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# PJR REPORTS

Published by the Center for Media Freedom & Responsibility

DECEMBER 2007



A confrontation on basic issues

# THE SIEGE OF THE PEN



# EDITOR'S NOTE

**PJRREPORTS**

PUBLISHED BY THE CENTER FOR MEDIA  
FREEDOM & RESPONSIBILITY

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## Dilemmas

SOME OBSERVERS in the Manila Peninsula siegemake much of the fact that media became the center of attention in the failed power grab by Sen. Antonio Trillanes IV and Brig. Gen. Danilo Lim. Other observers, however, would just as easily reply that such could not be helped. After all, an attempted coup must have happened at least ten times in the country's recent history. Carting off journalists who were covering an event, on the other hand, would seem to be the first of its kind to have taken place in this nation's tumultuous experience.

And while putting down an uprising is widely regarded as a prerogative and duty of government, the same cannot be said about waving a finger at journalists and warning them that the next time around, they will be arrested for covering events that involve so-called enemies of the state.

The issue then is no longer just about coup plotters; it is about the role of media and the way its members perform their duty of reporting an event as accurately as possible. At a certain point, this issue was in danger of getting lost. The police—and even some journalists—think that the press has no business being in a place where operations against alleged lawless elements are being conducted. The journalists could get hurt and who will be blamed then? Worse, they could be impeding the efforts of the authorities to get to the criminals.

What was overlooked was the fact that the journalists have never complained about getting hurt—or killed—while covering an event. Getting caught in a crossfire or being hit by a stray bullet are all parts of the hazards of the trade. What they do complain about is when they are singled out for retribution or just plain harassment, or when they are arrested or handcuffed or thrown to jail or murdered because they were doing their job. Because then, the authorities would be saying something

different: that journalists should not be instruments in upholding the people's right to know.

It's been a colorful year for the Philippine press. The curious thing is that questions about freedom of expression continue to be raised more than two decades after the supposed restoration of democracy. As told in this issue's article describing the year that was for the press, the good news is that fewer deaths among journalists have taken place. The bad news is that press freedom remains a tricky proposition.

It's not that the media have unfailingly done their job well. An article on how the press covered the story about Mariannet Amper shows how a tragic event can possibly get much worse for its victims.

Media as an institution has its problems as well. Survival continues to top the list. The means of trying to stay alive are becoming increasingly disturbing. It has been said that the true owners of media are the advertisers. Often, they can be more assertive than the traditional owners of a media enterprise. To avoid the pain of losing a rich source of revenues, news organizations have been bending over backwards to accommodate the wishes of advertisers to get more attention for their products. Lately, this has come to mean using the news to peddle commodities. An article on this worsening problem is featured in this month's *PJR Reports*.

Struggles are usually a grim affair. The bright spots lie in the growing number of friends and allies who believe in the same things that the media are supposed to stand for. They, too, have raised their voices against repression. These people—like United Nations rapporteur Philip Alston and new-found human rights ally Chief Justice Reynato Puno—have become fellow travelers in a long, dark road.

Chit Estella

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

## PRESSED FREEDOM

By Manix Abrera



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## THE COVER

**First, it was the Pen—the hotel—that was under siege. But by the end of the day, journalists—the wielders of the pen—felt it was they and their profession that were under attack.**

### Brazen acts

“The Philippines is the most democratic country in the region. We have no tolerance for human rights violations of any kind.... We deplore any and all killings of political activists and journalists.”

*President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, in an Oct. 15 speech before human rights advocates in a regional forum on human rights in Manila, Philippine Daily Inquirer, Oct. 16*

“To attack a broadcaster right inside the announcer’s booth while he is doing his work is the height of brazenness that a government official can do. It only reflects the government official’s disrespect and ignorance of media’s role as watchdog of democracy, a role that should always be protected.”

*Joint statement of Carmelito Francisco of the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines-Davao and Roy Geonzon of the Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas - Davao on the Oct. 24 attack against Roel Sembrano, Oct. 26*

“While we have yet to ascertain the motive for the attack, this incident is nevertheless another clear example of the culture of impunity nurtured by official apathy and inaction that has emboldened those who wish to silence a critical press to carry out such brazen attacks as this broad daylight attempt on the lives of (Marlan) Malnegro and (Ruben) Oliverio. “Again and again, government has vowed to put an end to media killings and solve the murders of our colleagues. Again and again, these vows have proven to be lip service.”

*National Union of Journalists of the Philippines on the slay attempt against the two Digos City-based radio announcers, Oct. 25*

“The authorities must send a strong message to those who attack journalists that their actions will not be tolerated and will have serious consequences.”

*International Federation of Journalists Asia-Pacific Director Jacqueline Park, on the slay attempt against Malnegro and Oliverio, Oct. 26. Park urged government authorities to investigate the incident immediately and thoroughly.*

### The rights of others

“If we can pass some of the problems to the private sector, the mass media, for instance, in relation to the right of reply bill, let’s do it.... But let us also make sure that we have an honest-to-goodness working remedy to balance the right of

the mass media to publish what they want to publish with the right of the objects of their libel, defamation or criticism to explain their side within the ambit of the right of reply bill.”

*Sen. Aquilino Pimentel Jr., in a seminar on right to reply organized by the Philippine Press Institute, Oct. 19. Pimentel is the proponent of Senate Bill 1178 (“An Act Granting the Right of Reply and Providing Penalties for Violation Thereof”).*

### An exaggeration

“Indeed, 9/11 traumatized the world, but most especially United States citizens. The twin buildings epitomized the rise of the U.S. as a global superpower and also the collective aspirations of its people. 9/11 was interpreted as an attack against everything the U.S. symbolized.

“The Glorietta 2 explosion killed eleven people and injured more than a hundred innocent individuals. If it was a terrorist attack, the casualties were small and it may be an exaggeration to name the site of the tragedy as ‘Ground Zero.’ In fact, the Glorietta 2 blast was a minor terrorist attack compared to the suicide bombing in Pakistan which killed more than hundred people also on October 19. “But if media exaggerated its reports, the public agreed with them. The blast occurred in Makati, the country’s financial center; the building was owned by the country’s richest family, the Ayalas; and most symbolic of all, it was a mall. Glorietta was a perfect terror target.”

