFFJ chair and PPI executive director Jose Pavia said. “(This forum was organized) to remind all of us that these (killings and attacks on press freedom) have to stop.”

“These are attacks against all of us and against press freedom. We should learn to think collectively in terms of the institutional autonomy we want to keep and preserve for ourselves,” CMFR’s executive director Melinda Quintos de Jesus also said in the forum.

Reviving cold cases

The weakness of the rule of law, an inefficient judicial and police system, and the lack of political will to solve the killings have contributed to the growing culture of impunity in the Philippines. Only in two cases since 2001—the 2003 killing of Edgar Damalerio and the 2005 killing of Marlene Esperat—have the suspects been successfully tried, sentenced and convicted. FFFJ’s legal adviser, lawyer Prima Jesusa Quinsayas stressed that the press needs to exert “effort (in) reviving the cold cases so



In memory of slain journalists

Photos by LITO OCAMPO



Roque at the FFFJ forum

that the murderers don’t just get away with it.”

This situation has prompted media organizations and press freedom advocates to push for the revival of cases involving the killing of journalists/media practitioners. FFFJ and the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) helped revive the cases against the killers of Aklan-based broadcasters Rolando Ureta and Herson Hinolan, for example. The hearings on these cases resumed in May 2008. Ureta was killed on Jan. 3, 2001 by two assailants on a motorcycle in Lezo town, Aklan. Hinolan was gunned down on Nov. 13, 2004 by an unknown assailant outside a carnival in Kalibo.

FFFJ and NUJP filed a petition for transfer of venue for the

cases of Ureta and Hinolan before the Supreme Court on Feb. 5, 2008, citing the influence of the suspects in the killings in Aklan. The Supreme Court granted the petition last March 18. The cases are now being tried before the Cebu City Regional Trial Court (RTC).

In a statement, FFFJ also said that “(t)he press community needs to...closely monitor what the police and the prosecutorial service are doing to investigate the killings and prosecute the killers.”

Going after the masterminds

A new case against the alleged masterminds in the 2005 killing of Sultan Kudarat journalist Marlene Esperat was filed last Oct. 20 before the Tacurong City RTC Branch 20, private

prosecutor Nena Santos told the forum. New warrants of arrest have been issued for the alleged masterminds. No mastermind has been successfully prosecuted since 2001.

Esperat was killed on March 24, 2005 in her home in Sultan Kudarat in the presence of her children. She was known for her exposés on alleged corrupt activities in the regional office of the Department of Agriculture where the alleged masterminds, Osmeña Montañer and Estrella Sabay, are employed as finance officer and regional accountant, respectively.

She said the masterminds should be arrested immediately for the case to proceed. “While the RTC in Tacurong is willing to pursue the case.... We cannot continue with the case as the accused are not yet arrested as of this time. We have been pursuing the police, pursuing the NBI (National Bureau of Investigation) on what is now the status (of the arrests).” A regional police director said they can get Montañer and Sabay but it would be difficult because the two are hiding in a conflict-ridden town in Lanao, Santos added.

Santos said there is another issue needed to be resolved regarding the case. The prosecution might need to bring the case to the Supreme Court after the Manila and the Cebu Courts of Appeals handed out conflicting

decisions, she said.

The Cebu City Court of Appeals issued a preliminary injunction last May 14 prohibiting the Cebu City RTC Branch 7 judge Simeon Dumdum from proceeding with the case against Montañer and Sabay. The Cebu City Court of Appeals said the Cebu City RTC has no jurisdiction over the case against Montañer and Sabay since the murder happened in Sultan Kudarat.

But last Oct. 15, the Manila Court of Appeals denied the other petition for certiorari and prohibition filed by the alleged masterminds to stop the re-investigation of, and the filing of charges against them for the murder of Esperat saying “(i)t is legally permissible for public respondents to re-open the preliminary investigation.”

The Manila court explained that “...the complainants may present new or additional evidence which could alter the result of the earlier finding of no probable cause and accordingly ask for a reinvestigation or a re-opening of preliminary investigation.”

The counsel of the Montañer and Sabay has filed a motion for reconsideration before the Court of Appeals in Manila. Meanwhile, the solicitor general also filed a motion for reconsideration for the May 14 decision of the Cebu Court of Appeals.

“In the meantime, the RTC will (also have to) resolve the motion to quash filed by the masterminds’ counsel. The DoJ has filed its opposition,” Santos said. The alleged masterminds filed a motion to quash the Information last Oct. 21.

Legal threats

Lawyer Harry Roque discussed the case of Davao-based broadcaster Alexander “Lex” Adonis who was convicted of libel on Jan. 26, 2007 after missing several hearings on the the libel case filed by House of Representatives Speaker and Davao District representative Prospero Nograles. Adonis spent almost two years in prison prior to his release last Dec. 23.

Nograles filed libel charges in 2001 after Adonis reported that Nograles and a woman broadcaster had been caught by operatives and the woman’s relatives in a compromising situation during a raid at a hotel in Metro Manila.

CMFR and NUJP filed a petition last May 30, for a writ of habeas corpus asking the Supreme Court to order the release of Adonis after Davao Penal

“That is why the culture of impunity continues—we contribute to it by not persisting, by not reporting with the constancy and consistency needed”—Burgos

.....

Colony warden Superintendent Venancio Tesoro refused to release Adonis despite a discharge on parole from the Department of Justice’s Board of Pardon and Paroles (DOJ-BPP) in December 2007 and a release order from the Davao RTC Branch 14 on 26 May 2008. Tesoro argued that the case filed by the alleged paramour of Nograles disqualified Adonis from parole.

Adonis is now out prison after the alleged paramour dropped the second case against him. He was set free last Dec. 23 after the DOJ-Bureau of Corrections (DOJ-BuCor) approved his release order. The DOJ-BuCor order came two months after the Davao City RTC Branch 14 dismissed the second libel case and ordered that Adonis be “released from detention unless there be other lawful ground for his further confinement”.

The case was dismissed after the alleged paramour withdrew charges in return of Adonis’s apology. During his release, Adonis explained his decision to apologize. “The decision to say sorry...was a hard move I had taken. I would like to state now the truth that while I did say sorry, it did not in any way mean a capitulation of the truth I have been pursuing nor did it mean an admission of my guilt,” Adonis said. (see *Germelina Lacorte’s* “Above the law?: Broadcaster released, but...,” p. 23)

Creating awareness

The Philippine press needs to comprehensively report on the elevating number of killing of and attacks against journalists in the Philippines to create public clamor over the current situation of press freedom in the country. This was also highlighted in the forum.

Ironically, despite being a key issue in the practice of journalism, much of the Philippine press has not paid much attention to the continuing problem of the killing of journalists and other attacks against press freedom.



Burgos



Human rights advocates and journalists discuss how media cover extrajudicial killings.

“We have to continue to cover the cases. You can’t imagine how concerned we are when there are stories that are out there and nobody is covering them,” KBP executive director Rey Hulog stressed in his closing remarks.

To get people to care, Hulog said, the press should comprehensively explain the state of press freedom in the country. “One reason why people do not care so much nowadays is because we haven’t explained the situation to them....We have to get the people to our side because they do not fully understand what is at stake here.”

Media and HR violations

Meanwhile, on Dec. 10, International Human Rights Day, media practitioners, mass communication students, and human rights advocates revisited how the press has covered extrajudicial killings and other human rights violations in the Philippines.