*Mong Palatino, <http://mongpalatino.motime.com>, Nov. 4*

### The presence of media

“And why did the police want the journalists to get out? Were they planning to do something they did not want the journalists to witness, record and broadcast to the nation and the world? Were they, perchance, planning a bloodbath? Did they perhaps think that with Trillanes, Lim et al. dead, the threats to the Arroyo administration would be gone?”

“No, sir. It won’t. It would have aroused other soldiers to anger and the desire to get rid of the tyranny of the Arroyo administration would increase and more and bigger mutinies would follow again and again until one of them succeeds. So they should thank the journalists for being there and preventing a bloodbath.”

*Neal H. Cruz, “As I See It,” Philippine Daily Inquirer, Dec. 5*



## They've got it all

 ADVERTISING HAS conquered *The Philippine Star's* front pages.

A story about the opening of the SMX Convention Center inside the SM Mall of Asia complex eased out a news story on page 1, lower fold of the *Star* last Nov. 6. The feature article was an enumeration of the amenities offered in the new convention center, which, the report said, was already booked up to the end of the year.

A virtual press release, the report quoted SM Investment Corp. president Harley Sy as saying that the new facility enhances management's goal of making the mall the premiere tourist destination in the country. It also discussed the SM management's plan to go into servicing business process outsourcing companies.

After identifying the features of the convention center, the report took note of the mall's other entertainment facilities—an indication of the article's out-and-out promotion of SM and its giant complex.

## Cheering instead of reporting

 *THE PHILIPPINE Star* clearly jumped to conclusions in reporting the developments in the basketball career of former Ateneo Blue Eagle center Japeth Aguilar ("Japeth closing in on the NBA," Nov. 12).

The report said Aguilar was a season away from attracting the attention of National Basketball Association (NBA) scouts. The young cager made it to the roster of Western Kentucky University (WKU), a Division 1 school in the US National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA).

Division 1 is the highest level of intercollegiate athletics recognized by the NCAA in the United States.

The report did not provide the necessary details to support its bold



Aguilar [HTTP://WWW.BASKETBALL.EXCHANGE.PH](http://www.basketball.exchange.ph)



Never too big to advertise

[HTTP://WWW.SKYSCRAPERCITY.COM](http://www.skyscrapercity.com)

headline. The story was based only on the statements of Aguilar and his father, who recounted how his son got into WKU and the adjustments he had to do to make it to the team. He also expressed the hope that his son would make it to the NBA.

The report would have been more enlightening and convincing if it included an interview with the WKU basketball coach, who should be in a better position to assess whether Aguilar really has what it takes to make it to the NBA or even be competitive in the NCAA.

The report should have also noted that a stint in a Division 1 school does not guarantee entry to the NBA. Due to the limited number of NBA teams (30), and the high number of Division 1 schools (336), the chances of US college players making it to the NBA are very slim. Moreover, scouts have ceased relying solely on Division 1 schools, scouting and actually recruiting foreign players abroad.

## A story that sells

 *THE LIFESTYLE* section has become a favorite place for advertisements disguised as feature stories like the ones published in *The Manila Times* ("Celebrating 10 years in show business: Anne Curtis takes on the fast lane," Oct. 25).

The write-up about the career of young actress Anne Curtis turned out to be a pitch for the clothing line Freeway. The company's upcoming holiday fashion collection was discussed with Curtis as model.

The actress had a ready spiel: "I like Freeway because the clothes allow me to be fun and flexible. Freeway constantly reinvents and it doesn't go with just on trend. And that's exactly how I am as far as style and fashion are concerned."

On the same page, another article featured the soon-to-be launched

"Motion," a fragrance from Scent Station supposedly inspired by actor John Prats. The actor was quoted as saying that he was "thrilled" with the idea of having inspired a new brand of cologne.

## What's Uncle Sam up to now?

 SIXTEEN YEARS after the Senate voted to shut down the US military bases in the Philippines, is the United States building up military bases in the country again?

A three-part special report by the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* believes so, but through a different strategy.

"Instead of concentrating its troops and equipment in only a few locations, the United States will decrease the number of large well-equipped bases and increase the number of smaller, simpler bases in more locations," wrote *Inquirer* contributor Herbert Docena.

Docena is a research associate at Focus on the Global South, a Bangkok-based policy research and advocacy center.

The *Inquirer* reports, published from Oct. 15 to 17, explained why and how the



UP students light candles for slain schoolmate. [HTTP://SELVO.WORDPRESS.COM](http://selvo.wordpress.com)

 Cheers

 Jeers

US has been trying to restructure its presence overseas to stave off opposition.

"If, in the Cold War, US overseas presence targeted the Soviet Union and other communist and nationalist forces in the Third World," the *Inquirer* reported, "today, the US current 'global posture' is aimed at any state or non-state force perceived to be threatening US interests."

The reports claimed that the United States clearly wanted to prevent the rise of rivals that could threaten its preeminent status, particularly China. Given its location vis-à-vis China, the Philippines has again become part of the "global posture" of the United States, the *Inquirer* said.



Estrada

LITO OCAMPO

## Explaining Erap's pardon

 *PHILIPPINE DAILY Inquirer* columnist Fr. Joaquin Bernas explained the key constitutional and legal issues involving President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's grant of executive clemency to ousted president and convicted plunderer Joseph Estrada. He discussed the President's powers and limitations and the two kinds of pardon under the law ("Only GMA can forfeit pardon benefits," Oct. 27).

## Hazy headline

 *THE PHILIPPINE Daily Inquirer* report about a ceremony at the University of the Philippines commemorating victims of fraternity violence in the campus had a wrong head ("UP studes light candles for dead frat neophytes," Oct. 31).

The article mentioned several students who died due to hazing. But some of those cited in the report were not victims of fraternity initiation rites. Both Den Daniel Reyes and Dennis Venturina, for example, died during fraternity rumbles and not during an initiation.