In the forum “Solving and Reporting Extrajudicial Killings and Disappearances: Are the Government and Media Doing

Enough?” at the University of the Philippines (UP) in Diliman, Quezon City, the speakers said the media need to do better in upholding the human rights and civil liberties of the people through responsible reporting.

Human rights advocates also criticized the lack of contextualization in reports on human rights violations. Ruth Cervantes, the International Liaison and Public Information Officer of the human rights group Karapatan (Alliance for the Advancement of People’s Rights), said the press should refrain from reporting cases of human rights violations as if they were isolated “police reports”.

NUJP vice-chair and *Inquirer.net* editor Jaime “Nonoy” Espina also said that the press often forgets to answer the Why in the 5Ws & H in news reporting. Espina said that more provincial journalists go into the reasons behind human rights violations compared to their Manila-based counterparts because “they are closer to the action.” But sadly, Espina said, these journalists are being killed in

the provinces for asking why, among other reasons.

Biases and inaccuracies also show in several reports. Some media outfits adapt labels used by the police and the military to demonize some victims as well as militant groups. Cervantes stressed that the press should be careful in using labels like ‘militants’ or ‘leftists’ in describing legal organizations.

Edita Burgos, chair of the Pamilya ng Desaparicods para sa Katarungan (Desaparacidos, Families of the Disappeared for Justice) and mother of missing activist Jonas Burgos, emphasized the need for continuing coverage of human rights violations and criticized the event-based tendency of media coverage.

“Kung walang nangyayari, wala masyadong napiprint.... Ang problema kahit walang event, tuloy-tuloy pa rin ‘yung crime especially ang disappearances (If there is no event, nothing gets printed. The problem is even if there is no event, crimes, especially disappearances continue),” stressed Burgos, widow of late press freedom advocate and journalist Joe Burgos.

“Sometimes the perpetrators anchor their hopes on the probability that the stories will die a natural death,” Burgos said. “That is why the culture of impunity continues—we contribute to it by not persisting, by not reporting with the constancy and consistency needed.”

Cervantes also hoped that the press reports on human rights issues beyond Dec.10. “Marami pong isyu ang human rights. Comprehensive kasi iyan—social, economic, cultural, civil, and political (Human rights is a multi-faceted issue),” she said, adding that journalists should re-educate themselves on human rights laws.

The forum was organized by the Philippine Human Rights Reporting Project, the Journalism department of the UP College of Mass Communication, Karapatan, the Asian Congress for Media and Communication, and the student organization UP Mass Communicators Organization.

Remembering colleagues

Several journalists gathered in the evening of Dec. 10 at the Bantayog ng mga Bayani (Heroes’ Monument) in Quezon City to commemorate the death of their colleagues. Led by the NUJP, journalists/media practitioners lighted candles and offered prayers to slain journalists, among other rites. ■



GERMELINA LACORTE

■ By GERMELINA LACORTE

DAVAO CITY—When jailed Davao broadcaster Alexander “Lex” Adonis finally walked out to freedom on Christmas Eve, he made himself scarce and refused to join the press conference the National Press Club (NPC) had arranged for him at the Apo View Hotel here where, according to Adonis, NPC president Benny Antiporda had earlier asked him to say thank you to House Speaker Prospero Nograles, the man who sent him to jail for libel.

“*Yakapin mo lang*, say thank you, *at wala na* (Just embrace him, say thank you, and that’s all),” Adonis said Antiporda told him when the latter was working for his release.

Instead, Adonis went straight home, where a streamer that read, “No journalist should be jailed for doing his job,” was hanging near the doorway to greet him.

He was finally free after spending two years in jail. But the circumstances of his release angered lawyers and press freedom groups fighting to decriminalize libel in the Philippines. There was no longer any reason for him to stay in prison but he was released only after the apology he issued in court to Jeanette Leuterio Lomanta, the woman he had identified in a broadcast on the “Burlesque King” scandal which earned him a four and a half year conviction in 2007.

“Press freedom continues to be under siege,” said Harry Roque, chair of the Center for

International Law (CenterLaw), a lawyers group working for freedom of expression. “In the first place, there was no need for that apology. He had been granted parole for the first case filed by Nograles and media friends had posted a P5,000 bail for the second case lodged against him by Lomanta,” Roque said. “There was no longer any reason at all why he had to stay in prison.”

But Roque said Nograles, the country’s fourth most powerful man, had solicited the apology as a pre-condition for the broadcaster’s release.

“This does not bode well for press freedom,” said Roque. “Influent public officials can determine who amongst media practitioners should be jailed and when they should be released. Nograles claimed that Adonis owed his newfound freedom to him.”

Adonis was sentenced to a maximum of four and a half years in jail for libel in 2007 after a series of radio commentaries

Above the law? BROADCASTER RELEASED, BUT...

“*Yakapin mo lang*, say thank you, *at wala na* (Just embrace him, say thank you, and that’s all),” Adonis said Antiporda told him when the latter was working for his release.

ies he made in which, court proceedings said, he reported that Nograles ran naked in a Manila hotel after the husband of the woman he was with caught them inside one of the hotel’s rooms.

On December 11, 2007 the Board of Pardon and Paroles granted Adonis parole.

But Roque said the Davao Penal Colony (Dapecol) did not inform Adonis about the parole order. It was Roque who found out about it when the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) engaged his services as Adonis’ lawyer.

What incensed Roque was Dapecol’s stubborn refusal to follow the Court order.

Dapecol chief Venancio Tesoro said he could not free the jailed broadcaster because of a pending second libel case by Lomanta. “He only has custodial powers over prisoners but he argued that the pending case disqualified Adonis from receiving his parole,” Roque said.

When Adonis’ media friends in Davao posted bail for his temporary release, the Davao Regional Trial Court Branch 14 ordered Adonis’ release last May 26.

Prison officials still refused to release him.

“Is Dapecol above the Court?” asked Dodong Solis, vice president for Mindanao of the Radio Mindanao Network (RMN).

This prompted the NUJP, CenterLaw and the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) to file a petition for a writ of habeas corpus with the Supreme Court. But before the Supreme Court could act on the petition, the NPC stepped in and convinced Adonis to apologize.

Adonis said Antiporda assured him he can get out of jail if he apologized to Lomanta and that would serve as a Christmas

gift for him. “Send the gift to my family,” Adonis said he told Antiporda.

NPC denied this in a statement. Adonis said that during his October visit in Dapecol, Adonis had complained that his case was not moving. “We reminded him that petition for his release was pending in the Court of Appeals, and that Ms. Jeanette Leuterio, who filed the libel case wanted an apology before withdrawing her complaint. Adonis voluntarily said he’ll issue an apology,” he said.

In September, Adonis discharged the services of Roque to pave the way for the NPC lawyer to facilitate the broadcaster’s Court apology.

Adonis said the decision to say sorry to Lomanta was a “hard” move but it did not mean “capitulation.” “It did not mean admission of guilt,” he said. He was just tired of prison life.

But on the day of his release, Adonis refused to face Nograles. He also expressed no interest in the livelihood assistance in Manila that Antiporda had promised him.

“*Yakapin?*” he asked. “*Niyakap ko na ang rehas at bato.*”

Adonis’ conviction in 2007 had once more fueled the decades-long debate on the imperative of decriminalizing libel, a law which according to NUJP, CMFR, and other media and journalists’ groups has been used by powerful politicians to harass members of the press critical of those in power.

“What facilitated Adonis’ release?,” asked Rowena Paraan, NUJP treasurer, “The apology that the NPC brokered? But what about our legal system, considering that he was already on parole in one case and on bail in another case? And why did the NPC act as a fixer for

Nograles?”

Solis said that the media are supposed to be a watchdog of democracy and have a role to play to make the citizens informed but such a presscon, where the NPC wanted Adonis to embrace Nograles, will project the message that a powerful person can send a journalist to jail and can decide when to have him released regardless of what courts and the law say.

“It was not only about Lex Adonis,” Solis said. “If he was presented there (at the presscon), the media will be stripped of its dignity. To think that here is a very powerful man who sent this journalist in jail and now he’s taking him out.”

The broadcaster is already back in action barely 20 days after his release. But when he covered the release of first Lt. Vicente Cammayo by the New People’s Army on the first working days of the year, he stayed on the sidelines, refusing to ask questions, “*baka mapahiya*,” he said. “I still feel slightly disoriented,” said Adonis, looking emaciated. “I don’t even know how to operate my cellphone. I never had one in the last two years I was in prison,” he said.

He said he experienced having dined, slept and played with convicted terrorists, rapists, guns for hire, rebels and all kinds of offenders in the world but he said, he realized, quite a number of those inside could be innocent.

He is still backing up the news production team of the RMN but he said it has never crossed his mind to quit his life as a broadcaster. ■

Germelina Lacorte works as associate editor for Davao Today and an Asian Center for Journalism Fellow at the Ateneo de Manila University.

NUJP OUSTS CHAIR OVER ETHICS ISSUE

“What was questioned was the breach of ethics,” Espina said. Torres however disputed the result of the NUJP investigation.

■ By Luis V. Teodoro with reports from Edsel Van DT. Dura and Jamaica Jane J. Pascual

MAY A journalist accept favors from a long-time friend who is also a public official? The National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) replaced Jose Torres Jr. as chair last Nov. 10 over allegations of an ethical breach in his relationship with a congressman. *Philippine Daily Inquirer* Iloilo Correspondent Nestor Burgos took over his post.

Torres, however, disputed the result of the NUJP investigation.

“I did nothing unethical,” Torres told *PJR Reports* last Jan. 15.

NUJP is the largest organization of journalists in the country, with chapters all over the Philippines. It has been focused on defending press freedom, ethics training, and campaigns for journalists’ safety.

In a statement, NUJP said Torres was removed from office “for violations of the NUJP’s By-Laws and The Journalist’s Code of Ethics.”

Torres was “found to have personally solicited money from a source for his personal use,” the group said. The act, according to NUJP violated the group’s by-laws, specifically Article II Section 1 which states that among NUJP’s objectives is to “raise the standards of journalistic ethics toward the end goal of securing press freedom and protecting the integrity of the working press in the country.”

NUJP also said that Torres violated the Journalist’s Code of Ethics, specifically Articles V (“I shall not let personal motives or interests influence me in the performance of my duties, nor shall I accept or offer any present, gift or other consideration of a nature that may cast doubt on my professional integrity”) and XI (“I shall conduct myself in public or while performing my duties as journalist in such manner as

to maintain the dignity of my profession. When in doubt, decency should be my watchword.”

NUJP added that Torres was removed from office and his membership canceled based on the group’s by-laws.

Question of ethics

The flap began when Julie Alipala accused Torres of soliciting money from Anak ng Mindanao (AMIN) Partylist Representative Mujiv Hataman. Alipala, a *Philippine Daily Inquirer* correspondent based in Zamboanga, is a member of the NUJP national directorate.

Espina said Alipala was with Hataman in a military visit in Basilan when the representative received a phone call from Torres to Hataman. Torres was leaving for a conference in Korea as NUJP’s representative.

Espina said Hataman told Alipala: “*Ano ba kayo NUJP, aalis chairman ninyo, wala kayong pabaon* (Why are you NUJP people like that. Your chairman is leaving and you don’t even have something for him).” It was then followed by “*Ikaw, kailan ka hihingi sa ‘kin* (How about you, when are you going to ask me for something)?”

However in an interview with *PJR Reports* last Jan. 19, Hataman insisted that he never mentioned NUJP in connection with the phone call.

“*Wala akong sinabing gano’n. Sigurado ako. Kami ni Joe, personal naman ang usapan namin, hindi naman organization to organization* (I never said those things. The relationship between me and Joe is personal, and we don’t involve each others’ organizations).”

He also denied asking Alipala when she would ask him for something.

Alipala reported the incident to the NUJP directorate during the media organization’s training in Sta. Rosa, Laguna last Oct. 18 to 19. Eight of the 15 directors present decided to consider Alipala’s account a formal complaint.

“We have to investigate and conduct a hearing. So we agreed to hold a hearing,” Espina said.

“The complaint was a violation of the NUJP by-laws especially on ethics,” said Espina “The specific charge was solicitation from a potential source.”

The NUJP national directorate looked into the allegations in a day-long hearing last Nov. 10, with Torres presenting his side.

NUJP elected a new set of officers after the directorate found Torres accountable and expelled him as chair and member.

Torres, in an interview with *PJR Reports*, denied asking for or soliciting money from Hataman. He did, however, admit that Hataman had asked him to buy Korean dolls for him, and that the money Hataman gave him was for that purpose as well as to buy gifts for his (Torres’) kid.

Neither Torres nor Hataman could remember what the exact amount was, but Torres added that he was able to bring home the Korean dolls and to give Hataman a coat and some Ginseng.

Espina said the money involved was roughly P25,000. Torres refused to confirm the amount while Hataman told *PJR*

Reports last Jan. 19 that he had forgotten what the amount was.

Torres and Hataman both said that they have been friends for 20 years and that their relationship has been limited to the personal level. Torres said that he considered Hataman a “brother” and that their friendship started when they were young activists in their teens in the 1980s. They have been very close friends since.

Espina said NUJP knew Torres and Hataman were friends.

Torres maintained that he and Hataman have always treated each other with mutual professional respect.

“I never write a story about him,” he said. “We do not treat each other as reporter and source. I wrote only one story that included him in 2003 for *Newsbreak*. It was a story about Basilan. It was a story about the island, about politicians, and it was not a story about Mr. Hataman.”

The Jan. 1, 2003 article “All in the Family” tackled political clans. Hataman was used as a source of information on the political families of Basilan. He was not the only source cited in the article.

An Internet search of articles on Hataman in *GMA News.tv* found a few articles where he was used as an ordinary source. None was written by Torres himself, except for his Aug. 4, 2008 blog entry “What price peace in Mindanao?” in the *GMA News.tv* website where Hataman was quoted on his opinion on the cancelled Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

“I said sorry for all the hassle that I brought to the organization. It was not a sorry about ‘I made a mistake,’ Torres said.

Hataman also denied that Torres was asking him for money. He said NUJP did not get his side of the story.

“They should have gone deeper into their investigation. For instance, since I was involved, they should have asked me about it. They should have also looked into the motive, if it’s a bribery or solicitation, or maybe it’s something personal,” Hataman said.

NUJP treasurer Rowena Paraan said that they were able to get hold of documents that proved that Torres got the money. Paraan, who is also Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism research director, refused to mention her source, but she said that they were able to get hold of the bank informa-

tion confirming the transfer of money from Hataman to Torres.