The *Inquirer* also mentioned one victim who was not even a member of any fraternity: Niño Calinao. Gunned down by an alleged hired killer, Calinao's murder on Feb. 19, 1999, is believed to be a case of mistaken identity.



De Venecia

LITO OCAMPO



Enrile

LITO OCAMPO

## No holier than thou

**MANILA STANDARD** Today published a two-part report explaining the issues surrounding the North Luzon Railways Corp. (Northrail) project ("Northrail project worst of them all," Nov. 10; "Probe of speaker's role in Northrail fiasco sought," Nov. 12).

The latest offensive of Sen. Juan Ponce Enrile against Speaker Jose de Venecia Jr. revived the controversy over the Northrail project, which aims to develop a 32-km railway from Caloocan City to Malolos, Bulacan, and eventually to Clark.

Describing the speaker's call for moral revolution as absurd, Enrile blamed De Venecia for allegedly brokering the overpriced project. The senator said De Venecia does not have the moral high ground to support his son's exposés against the government because the speaker himself intervened in the national broadband network deal to favor his son's own bid.

The *Standard Today* quoted parts of Enrile's privilege speech exposing the loan agreement as highly questionable and one-sided. He said the contract did not go through competitive public bidding.

The article noted a couple of studies, including one by Sen. Rodolfo Biazon, which showed the Northrail project as probably the world's most expensive railway system. A study by experts from University of the Philippines Law Center said that in the long run, the Northrail project would prove to be just an added debt burden to the country.

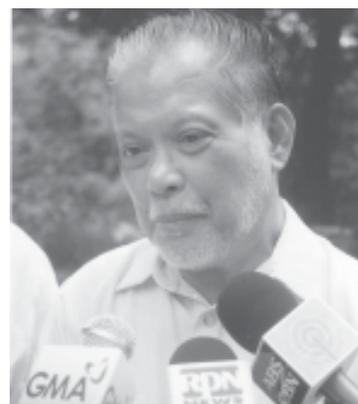
De Venecia aired his side of the story

through a statement. He claimed that his participation in the project was above-board and that the new railway system would boost economic development. Defenders of the deal said the project was exempted from the Procurement Reform Act because it involved an executive agreement.

## Age difference

**THE DAILY TRIBUNE** got confused about the age of Mariannet Amper who allegedly committed suicide due to "despondency with the extreme poverty her family was suffering." Its headline suggested that the girl was 6 years old ("DepEd to investigate 6-year-old kid's suicide," Nov. 9). Yet, the lead described Amper as a 12-year-old, grade-6 student.

Upon checking other reports, *PJR Reports* found out that Amper was a 12-year-old sixth grader from Davao.



Saguisag

LITO OCAMPO

## Anything for an 'exclusive'?

**ON NOV. 9**, the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* published the photos of the victims of the car crash that killed former social welfare secretary Dulce Saguisag and injured her husband, former senator Rene Saguisag, as well as their companions in the vehicle. Although the pictures were not close-ups, they were clear enough to show blood coming out of one side of Mrs. Saguisag's head. The photos were intrusive and disturbing for many readers, not to mention the members of the Saguisag family.

The use of the pictures prompted a reader to protest the use of the photographs, saying the newspaper had been insensitive to do so. Although an editor's note at the end of the reader's letter apologized for the use of the photos, it sounded weak and less than contrite. The editor pointed out that the photos were "exclusive" to the *Inquirer* (they were given by a contributor), implying that this was the reason the paper decided to publish them. ■

# MONITOR



Arroyo

OPS

## Gloria's megaphones

**I-WATCH NEWS**, aired on government sequestered RPN-9, is working overtime as a propaganda arm of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo.

*I-Watch News* gave extensive coverage to the Nov. 6 gathering organized by Pampanga politicians to express support for their *cabalen*, Arroyo. The report was aired when the Senate was considering inviting Pampanga Gov. Ed Panlilio to shed light on the alleged bribery of congressmen and local officials in Malacañang on Oct. 11.

*I-Watch News* said Panlilio was not able to attend the rally due to a prior commitment. But the sound bites of officials interviewed in the program were clearly aimed at Panlilio.

Lubao Mayor Dennis Pineda said "two years na lang mahigit si Madame President ngayon. Kung magpapagamit sila sa ibang pulitiko upang pabagsakin ang ating Pangulo, kawawa naman ang Pampanga (The President has just a little more than two years to go in office. If some people will allow themselves to be used by other politicians to topple the President, Pampanga will suffer)."

Bacolor Mayor Bobby Dunca, on the other hand, said, "Magsama-sama na tayo at sana wala nang oposisyon para sa ikauunlad ng ating bansa (Let's all unite and I wish there will no longer be any opposition so the country can move forward)."

**IBC-13'S EXPRESS Balita** rushed to the defense of the Arroyo administration following reports about the alleged bribery of local officials in Malacañang.

On Oct. 16, *Express Balita* peppered its newscast with interviews of government sources who disputed Pampanga Gov. Ed Panlilio's claim that Palace officials gave out cash to governors and representatives on Oct. 11.

The report interviewed Budget Secretary Rolando Andaya Jr. and Defense

Secretary Gilbert Teodoro who said that government funds are rarely distributed in cash. Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye did what he has been doing for the President for the longest time—deny a negative report about his boss. He said not one of those who attended the Oct. 11 oath-taking ceremony received funds from the President herself. Nowhere in the report was Panlilio's side aired.

On Oct. 19, *Express Balita* reported that the President was "sawa na sa gulo (tired of bickerings)." The media were then carrying stories about calls for President Arroyo to step down following the bribery scandal. The report used the statement of Chief Legal Counsel Sergio Apostol, who said the opposition might have been behind the alleged bribery to discredit Arroyo.

When the burning issue was about the latest impeachment bid against the President, *Express Balita* devoted two newscasts in downplaying the complaint. On Nov. 6, the newscast highlighted the appeal of Pampanga local officials for Congress to set aside the impeachment complaint, the forecast of former President Joseph Estrada that the ouster bid would not prosper, and the assessment of former President Fidel Ramos that there was no real threat against Arroyo's leadership. No other views were presented in the newscast.

**PRIMETIME TELEDYARYO** tried its best to deflect the bad news about President Arroyo's trust ratings.

Reporting last Nov. 15 on Pulse Asia's October survey that showed the President's consistently high disapproval and distrust ratings, *Teledyaryo* aired a one-source story—an interview with Palace spokesperson Ignacio Bunye who said the President would rather focus on poverty alleviation. There was no mention of the results of the Pulse Asia survey.

According to the survey, Arroyo registered an overall disapproval rating of 39 percent, the highest among the



country's top five national officials. Her distrust ratings increased by 9 points to 46 percent during the period.

### A bait for a story

 THE USE of hidden cameras is a ticklish issue because of ethical considerations. *Noypi: Ikaw Ba 'To?*, an ABS-CBN 2 public affairs program that tackles the character and traits of Filipinos through social experiments, has used hidden cameras to show how Filipinos react to various social situations. Past episodes tackled various Pinoy traits such as hospitality and honesty.

Last Nov. 5, *Noypi* was not content with using hidden cameras. The program used a minor as an "accomplice" in an experiment that looked into the dangers of meeting strangers from television chat room channels. In these chat room channels, viewers meet and communicate with others by sending their contact numbers that are shown on-air.

The program started by showing clips of a 2004 episode of *Private 1*, a defunct ABS-CBN 2 program that tackled crimes. A 2004 episode "Killer Texter?" discussed the case of a female teenager who was allegedly killed by a man she had personally met after getting his number from a chat room channel.

*Noypi* "experimented" on the issue through its "accomplice" (*Noypi*'s own term), a 14-year-old girl who was to meet somebody from a chat room.

The teenager, alias "Angel14QT," was instructed to post her number in a chat room. She received several text (short-message service) replies to "Angel14QT." One texter, "Philip," asked if she was interested in an SEB ("sex eye ball" in chat room parlance). He insisted on a meeting. While not saying anything about an SEB, the accomplice agreed.

In their face-to-face meeting, Philip invited Angel14QT to a place where they

could talk. Angel14QT told the program that Philip told her that he wanted to go where no one could disturb them.

In their meeting, he told her he was feeling cold and wanted to get warm. The girl prevented him from going any farther and abruptly ended their face-to-face encounter.

The next day, however, Philip requested another meeting in a fast-food restaurant. He brought two companions, one of whom waited outside. Philip was more aggressive this time, persuading Angel14QT to go to another place. He asked, "*Hanggang dito na lang ba tayo* (Are we only going to do this)?"

Philip even touched Angel14QT who protested: "*Ano ba! Huwag mo nga akong hawakan* (Hey! Don't touch me)!"

After a few minutes, *Noypi* said it instructed Angel14QT to go with Philip.

Philip took Angel14QT to a motel. When the two were already in front of the motel's reception desk, a team from *Noypi* appeared. Philip, whose face was digitized, realized it was all a setup. He started questioning the motives of the accomplice.

Angel14QT told *Noypi* that she panicked when Philip was about to pay for a motel room. She also became afraid when he began blaming her for what happened.

*Noypi* protected the identities of Angel14QT and Philip by blurring their faces most of the time. But protecting the personalities' identities could not correct *Noypi*'s biggest mistake—using a minor as an accomplice for a story and actually exposing her to danger.

*Noypi* said it did not want anything bad to happen to Angel14QT that's why its team immediately showed up at the motel's reception desk.

The whole experiment—from the time Angel14QT gave away her number to the time that she went to a motel with Philip—could have endangered and traumatized her. *Noypi*'s spy team might have been only

a few meters away but it was still the teenager who had to deal with the man's advances. And she was even asked to describe her feelings in a separate interview on air.

*Noypi* is not the only local program to use hidden cameras. This undercover tool is also used by so-called "investigative" programs like *Imbestigador* (GMA-7) and *XXX* (ABS-CBN 2).

The use of hidden cameras and other forms of journalistic deception violates the journalistic ethical principles of justice and humaneness.

Using hidden cameras is permissible only in limited circumstances (for example, when an issue is of profound importance and all other alternatives in getting the same information have been exhausted). This should also be done only after experts on the issue have been consulted.



Reyes

LITO OCAMPO

### Reporting on solutions

 WITH THE impending fuel price hike, *Top Story* on Nov. 9 discussed not only the proposed energy-saving measures of Energy Secretary Angelo Reyes but also those procedures that some malls were already implementing. The report compared the energy-conserving measures of SM and Ayala malls.

Some of SM's strategies included the adjustment of chiller options in accordance with the five-day weather forecast of Pagasa and Yahoo!, the replacement of incandescent bulbs with compact bulbs, the use of just 50 percent of lights in back alleys and storage areas, smaller dishwashing machines in the food court, the installation of capacitors for more efficient power use, and the quarterly replacement of aging sanitary equipment.

Ayala, on the other hand, has been implementing a loop system pipeline for the air-conditioning of Glorietta malls and replacing bulbs with fluorescent lights. It has also installed an automatic sensor in escalators and new chillers for more

 Cheers

 Jeers

efficient electricity use.

The report showed how industries save energy, providing a contrast to the energy department's rudimentary tactics that include the formation of the anti-"kotong (extortion)" task force, the use of compact fluorescent lamps, the limited use of air-conditioning, and cutting down on the fuel consumption of government vehicles.

The report would have been more helpful, however, if it had explained how the suggested measures—for instance, the use of compact lamps and the loop system pipeline for air-conditioning—could actually reduce energy consumption. It could have also ranked the major energy users in the country to show the importance of the malls' efforts.

Since the report tried to relate fuel-saving efforts to rising fuel prices, it would have been interesting if it detailed the country's fuel consumption and how the energy-saving measures could actually help keep fuel costs down.

### True colors

 IT SEEMS *Primetime Teledyaryo*'s bias is not only for President Arroyo.