“During the meeting, we showed him the proof,” said NUJP deputy secretary-general Alwyn Alburo. “In the sense that we were able to get the proof, we got the other side.”

Alburo, who works as GMA-7 senior desk editor, added: “You are a journalist, and you get money from the source, there can be no gray issues there. It’s a black and white thing. Ethics is black and white. We cannot paint it otherwise.”

Espina said that they felt that there was no need for the source to be present in the hearing. Hataman was secondary to the issue.

“What was questioned was the breach of ethics,” Espina said, adverting to allegations of the Journalist’s Code of Ethics. “The source could always deny or confirm it.”

However, Torres said that ethics is an issue of perception. He said that people based their moral and ethical perception based on each person’s individuality. “*Alam ko naman na ang ethics, and issue of ethics, issue ‘yan ng perception. So hindi talaga magka agree ‘yan* (I know that the issue of ethics is an issue of perception. So there will never be an agreement).”

“*Yung question hindi naman kung sino yung bumigay. ‘Yung kinuwestyon dun ‘yung act ng officer* (The question was not who gave in. The issue there was the act of the officer),” Espina said.

GMA Network probe

After hearing allegations of ethical breach, GMA Network also looked into Torres’s case. However, a GMA Network statement sent last Jan. 23 through e-mail by Butch Raquel, vice-president for GMA Corporate Communications, to *PJR Reports* did not say from where or whom they learned of the allegations.

Torres was officer in charge for Editorial Operations of Media Merge Corporation, the GMA Network affiliate in charge of online operations.

Raquel said the network accepted Torres’ resignation before its investigation was concluded.

“Our administrative investigations are confidential in nature, thus we cannot disclose the details of the investigation. Suffice it to say that the standard due process was followed in the case according to company policy,” Raquel said in a Jan. 28 email to *PJR Reports*.

Torres’ resignation took effect last Dec. 31. ■

CRISIS

NATIONAL

Broadcaster unhurt in slay attempt

A radio broadcaster survived an attack by unknown gunmen in Kalibo, Aklan last Jan. 2.

Charie "Katribung Che" Indelible, news director and anchor of local government-run radio station dyYM 98.5 Hot FM, was on his way home onboard his motorcycle when gunmen fired at him at around 11:45 p.m. Indelible was not hurt.

Indelible told the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) that he had come from a colleague's house and was approximately 20 to 30 meters away from his boarding house when he was attacked.

Indelible ran up his boarding house and called the police. After a few minutes, he went outside and saw two unknown men in front of his boarding house.

"They seemed to be accomplices of the gunmen and were checking if I was injured," Indelible said in Filipino.

More shots were fired at him from a building across his boarding house while he was questioning the two men. He immediately took cover behind a car parked in front of his boarding house, and then went to the hospital nearby to take refuge.

Indelible said he tried to hold the two suspected accomplices at St. Jude hospital with the help of the hospital's security guard until the police came, but they were able to run away.

Local police recovered .38 and .45 caliber pistol shells around Indelible's boarding house.

Police later captured the two men who were allegedly at Indelible's boarding house, as well as one of the suspected gunmen. Indelible said these three men point to a certain Miguel Salcedo and a certain Jojo Garmino as the other gunmen. Salcedo and Garmino are at large.

Indelible told CMFR he was surprised by the slay attempt. Indelible did not receive any threat prior to the incident. The last death threat he received was in the first quarter of 2008, he said.

But Indelible and his colleagues believe the attack was related to his work. In a phone in-

terview with CMFR, dyYM station manager Terence Toriano said Indelible was known for his commentaries involving local government officials and businesses. Indelible had recently discussed on air alleged anomalies at the local electric company.

His colleagues condemned the attack and called on the Philippine National Police (PNP) to conduct a "thorough and full investigation of the shooting incident."

"It is with great despair that the attack came a day before the death anniversary of Agong Rolando Ureta, who was killed on January 3, 2001 in Lezo, Aklan", said the statement signed by the Publishers Association of the Philippines Inc.-Aklan, Kapisanan ng mga Broadcaster ng Philipinas, Aklan Media Forum, Aklan Press Club, National Union of Journalists of the Philippines-Aklan chapter, Aklan United Media Association, Aklan Sangguniang Panlalawigan Press Corps, Press Photographers of the Philippines Aklan-Boracay, and the Aklan Police and Defense Press Corps and several radio stations. "(W)e urged our media colleagues and the press freedom community to carry on banding together against all attempts to suppress us as we maintain our commitment as guardians of public interest and the independent voice of the people."

But police said the attack was not related to Indelible's work. Aklan police provincial director Senior Supt. Clarence Guinto told CMFR in a phone interview that initial findings showed that the suspects attacked Indelible out of whim. "They took a fancy on him," Guinto said in a Jan. 5 *Philippine Daily Inquirer* report.

Two Aklan-based journalists/media practitioners have been killed in the line of duty since 1986. The cases of the 2001 killing of Rolando Ureta and the 2004 killing of Herson Hinolan are currently being tried at a local court in Cebu City.

Jailed broadcaster released

A Davao broadcaster was released last Dec. 23 after spending almost two years in prison in Davao del Norte for libel. Libel is a criminal offense in the Philippines.



ADONIS

GERMELINA LACORTE

Alexander "Lex" Adonis, formerly of Bombo Radyo in Davao City, was released from the Davao Penal Colony (also known as the Davao Prison and Penal Farm) at around 2 p.m. last Dec. 23 after the Department of Justice (DoJ)-Bureau of Corrections (BuCor) approved his release. The release order, signed by DoJ undersecretary and BuCor director Oscar Calderon included 52 other prisoners, *GMANews.TV* reported.

Dodong Solis of the Kapisanan ng mga Broadcaster ng Pilipinas (KBP)-Mindanao Chapter and radio station *Radio Mindanao Network* told the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) that Adonis was released due to his December 2007 parole.

The DoJ-Board of Pardon and Paroles ordered his release on Dec. 11, 2007 after he had served the minimum sentence for a libel case. But Davao Penal Colony warden Supt. Venancio Tesoro refused to release him when a second libel case based on the same report for which he had been convicted was filed by a woman alleged to be the paramour of House of Representatives Speaker Prospero Nograles.

Last May 26, Tesoro still refused to release Adonis despite a release order by the Davao Regional Trial Court (RTC) Branch 14 after Davao media colleagues paid a P5,000 bail bond for Adonis. Tesoro, who has only custodial powers over prisoners, argued that the pending case disqualified Adonis from parole.

The alleged paramour withdrew the second libel case in October 2008 after Adonis issued a public apology. The Davao City RTC

Branch 14 then dismissed last Oct. 27 the second libel case and ordered that Adonis be "released from detention unless there be other lawful ground for his further confinement".

According to Adonis's colleagues in Davao, the National Press Club (NPC) apparently convinced him to issue an apology letter and withdraw from his counsel Harry Roque to give the lawyers of NPC the right to negotiate Adonis's case with the alleged paramour. Adonis has been asked by Nograles and his alleged paramour to apologize as a pre-condition for his release.

Several media reports after Adonis's release quoted Nograles as saying that he and NPC convinced the alleged paramour to withdraw the charges of libel against the jailed broadcaster.

Upon his release, Adonis read a statement expressing his gratitude to the media organizations and individuals who helped him during his detention and worked for his release. He also explained his decision to apologize. "The decision to say sorry...was a hard move I had taken. I would like to state now the truth that while I did say sorry, it did not in any way mean a capitulation of the truth I have been pursuing nor did it mean an admission of my guilt," Adonis said.

Roque, the former counsel of Adonis, said in a statement that "there was no need for that apology." He added that "Mr. Adonis had already been paroled. It was his legal right to be released from prison, a right that Director Tesoro refused to recognize. That is why we filed a petition for the writ of habeas corpus before the Supreme Court." A petition for a writ of habeas corpus asking for the release of Adonis was filed by the CMFR and NUJP last May 30.

Adonis was convicted on Jan. 26, 2007 for the first libel case filed against him by Nograles. Davao congressman Nograles, the fourth most powerful person in the Philippines, filed libel charges in October 2001 for Adonis's report on his alleged extra-marital affairs. Adonis, reading from a tabloid, reported on his program that Nograles had been caught in a compromising situation with his alleged paramour in a hotel in Manila.

Reporter assaulted, files charges

A television reporter in Iloilo City filed last Dec. 22 charges against a woman involved in a road mishap she was covering who allegedly assaulted her.

GMA-7 reporter Charlene Belvis filed charges of slander by deed, grave oral defamation, and physical injuries against Andrea Gorriceta. Belvis, 24, sustained scratches and bruises after Gorriceta allegedly attacked her inside the Jaro district police station.

The news website *Inquirer.net* reported that Gorriceta, who was allegedly involved in a road mishap, attacked Belvis after apparently getting irked when Belvis and her crew continued taking footage of her and her car despite her request not to.

Footage from GMA-7's primetime news program *24 Oras* showed Gorriceta, 27, slapping Belvis on the side of her head. Gorriceta was also seen pulling Belvis' hair, until she fell to the floor inside the Jaro district police station at around 3:55 a.m. of the same day.

In a phone interview with the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility, Belvis said she had repeatedly told Gorriceta that she was "Sorry, I have to. It's my job."

The *Inquirer.net* report said Gorriceta allegedly hit a certain Ria Aquino earlier while parking her car in front of the MO2 bar and restaurant in Mandurriao district, Iloilo City. She also allegedly bumped into a concrete post, the report said.

The Iloilo chapter of the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) condemned the attack. "Even if we grant that the television team went overboard in taking videos of the incident despite the request of Ms. Gorriceta, the physical attack on Ms. Belvis cannot be justified," NUJP said in a statement.

"We also raise questions why it was possible for Ms. Belvis to be physically manhandled inside the Jaro police station in front of policemen," NUJP added.

The Commission of Human Rights in Western Visayas also said that although Gorriceta has a right to privacy, Belvis on the other hand has the responsibility to inform the public. ■

CHRONICLE

JVO Awards for Excellence in Journalism

FILIPINO PRINT journalists may nominate their best investigative and explanatory reports for the Jaime V. Ongpin Awards for Excellence in Journalism (JVOAEJ). Deadline is on Feb. 16, 2009. The JVOAEJ is on its 20th year.

The report must have a minimum of 1,000 words. It should have been published from Jan. to Dec. 2008 in a newspaper (including community/provincial) or magazine of mass circulation, and written by a Filipino journalist or group of journalists, whether freelancers or regularly employed in a news organization.

The awards will recognize the best reports on the following issues: governance and corruption, human rights, the environment, and the financial/economic crisis.

The Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR), the technical and administrative secretariat of the JVOAEJ, is also conducting an independent scan to identify qualified print articles and reports. The scanning process makes sure that articles that are not nominated are included for evaluation for the awards, which will be given in June 2009. Entry forms can be downloaded from the CMFR website (<http://www.cmfr-phil.org>). Completed forms and photocopies of the reports must be submitted to the CMFR office at 2/F Ateneo Professional Schools Salcedo, 130 H.V. dela Costa St., Salcedo Village, Makati City on or before Feb. 16, 2009. If possible, digital copies of the submitted reports must be submitted. Entries submitted by mail must reach CMFR on or before the deadline.

Questions may be directed to CMFR at any of the following numbers: (+63 2) 894-1314/894-1326. CMFR may also be emailed at staff@cmfr-phil.org.

The JVOAEJ is one of the three flagship programs of the CMFR. The annual event seeks to promote excellence in the practice of investigative and explanatory reporting, which involves research, inquiry, corroboration and analysis.

2009 SEAPA Journalism Fellowship

Filipino journalists may apply to the 8th Southeast Asian Press Alliance Journalism Fellowship Program which will run for three weeks in May. Deadline is on March 15, 2009.

The fellowship allows journalists to explore issues concerning democracy and human rights in the context of the new Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) Charter that was adopted during the 13th

ASEAN Summit in November 2007. The fellowship theme is “The Challenge for Democracy and Human Rights Under the New ASEAN Charter”.

“Given such developments and continuing concerns, the SEAPA Journalism Fellowship 2009 asks: What issues and stories might the region’s journalists want/need to highlight or explore to illustrate and discuss continuing challenges for democracy and human rights in Southeast Asia, the new ASEAN Charter considered or notwithstanding?”, SEAPA said in its press release.

Interested applicants may submit a story proposal (no more than 1,000 words), along with an application form downloadable from the SEAPA website. Applicants must also submit two articles published from 2007 to 2009, an ID picture, curriculum vitae, and certification of employment from their media company while freelancers may submit certification from editors of publications where their submitted clips appeared.

Fellows are required to finish a draft of an investigative/news feature article on their chosen topic by the end of the fellowship program in May. Fellows are also expected to publish their final articles in their home publications within a month of the conclusion of the program.

Past Filipino fellows include: Tita Valderama, Patricia Evangelista (2008); Joel V. Escobilla, Joseph Israel M. Laban (2007); Allen V. Estabillo, Germelina Lacorte, Leizel Longboan (2006); Tess Bacala, Rafael Tima (2005); Alexander “Alecks” Pabico (2004); Jofelle P. Tesorio, Mic Mic Villafior (2003); Miriam Grace A. Go, Yasmin Lee Arpon (2002).

SEAPA is a non-profit, non-governmental regional press freedom alliance established in Bangkok in November 1998. Its founding members are: Thai Journalists Association, Institute on Studies for Free Flow of Information (Indonesia), Alliance of Independent Journalists (Indonesia), Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility, and Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism.

Freelance journalist wins UN award

A FILIPINO freelance journalist won one of the three major awards last Dec. 4 in the United Nations Correspondents Association’s (UNCA) annual search for best printed, electronic and broadcast report on the UN.

Imelda Visaya-Abaño bagged the gold medal for the UN Foundation Prize for Reporting on Humanitarian and Development Affairs for her report “Inside Haiti: Hunger and Hatred in an Unhealed Land”.

Abaño’s report was published in *BusinessMirror’s* Perspective section on June 19, 2008.

She shared the honor with Juan Carlos Machorro of *Mi Ambiente* newspaper in Mexico. Manchorro also received the gold medal for the same prize for his report on Mexico’s environmental problems.

The awards were supported by the UN Foundation, Antena 3 TV of Spain, the Euro-American Women’s Council, and UNCA.

Abaño works as a Baguio correspondent for *BusinessMirror*. She also writes for various publications such as the *Inter Press News Service*, *Women’s Feature Service*, *Science and Development Network*.