In its showbiz segment last Nov. 15, *Teledyaryo* reported on an upcoming drama program of an all-female dance group. The show would tackle the social disadvantages of having dark skin. Some members of the dance group would portray dark-skinned characters, it added.

The reporter described dark-skinned people as those not endowed with beautiful skin ("*Hindi binigyan ng magandang kulay*").

### Refusing to let an issue die down

 24 ORAS has been consistent in providing valuable information to explain to the public the alleged bribery



Lazatin

LITO OCAMPO



in Malacañang. This in spite of the lack of new data or officials willing to shed light on the case.

On Oct. 16, *24 Oras's* report, "Pulitika at Panunuhol (Politics and Bribery)," tried to determine if bribery has become a part of Philippine politics.

Alex Brillantes Jr., dean of the University of the Philippines National College of Public Administration and Governance (UP NCPAG), was interviewed for the report. He said bribery has become the standard operating procedure to secure contracts and services from the government. Still, Brillantes said, the amount of money involved and the way bribery is being done nowadays are worrisome.

*24 Oras* noted a 2007 Social Weather Stations business survey on corruption which showed that 61 percent of privately owned companies have been asked by government officials for bribes when securing permits and licenses or paying taxes.

The report sought the views of a non-government organization. Vincent Lazatin of the Transparency and Accountability Network (TAN) said that compared to last year, the rate of bribery has declined. Nevertheless, he expressed alarm over the fact that bribery has become widespread and that erring officials no longer bothered to be discreet. He said people should muster the courage to expose bribery.

NCPAG and TAN emphasized the role of media in continuously reporting bribery incidents and helping pass the Whistle-Blowers Protection Act.

### Making gov't accountable

ON OCT. 18, *24 Oras* and *Saksi* reported the many questionable expenses of the Office of the President (OP).

Based on its investigations, the news team said OP had incurred P615 million in unliquidated cash advances. The paper trail showed that the Commission on Audit (COA) released a memorandum compelling "the concerned accountable officers to liquidate their cash advances within the prescribed period and refrain from granting additional cash advance to those who have unsettled cash advances."

The report said the OP accepted P9 million in donations for the victims of the Southern Leyte landslide, typhoon Milenyo and the calamity in Albay province. The funds, however, were used for other expense items such as payment for hotels and seminars, donation to an unnamed foundation, and repair of the Malacañang golf course.

According to the report, loans amounting to more than P200 million were extended to small entrepreneurs in the rural areas in 2003 to 2004. The funds were sourced from the Presidential Social Fund,



Escudero

LITO OCAMPO

which is supported by revenues of the Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation and Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office. The loans were not recorded in the books.

Former Budget Secretary Benjamin Diokno, Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye, and Sen. Francis Escudero were asked for their reactions.

A follow-up story was aired on Oct. 22 in *24 Oras*. COA named the officials responsible for the unliquidated advances: Inter-Agency Legal Action Group c/o Norberto Gonzales (P5 million), Natural Resources Development Corp. c/o Victor N. Corpus (P10 million in 2005), and Office of the Presidential Advisor for Special Concern c/o Abraham Purunggan (P29 million).

Gonzales, Corpus, and Purunggan were asked for their reactions. Budget Secretary Rolando Andaya said, "It is very clear that no funds are missing. There was just an accounting error. The recommendations of COA were followed."

### No deal!

EVERYTHING SEEMED to be going well for *Bandila's* Oct. 15 newscast until its last news item was aired.

For its final story, *Bandila* reported that one of its anchors and her boyfriend played on ABS-CBN 2's game show *Kapamilya Deal or No Deal*. It showed Korina Sanchez and Sen. Manuel Roxas II waiting for the game show host to open their chosen briefcase.

Winning only P10 in the game, the two promised to donate P75,000 to their chosen beneficiary, the report said.

Shown in the newscast was Sanchez giving Roxas a peck on the cheek during the game show. ■

# MONITOR



Mariannet's family at the funeral mass

BARRY OHAYLAN/HTTP://WWW.DAVAOOTODAY.COM

### An effort to understand

WHILE MOST people blame poverty for the suicide of 12-year-old Mariannet Amper, *GMANews.TV* explained in its Nov. 10 special report other factors why children commit suicide (<http://www.gmanews.tv/story/68149/The-tragic-life-of-Mariannet-Amper-or-why-children-commit-suic>).

*GMANews.TV* interviewed psychiatrist Ma. Luz Casimiro Querubin who noted that even rich kids commit suicide. She said that a suicidal tendency is "developed through time when the child faces long-standing problems within himself and in his immediate environment."

*GMANews.TV* cited the article, "When a Child Wants to Die," by Dr. Agnes Bueno which stated that 100 percent of her patients who wanted to commit suicide are from the class A economic status, 90 percent are Catholics, and 80 percent are unhappy with their relationships.



Malacañang's Kalayaan Hall

HTTP://WWW.FLICKEER.COM/PHOTOS/13118355@NO

### Running the No. 1 household

AMID THE Senate hearings on the 2008 national budget and the controversy behind the alleged bribery in Malacañang, *GMANews.TV* looked into the bills of the most powerful household in the Philippines last Nov. 13.

In the report, "Malacañang household bills: P2.4-B tab on taxpayers in 2006" (<http://www.gmanews.tv/story/68543/Malacañang-household-bills-P2.4-B-tab-on-taxpayers-in-2006>), *GMANews.TV* reported that maintaining the President's official residence costs nearly P196 million a month or P273,148 a day. The report compared the expenses of Malacañang in 2005 and 2006 and recalled the launch of austerity measures by the President herself through Administrative Order 103. The report said Malacañang is still one of the most expensive households to maintain.

On Nov. 15, *GMANews.TV* also reported on the travel expenses and "donations" of the Office of the President that amounted to P40 million and P35 million a month, respectively. ■



Reporters and photographers crowd around the casket of Amper (top), leaving little space for the family to grieve (right).

Photos by BARRY OHAYLAN/HTTP://WWW.DAVAO TODAY.COM



to hang herself has left a burn, a reminder of her sad fate.