Abaño told the *Philippines Graphic* last Dec. 22 that her trip to the Republic of Haiti, a country in the Caribbean, was sponsored under the Media21 Global Journalism Network, Geneva Fellowship. The fellowship is a program by InfoSud news agency, a non-profit organization based in Geneva, Switzerland. Media21 is a multimedia management service provider.

Abaño told *Philippines Graphic* the poverty and despair she witnessed in Haiti was “far more extreme than the Philippines”.

“I can’t imagine my kids going through all the violence and poverty there.... It really tells us how we take our nice country and lifestyle for granted,” she said.

4th PopDev media awards

A NON-STOCK, non-profit organization composed of members of Congress awarded journalists who produced outstanding reports that explain “the intrinsic connection between population factors and socio-economic issues” last Nov. 25.

The Philippine Legislators’ Committee on Population and Development (PLCPD) gave cash prizes, trophies, certificates, and a chance to go on a study trip to a PLCPD project area in the Philippines to the winners of the annual competition.

The winners in the print and online category were: David Chavez Dizon, *abs-cbnNEWS.com* (Best News Reportage); Rene Ezpeleta Bartolo, *The Mindanao Times* (Best Opinion or Editorial Piece); Isa Lorenzo, Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (Best Feature or Magazine Article), and Cherry Ann T. Lim, Rene H. Martel, Garry Cabotaje, Allan I. Varquez, Jerome M. Dalipe, and Mayette Tabada, *Sun.Star Cebu* (Best Investigative Report).

In the radio category, the best radio program was *Magandang Gabi Dok* of DZMM 630 kHz. In the television category, the best TV

documentary was *I-Witness: The GMA Documentaries*.

In the photojournalism category, the best single photo winner was Sonny M. Espiritu of the Philippine Human Rights Reporting Project. Jes Aznar of *Newsbreak* received a citation for his photo essay. The photojournalism category was first included this year.

Each category also had runner-up winners.

The competition was supported by the United Nations Population Fund and organizations expert in the field of population and development.

Muslim Mindanao website launched

JOURNALISTS REPORTING on or interested in issues related to Mindanao can visit a new website that contains a variety of reference materials on Muslim Mindanao.

The website www.muslimmindanao.ph includes, among others, articles by experts and scholars on Muslim affairs, a glossary of terms, population statistics, a directory of resource persons, an interactive map of Mindanao, and documents explaining the culture of Mindanao and its people.

The website, its proponents said, aims to help “build the competence of print, broadcast or online journalists and other communicators covering or writing about Muslim affairs.”

The website is a joint project of the Asian Institute of Journalism and Communication and the UNESCO National Commission of the Philippines with the cooperation of Cybersoft and UNESCO Office Jakarta.

Members of the editorial advisory board and staff include scholars and journalists, both Muslims and Christians: Dr. Florangel Rosario-Braid, Eric Canoy, Carlos Conde, William Esposo, Miriam Coronel-Ferrer, Datu Michael Mastura, Jose Pavia, Amina Rasul, Chito Salazar, lawyer Soliman Santos Jr., Samuel Tan, and Samira Gutoc Tomawis.

Remonde replaces Dureza as press secretary

FORMER PRESIDENTIAL Management Staff (PMS) head Cerge Remonde took over Jesus Dureza’s post as press secretary Feb. 1 after Malacañang reshuffled the Cabinet last Jan. 21. Dureza, who spent seven months as press secretary, is now Chief Presidential Legal Counsel.

Remonde, who served as head of the Government Mass Media Group before becoming PMS head, was among the original Cabinet members appointed by President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo in 2001.

He was a radio reporter and commentator at the dyLA-AM 909 Kilo-hertz station in Cebu City before he joined the government. Remonde was also a former six-term chair of the Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas (KBP).

He finished his Bachelor of Arts degree, magna cum laude, from the University of the Visayas. Remonde was also senior adviser to the GRP-NDF Peace Panel. He took up Cooperation and Development Studies at the Afro-Asia Institute in Tel Aviv, Israel in 1986.

Remonde also became chair of the Advertising Board of the Philippines, the Freedom Fund for Filipino Journalists, and the Appeals Board of the Movie and Television Review and Classification Board (MTRCB), and commissioner of the Communications Committee for UNESCO.

Filipino TV news programs honored

LOCAL TELEVISION news and public affairs programs copped two each for gold and silver and one bronze medal at the Television Programming and Promotion Awards of the 2009 New York Festivals (NYF).

The 51-year-old NYF recognizes the best work in advertising and television programming worldwide. It is a member of the International Awards Group (AME Awards, Global Awards, Midas Awards), a for profit company.

ABS-CBN 2, GMA-7 and QTV-11 also won medals and finalist certificates for their entertainment programs. Some of its news and public affairs programs also received finalist certificates. Various television programs in 31 countries were also given medals and finalist certificates.

GMA-7’s primetime news program *24 Oras* and the profile documentary on fashion designer Inno Sotto of its sister network Quality Television (QTV)-11 both received the Gold World Medal. *24 Oras* won in the Coverage of an Ongoing Story category for its coverage on Corporal Angelo Abeto, who was killed last year in an encounter with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

24 Oras also took home the Silver World Medal award in the Best Newscast Category for the coverage of the MILF’s assault in Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte last Aug. 18. ABS-CBN-2’s *Bandila* was also a recipient of the Silver World Medal for its investigative report on substandard food supplements.

GMA-7’s *Reporter’s Notebook*, a television news magazine program, won the Bronze World Medal in the Best Public Affairs Program category for its “Pinays for Export: The Asian Sex Trafficking Trail” report. ■

OBIT

ERASGA, 58

VETERAN FILIPINO broadcast journalist David Noel Erasga died of a heart attack last Dec. 30. He was 58.

A dxMR-*Radyo ng Bayan* senior radio broadcaster at the time of his death, Erasga began his career at the defunct dxYZ radio station in the late 1970s.

He and his brothers established and managed the Leaders Press, the oldest offset printing press in Zamboanga City. Erasga also published the oldest offset newspaper in the city, *Zamboanga Star* (formerly known as the *Zamboanga Newswatch* and later, the *Business Star*).

Erasga was president of the Zamboanga Press Club in 2000. He also served as president of the Zamboanga Columnists Club for three years (2001-2004).

(Source: *Philippine News Agency*)

POWELL, 89

U.S. GOVERNMENT critic and journalist John W. Powell died of complications from pneumonia last Dec. 15. He was 89.

Powell was tried for sedition in the 1950s because of his articles, published in the *China Monthly Review*, alleging that the United States and Japan used biological weapons (germ warfare) in North Korea and China. The government eventually dropped the case after five years.

Powell published and edited the English-language *China Monthly Review* magazine in Shanghai.

After studying at the University of Missouri journalism school, Powell joined the U.S. Office of War Information as a news editor during the World War II.

MULLIGAN, 83

ASSOCIATED PRESS (AP) reporter Hugh Aloysius Mulligan died last Nov. 26 at age 83.

Mulligan visited nearly 150 countries around the globe covering stories of war, religion, politics, and anything of human interest. He joined *AP* in December 1951 and retired in 2000.

He wrote books with other *AP* staffers which included topics such as the Kennedy assassination and the 1967 six-day war. He also authored books on Vietnam, the racehorse Kelso, and *Sherlock Holmes*. He published his memoirs in 2005 called *Been Everywhere, Got Nowhere*.