The contents of Mariannet's diary, a school requirement, and her unsent letter to GMA-7's *Wish Ko Lang* program have been reported so often and have laid bare what had once been a little girl's private musings about her misfortune.

The family's impoverished situation is not unique; millions of Filipinos share the same fate. For many people caught in this situation, suicide has become the easy way out, as the tabloids so often scream in their front pages. What is unique in Mariannet's case is the way the government reacted to the story, and how it has brought out the worst in Philippine media.

#### A slap in the face

Nico Alconaba, Mindanao bureau chief of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, never thought the story would provoke such intense reactions when he wrote what he considered a routine news article assigned to him by a Manila editor who had heard about it on the radio. He believes part of the reason for the shock wave was that the story landed on the front page, instantly eliciting a flurry of breast-beating in the national government.

For one thing, Mariannet's suicide was a slap in the face of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's claim that more and more Filipinos are benefiting from her much-vaunted economic policies. It also exposed the unnecessary expenses in public schools that make it difficult for poor children to complete their primary education which is supposed to be free.

The knee-jerk reaction from the government was predictable; officials quickly gave renewed focus on anti-poverty programs and educational projects. In Davao, Alconaba's office received phone calls from readers asking

## Worse than a tragedy MEDIA, POLITICS AND MARIANNET AMPER

■ By Yasmin D. Arquiza

**A**BOUT AN hour before she hanged herself, 12-year-old Mariannet Amper had gone to the factory where her mother worked, wanting to help repack noodles. Every week, her mother and sister-in-law took home an average of P400 as they were paid by the piece and were not yet considered highly skilled. The owner sometimes allowed children to work in the factory after school, and since Nov. 2 was a holiday, Mariannet wanted to help her mother so they could earn more money.

Three weeks after the suicide, her mother Magdalena is still wondering if Mariannet had become distraught after getting a reprimand instead of encouragement for her insistence on working. The night before the incident, she had asked her father, who does not have a regular job, for money for a

school project and had also been denied. Mariannet loved school but was often frustrated because she and her younger brother rarely completed a week without any absence, usually due to lack of fare money. She would rejoice if Friday came around and she realized they had not missed a single day of school that week,

Magdalena recalls.

So why did Mariannet kill herself? Did she feel overwhelmed and helpless in the face of abject poverty? The questions keep haunting Magdalena, as well as thousands of others who have read and seen the story of Mariannet Amper unfold on television, radio, newspapers, the Internet, and even over text messages.

Perched on a leveled piece of land near the top of a hill, the hut where the Amper family lives in Davao City isn't much, their lifestyle more rural than urban. The main door opens into a kitchen, where a dining table also stands on the dirt floor. Another door leads to an inner room with a wooden floor where the family does everything else—entertain themselves, sleep,

**Mariannet's father and two brothers were questioned, with the local media feasting on speculations that the three were possible suspects.**

study, and play. Magdalena points to the wooden beam in the middle of the room where the nylon rope that Mariannet used

how they could send donations to the Amper family, which was stunned by the outpouring of support.

Magdalena sheepishly admitted she could hardly believe the amounts of cash that donors were offering the family. Their long-neglected neighborhood, a warren of houses where farm animals share cramped spaces with the residents, was suddenly swarming with media vehicles. The Amper family had to put up a wooden rail beside the steps dug on the slippery slope going up their *sawali* and nipa hut so that newscaster Vicky Morales could safely climb up when she arrived to shoot Mariannet's story for *Wish Ko Lang*. Mariannet's wake became a roller-coaster of emotions for the family, from grief to bewilderment to gratitude for the blessings they were receiving, even as they lamented that these had come at the cost of losing their youngest daughter.

#### Politicians join the fray

After the funeral of Mariannet on Nov. 10, however, the story shifted dramatically. An article in the next day's issue of the *Inquirer* had a number of quotes from mourners such as "We're also poor but I will not hang myself," which cast a harsh light on the child for taking her own life.

Alconaba explains that the *Inquirer* has a policy of putting out a "good news Sunday" issue, and it just happened that the story came out on that day; hence, they had to put a positive spin on the story. By this time, the media had also realized that the donations to Mariannet's family could inspire copycat suicides among children. The segment of *Wish Ko Lang* on her story ended with the note, "Nais naming ipaabot sa lahat na hindi ipinapayo ng Wish Ko Lang ang paggawa ng desperadong paraan para makuha ang atensiyon ng aming programa (We want everyone to know that *Wish Ko Lang* does not encourage any desperate means of getting the program's attention)."

On the same day that the funeral story came out, Davao City Mayor Rodrigo Duterte appeared on his regular paid broadcast on the local channel of ABS-CBN. Regular viewers have gotten used to his colorful language on television, with some people even keeping score of the number of times he says "p—ina" and "f—you," says Nikki Gomez, an editorial writer for a local newspaper.

The mayor minces no words when attacking his opponents,



Mariannet's family says goodbye.

the most prominent among them Davao First District Rep. Prospero Nograles. His show last Nov. 11 was particularly virulent, as Nograles had criticized Duterte in the aftermath of Mariannet's suicide. The two politicians traded accusations of inaction on each other's part—Duterte as the city's local chief executive and Nograles as the congressman for the district that includes Ma-a, where the Amper family resides.

Irked by the insinuations, Duterte belatedly ordered an autopsy of the child's body, which had to be exhumed. The order coincided with growing criticisms about the poor quality of national and local governance that has led to severe inequality in Philippine society and extremely harsh conditions such as those experienced by Mariannet's family.

#### A new angle

Alconaba recalled that when he first visited the family, the latter was in favor of autopsy if only to disprove a neighbor's superstitious belief that evil spirits might have taken hold of Mariannet and that her body had been replaced by a banana tree trunk. Such folk beliefs are common in rural areas beset by ill fortune.

When the reporter told the family what an autopsy involved, Mariannet's mother instantly rejected the idea, saying she didn't want her daughter's body to be despoiled. In a meeting with the *Inquirer's* local correspondents after the funeral, Alconaba predicted that a rape angle would most likely surface in the story, given the black eye it had given the government.

True enough, the city medico-legal officer was reported to have found healed lacerations on Mariannet's labia, and the local police chief immediately concluded that the girl had been raped. Mariannet's father and two older brothers were called in for questioning and subjected to a drug test, with the local media feasting on speculations that the three were possible suspects.

#### Worse and worse

The tone of the media coverage worsened by the day—the school denied that it had required a project; there were supposed to be pages from the girl's diary that could have shed light on the suicide, but which had been torn from it; Mariannet's father was accused of being a drunk and a wife beater; the family had supposedly refused to have the girl's body autopsied earlier because they were hiding something; Mariannet's mother was alleged to have a second husband; and so on and so forth. At one point, the police chief even disputed the poverty angle, saying the Ampers were not as poor as other Filipinos.

The family was bewildered by its quick reversal of fortune and the barrage of negative media reports. At one point, Mariannet's father Isabelo recalls, a radio commentator asked him pointblank about his demeanor when he gets drunk and thrust a microphone at him. Although stunned, he protested, "But I am not a drunk!" He complains about reporters who call him early in the morning and repeatedly delve into their private lives, and says that so far, only one radio station has been fair in withholding judgment

about the family. Although he wants to clear his family's reputation, he knows that they are no match against powerful institutions and personalities.

From their sad experience, Mariannet's mother Magdalena is slowly realizing how the media have pounced on their personal tragedy in pursuit of a story, without regard for the feelings of her family. Asserting her dignity amid what she considers unfair coverage, she is protesting the media's news peg that poverty drove her daughter to suicide, saying they still manage to eat three times a day. She does not understand why the government and the media seem intent on destroying her family's reputation, saying they never blamed the government for their misfortune.

A quick look at the news reports will show that, in fact, government officials were quick to take the blame for the suicide themselves. On the rape angle, she says the family believes that Mariannet's fondness for riding bicycles since she was nine years old may have caused the reported lacerations. Since she had no bike of her own, she would often use her brother's bike which was too big for her. This was why one of things she asked from *Wish Ko Lang* was a bike for herself, Magdalena said. She laments that the media did not report this theory, and focused instead on the accusations against the men in her own family.

#### Instant autopsy results

After the autopsy report came out, the media stopped going to the Ampers' house upon Duterte's request to leave the

family alone, Mariannet's father Isabelo says. He is grateful for the reprieve, even as there are still questions that need to be answered. Why was the family not given a copy of the autopsy report? If he had not been challenged by Nograles, would Duterte have ordered an autopsy? How credible were the findings of the city medico-legal officer and the police, given the political motive for the investigation?

One of the aspects that Alconaba finds intriguing about the autopsy report is that the procedure was done in just two hours, and on the same day, city officials immediately concluded that Mariannet had been raped. The girl's brother, Isabelo Amper Jr., who was the only member of the family to witness the autopsy, said he was told it would take some time before the results are released, so they were taken back when the report about the rape came out on the same day.

Both the family and members of the local media like Alconaba and Gomez believe that an independent investigation is needed to find out the truth about Mariannet's suicide. Given the sorry state of Philippine media and government, however, this is not likely to happen. Alconaba sees the rape angle as a convenient win-win solution for both Davao politicians and national officials, as the media has reduced the story to a simplistic equation: 12-year-old girl + sexual abuse = suicide.

Most reporters failed to portray Mariannet as a person. Her mother describes her as a precocious and sensitive child who loved to climb trees, play with babies, and hug little puppies. However, it seems that she was often rebuffed in her eagerness to live life to the fullest. A mourner told Alconaba that Mariannet once chided a neighbor, "Why don't you want me to hold the baby? It's not yours anyway. God gave it to you."

Mariannet often prayed the rosary with her little brother, from whom she was inseparable, and read the Bible when she had nothing to do, her mother says.

When she runs out of theories, Magdalena Amper says she resorts to the simple notion that everyone is given a set time on earth, and perhaps, her daughter's time had come. Why she had to go in such a manner remains a mystery, even as the impact of Mariannet's death on those she left behind may provide clues about her final act on earth. ■

.....  
Yasmin Arquiza is a freelance journalist.

■ By Melanie Y. Pinlac and  
Kathryn Roja G. Raymundo

**M**EDIA'S ROLE has always been to serve the interests of the public. Primarily, the media exist to gather information crucial for understanding the world we live in. But in order to do their job, the media must also ensure their survival as business enterprises.

Here lies the dilemma: how to balance the need for profit and the need to faithfully serve the traditional purpose of delivering the news.

Newspapers need millions of pesos to maintain their operations. With the decline in readership and the soaring costs of printing, many newspaper companies say that the profit they earn from their circulation (sales) is just not enough to cover the cost of operations. That is why many newspapers rely on advertisements to earn extra revenues.

Newspapers, however, also know the risk of relying on advertisements and advertisers. In July 1999, when then President Joseph Estrada asked movie outfits and big corporations to pull out their ads from the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, the press learned how vulnerable it can be.

The *Inquirer's* account manager, Lita Pascual, said advertisements are the primary sources of the newspaper's income. She pointed out that circulation alone is not enough to continue operations. She said there are times when even sales cannot cover printing costs.

The same is true of other newspapers with even smaller circulations than the *Inquirer*. For example, according to *Malaya's* advertising manager Malou Sison, the newspaper needs around P6 million to sustain its monthly operations. The paper depends on advertising for the bulk of its revenues.

Pascual cited *Libre*, a free and tabloid-sized version of the *Inquirer*, to show how important advertisements are in maintaining operations. The cost of printing *Libre* is shouldered by its advertisements, she said.

This explains why newspapers allot about 40 to 60 percent of their space to advertisements. The



Broadcaster Andy Vital dishes out the news from his radio booth.

Photos by LITO OCAMPO

Blurring the line between news and ads

# WORDS FROM THE SPONSORS



Pascual



A station's reach and influence account for its power.