He served the US Army during the World War II. Mulligan later completed a Bachelor of Arts degree at Vermont's Marlboro College. He earned a journalism degree at Boston University and a master's in English literature at Harvard.

His awards included a 1996 Overseas Press Club of America Award for his reports on Vietnam War and *Money* magazine listed him among the "All Time Greats" in journalism.

BURT, 81

THE MIAMI Herald journalist Al Burt succumbed to chronic illness and heart trouble last Nov. 29. He was 81.

Burt, who worked as a journalist for 45 years, began his career at the *Independent Florida Alligator* during his student days. He graduated from the University of Florida College of Journalism and Communications (UFCJC) in 1949.

He first served the *Herald* as a sports writer in the 1950s. Burt was most remembered by his work as its Latin America editor. In 1965, he was nearly killed in an accident during the civil war in the Dominican Republic. U.S. Marines, feeling threatened at a checkpoint, fired at the taxi carrying Burt and *Herald* photographer Doug Kennedy. Both passengers were severely injured but Burt eventually recovered and returned to work.

He was also a news reporter, editorial writer, and columnist. He also wrote for the *United Press International*, the *Atlanta Journal*, and the *The Jacksonville Journal*.

Burt won many journalism awards including the Ernie Pyle Award in 1961 for stories about Cuba. The award honors human-interest writing. In 2002, UFCJC recognized him as among its "alumni of distinction". He is also in the *Alligator* Hall of Fame.

Also an author, he wrote the books "Florida: A Place in the Sun (1974)", "Becalmed in the Mullet Latitudes (1984)", "Al Burt's Florida (1997)", and "The Tropic of Cracker (1999)".

NEITA, 78

VETERAN JAMAICAN journalist Hartley Neita died from what appeared to be a heart-related illness last Dec. 12 at age 78.

The Press Association of Jamaica (PAJ) honored Neita for his 60-year service to the journalism profession in 2007. He began his media career at *The Star* writing short stories, movie reviews, and sports reports. Since 1993, he was a regular columnist at *The Gleaner*.

Neita was press secretary to several prime ministers of different political parties.

Also an author, he wrote the biographies of two Jamaican prime ministers: "Hugh Shearer—A Voice for the People" and "Donald Sangster—They called Him Mr. Commonwealth". Neita also wrote "The Search", a book on the lost school boys in the Blue Mountains in Jamaica in 1939. ■

A CLASH OF VALUES

From page 28

publicly because it would betray their bias and, as a result, make it difficult for them to do their job as reporters. (This is why you seldom see journalists writing columns. And most of those who did decide to become pundits did so after retiring from the newsroom.)

Still, I'd like to think my opinion pieces were grounded on more solid information, on sounder analysis. These views were formed by my own journalistic appreciation of facts, not by some knee-jerk instinct to expose and shame members of a political dynasty allied with a regime that is mired in corruption. But in my rush, fueled by outrage, to make public my opinion about a potentially explosive issue, I threw all caution and good judgment to the wind. I forgot that I was, before anything else, a journalist.

It would be a disservice to society if journalists lost sight of who they are and what they do and resort to just whining in their blogs about matters that they should otherwise be investigating.

An argument can be made that journalists, because of their training, would be in a better position to blog about public issues and events. Can't I apply in my blogging the very same discipline I use in my journalism? I certainly can, though it would be mighty difficult, probably even impossible. Blogging, by its very nature, cannot be endowed with the same characteristics that make journalism such an important force in our society—gate-keeping to filter the irrelevant and verification to root out the lies; an editorial system whose bedrock is the objective processing of data and information.

If bloggers adopted these characteristics, well and good. And to their credit, a number of news organizations allow their journalists to blog, although unlike the regular blogger, what these journalists write in their blogs are subject to the same editorial process that their stories go through. And those journalists who blog outside the purview of their editors are cognizant enough of the possible effect blogging has on their journalism that they put disclaimers on their blogs. In other words, many journalists are able to use

blogging to improve their journalism.

Having said that, however, I don't think it is wise of journalists to impose their values and their methods on bloggers, and vice versa. It not only seems arrogant — it is pointless. As I've said, blogging and journalism are different animals. The best they can do is complement each other.

Case in point: the story of Meliton Zamora, the janitor at the University of the Philippines (UP) who retired broke because, as a blog earlier said, the student loans he had guaranteed while employed at the university had not been paid by the students and so UP supposedly deducted all those loans from his retirement benefits. While the blog first brought Zamora's plight to the public, it was not entirely accurate: turns out only one loan had not been paid (P5,000) and the reason he retired penniless was because UP did not pay him the sick leaves that Zamora insists he never availed. But as a result of the blog, the mainstream press got wind of the story and the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* later ran a front-page article about Zamora—and set the record straight. To be sure, other bloggers could correct the error but I doubt if they would spend the same amount of time, energy and resources that the *Inquirer* had put in writing Zamora's story.

Resistant to Change?

While I am certain that most bloggers do not entertain the notion that what they do can be considered journalism, there are a few but vociferous who do, exploiting the sins and shortcomings of the mainstream press to promote themselves as the alternative to mainstream media. I am an advocate of alternative journalism but I am not entirely sold to the idea that "blogging is the new journalism" or that so-called citizen journalists, with blogging as one of their tools, would eventually run journalism out the door.

Moreover, these bloggers often insist that old media types resist the advent of new media. That's nonsense. The reason most mainstream news media in the Philippines are slow to adapt new media

is not so much resistance but a failure to fully grasp new media's potentials and a passivity and complacency born out of the fact that what they do right now seems to still work so they don't feel compelled to change.

It's an attitude that will change, however, once old media's bottomline is hit hard by declining print advertising, as we are seeing in the US, or once they see that the domain that they have occupied for decades is being threatened by new media. They will not resist this change simply because they know they cannot win. To insist, therefore, that they are pig-headed has-beens trying to keep the status quo, as if they were a bunch of Luddites, would be to ignore the technological advances journalists have made in newsrooms around the world in the past 75 years.

We will soon see, in other words, these old media denizens improving journalism by using new media technology, and the public will be the better for it. Because, really, if there's anybody who's in the best position right now to use new media to improve journalism, it's those who are already in the newsrooms, and not some blogger in a pajama trying his shrillest best to carve out a niche in a crowded market by turning blogging into a tool for what amounts to nothing but heckling. (Hecklers proliferate in the blogosphere because that's apparently one way to get noticed.)

Think about it: Who do you think runs most of the web-based and multimedia news organizations in the world? Yes, that's correct: journalists who earned their spurs in the newsrooms of old media.

Still, journalists who blog and who value their profession have no choice, I think, but to navigate the blogging terrain carefully. As I found out in my case, being also a blogger eventually clashed with my values and instincts as a journalist. It's tough to play by the rules in a game that practically has none. ■

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Blogging and Journalism: A CLASH OF VALUES?

Blogging was not invented for journalists and may not be an ideal medium for them.

■ By Carlos H. Conde

I 'VE BEEN thinking long and hard lately about blogging and how, at least in my case, it fosters intellectual indolence, which can be detrimental to a journalist like me.

Blogging is a great invention. Used properly, it complements journalism in ways that are not possible five or 10 years ago. More important, blogging democratizes expression and has proved crucial in the struggle by many citizens in repressive regimes to be heard.

Since the Pangandaman case exploded, however, I have been entertaining the idea that maybe blogging is best left to people who have advocacies and causes but are shut out by the mainstream media. Or those who have interesting things to say about themselves, or what they had for dinner last night, or why *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* is a charming but tedious movie.

Blogging was not invented for journalists and may not be an ideal medium for them. (Indeed, some even believe that blogging was invented precisely to get around the conventions of mainstream journalism.) It is clear to me now that journalism is one hat and blogging another. And a journalist, in my view, cannot wear two hats—especially those that, because of their respective natures, simply don't fit if worn at the same time.

I would be lying if I said that this self-examination was not prompted by the so-called "golf war" and how it played out, i.e. that the Valley Golf and Country Club management had practically exonerated the Pangandamans, who have been vilified on the Internet left and right.

Although I still stand by what I had initially written in my blog—that the Pangandamans be-

haved like warlords and that Nasser Pangandaman Sr. did not deserve his appointment as peace negotiator because he couldn't even stop a simple misunderstanding from escalating into a brawl—I realized that it was an incomplete assessment of what had happened.

The problem lies, of course, with the fact that I, like the gazillion bloggers out there, relied solely on the word of Bambee dela Paz, whose account of the incident was, as can be expected, biased. Although she may not know it at the time, her post was a classic example of propaganda warfare: if you want to control the agenda, put out your version first, and as quickly as you can. The more heartbreaking the tale, the better.

From a propaganda standpoint, the odds were stacked against the Pangandamans. They not only belonged to a political class that is easy to pigeonhole and excoriate—they behaved precisely as people who belong to that class tended to behave. Plus, they apparently do not blog.

Bambee dela Paz certainly was well within her right to publish that post. And I'm glad that she did, because, as I've mentioned in an earlier post, blogging can be a tool to correct an injustice. She merely used a medium that allowed her—no,

expected her—to do exactly what she did.

The same can be said of the other bloggers, whose outrage, as can be gleaned from their posts and the comments sections of their blogs, quickly turned into the digital equivalent of a mass lynching, which is fine, because the medium allows that. I was the guy in red shirt with the baseball bat shouting "Let's kill these bastards!"

As a journalist, I should have known better.

In itself, the brawl at the Valley Golf Club was a fascinating story, with an even fascinating backstory from each side: a family of powerful politicians from a region known for their goons and guns versus a family of golfers trying to make it big in golf.

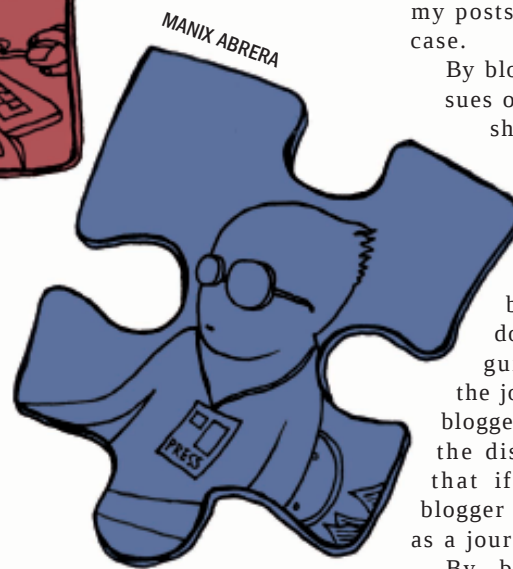
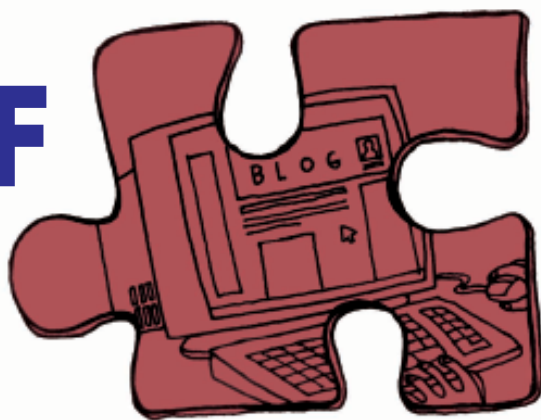
I felt strongly about what happened (at least according to Bambee), but instead of investigating the incident and getting to the truth of it, as any journalist ought to do and as I have done in other stories in the past, I put on my other hat and merely blogged about it.

Did I attempt to get the side of the Pangandamans? I did not. Did I investigate whether what Bambee dela Paz wrote was accurate or truthful? I did not. My outrage had been vented, so why bother? It was so goddamn easy.

Blogging about the golf brawl allowed me to let off steam. What that did was give me visceral pleasure—I hate arrogant pricks, particularly arrogant pricks who hold office—but it waylaid my instincts as a journalist.

Let me make it clear that I am not blaming blogging per se, just as I am not faulting radio for the rise of so-called shock jocks or newspapers for those pseudo-journalists, called *hao-siao*, who extort money from politicians and corrupt customs officials.

What happened in my case is more the result of a lack of discipline to fight the temptation—strongest among bloggers—to



The discipline in blogging—if you can call it discipline—is different from that of journalism

swat first and ask questions later. That baseball bat was so conveniently within reach.

But it must be said that, because of its nature, blogging is such that it is very easy to be lazy, irresponsible and careless with it.

Accountability

Journalists are accountable to the public. They have a covenant with their audience. Their main currencies are accuracy and fairness. I don't think these should apply to bloggers who use such a loose, free-wheeling medium that has great potential for misuse. Bloggers are generally only accountable to themselves.

The discipline in blogging—if you can call it discipline—is different from that of journalism. Bloggers can be, and are allowed to be, whimsical. Journalists are involved in a fact-checking process that should have no room for whimsy. Bloggers can be trigger-happy because the medium tempts the undisciplined to shoot his mouth off. We expect journalists not to

behave like that.

Journalists who blog, like me, therefore have gotten themselves in a dilemma: When I blog, do I stop being a journalist? I have been asking myself this question ever since I realized the mistakes I committed in my posts on the Pangandaman case.

By blogging about public issues or events—things that I should otherwise be covering as a journalist—I exposed myself to the intellectual and ethical trip-ups that are inherent in blogging. For instance, does my audience distinguish the blogger from the journalist? When I, as a blogger, commit errors, does the distinction still hold so that if my credibility as a blogger suffers, my credibility as a journalist remains intact?

By blogging, am I not, though unwittingly, promoting a medium that, because of its great potential for misuse, can in fact damage my journalism?

One can argue that the medium is not the problem; it's how people use it. One can also argue that the mainstream press has always been full of irresponsible reportage and careless commentary way before blogging was invented. But that's not an argument for journalists to start blogging about public issues—it is an argument *against* it. The answer to bad journalism is good journalism, not blogging.

Blogging is neat if all I blog about is how cute my sons are. But looking back at my blogging output over the years, particularly recently, I see that I had been drawn into a world where it is extremely easy to carelessly regurgitate lies and half-truths, even asinine thought. While blogging provides a venue where I can say whatever I want to say, particularly things that I am not able to say in my journalistic pieces because of the conventions and restrictions of my profession, I now think that it might be impossible to make a distinction between my journalistic self and my blogging doppelganger. I can, of course, continue wearing both hats for as long as I could but sooner or later, something's got to give.

Make no mistake: I have always been an opinionated person. Even before some genius coined the word blog, I was already writing commentary and opinion pieces, ignoring the view held by many that reporters should not voice their opinion

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