*Inquirer*, for example, dedicates 60 percent of its space to advertisements. The *Manila Bulletin* allots 30 to 40 percent, and *Malaya* and the *Philippine Star*, both 50 percent.

Isagani Yambot, publisher of

the *Inquirer*, explained that a newspaper is a business enterprise as much as it is a public service. He further said that a newspaper needs to earn profit because "if you do not make a profit or just break even or even

**Advertorials can mislead a reader into thinking that what he is reading is news rather than an advertisement.**

lose, very soon you have to fold up." The extra profit could also help newspaper companies in upgrading their facilities and equipment as well as provide salaries for their employees.

#### Getting ads

To assure themselves of income and keep their advertising clients, newspapers then have to offer competitive

rates for ad placements.

Most newspapers usually measure their rates by column inch, with a usual base rate of P330 per column inch. Rates also depend on the date and page of publication as well as the size and color of the advertisements. Other newspapers charge extra to international companies.

A full-page, black-and-white display ad in a broadsheet would cost from P90,000 to P160,000. If colored, prices go up to P162,000 or as much as P284,000.

Newspapers also offer advertisers special supplements. Broadsheets usually have a team of writers and artists for supplements which are supervised by the marketing or advertising department.

According to Rory Page, supplements supervisor of the *Bulletin*, supplements could be



Seva



Palmones



Yambot



Tadeo

supplied ready-made by an advertiser or done as an in-house project by the newspaper. In-house supplements, as in the case of the *Bulletin*, are usually about special holidays or, upon the request of their clients, corporate anniversaries. The price of a special supplement in the *Bulletin* ranges from P315 to P370 per column-centimeter, depending on the day of publication.

The placement of a supplement also depends on its length. If an advertiser wants a pull-out supplement, it will be given a separate section by the paper. But if a supplement is only two or three pages, it would be placed where the client wants it or where the supplements team deems it fit.

Reservations for ad placements are approved by the marketing and advertising departments.

#### Division of power

The content and layout of ads in newspapers are also subjected to the publishing policies of the newspaper. For example, the *Inquirer* states in its advertising policies that "final layout and copy are subject to editorial approval." It also states that the newspaper could "accept/reject advertisements in accordance with the publisher's policies."

There are times when the content of an ad is as good as approved. This is when the ad has already been checked and declared passed by the Advertising Board of the Philippines Inc. (AdBoard), said Pascual.

On the other hand, according to Yambot, non-traditional ads (which consist mostly of text and very often have political contents) are rejected if they are deemed "libelous and not in good taste, or potentially illegal." By illegal Yambot meant those that incite seditious or rebellious acts. These ads are also reviewed by the legal department to make sure that they do not violate any law.

Most newspaper companies



ABS-CBN boasts of its news and current affairs department.

allow their advertising clients to choose where they want their advertisements placed. *Malaya's* Sison said that advertisers usually prefer the premium pages 3, 5, and 7. These pages are supposedly the most accessible to readers.

Often, ads are placed before the editorial department gets to lay out the pages for the news. The same goes for supplements.

Describing the process that goes into apportioning space for ads, Page of the *Bulletin* said, "Editorial? Parang sila 'yung pinaka-endpoint. Maghihintay lang sila... (ng) dummy (mula) dito sa desk namin. Dito magpapa-reserve kami (ng pages)... At the end of the day... kung ano 'yung remaining pages... 'yun na ang gagawin nila (The editorial department is the endpoint. They wait for the dummy from us. Here, we reserve pages for the supplement. At the end of the day, they [editorial] just have to make use of the remaining pages.)"

#### Special requests

The editorial department seldom involves itself in matters

concerning advertising. A newspaper's sales, marketing, or advertising managers handle this. In turn, the advertising department recognizes that it does not have any hold on the editorial.

"Of course, this is a news-driven company," *Bulletin's* Menchu Ambrosio explained. "But sometimes, our clients have requests regarding placements and so we coordinate," she said. If, for example, a client wants an

ad to be in the lifestyle section, "we make sure it will come out in the lifestyle section," she said.

Despite this clear delineation between the jobs of the editorial and advertising staffs, the situation can still get sticky. This is especially so when advertising clients make special requests.

One such request is for the newspaper's reporters to write about their product or cover their product presentations. Ambrosio said that advertisers consider

**Despite the clear delineation between the jobs of editorial and advertising staff, a situation can still get sticky. Advertising clients make "special requests" and editorial staff agree to accommodate them via "advertorials."**

these requests "very normal." The request is channeled through the advertising department or directly asked of the editorial department. She sees nothing wrong with this kind of requests.

"(The advertiser will say) maybe we could invite one of your writers to try our products and maybe write something about it. We do that especially in newspapers that have several sections that cater to different individuals, like restaurants, parents, fashion," she explained.

For the *Inquirer*, Yambot said the editorial department would often let the supplement writers handle these requests. But if reporters are asked to do the stories, they are given the choice to turn down the request. In this case, the request would be referred to another reporter. Or the article would be written by the reporter without his or her byline.

#### Press releases

While the division of responsibility is clear with regard to advertising, the delineation becomes vague when it comes to press releases. There are advertisers who would like to see their press releases used by a newspaper as well. These are in addition to the space the advertiser has bought to promote his product.

According to Ambrosio, when it comes to press releases the job of her department is "just to make sure these would find space in our paper." She added that "the final decision, of course, especially when it comes to press releases, is always with the



Page and Ambrosio of the *Bulletin*

editorial. That is why we have what we call the discretion of the editor."

In a telephone interview, Robert Requentina, assistant metro editor of the *Bulletin*, told *PJR Reports* that they usually use press releases as fillers. Although press releases from major advertisers are given priority over others, there is no assurance they will always be used. Editors also have the prerogative to change the font type and size of a press release to set it apart from editorial material, and cut it down according to the space available.

The newspapers provide specific space for their advertising department. *Malaya's* "People and Events" section, for example, is allotted to advertising. According to Sison, this is where their clients' press releases are usually placed.

#### Advertorials

Meanwhile, the blurring of the line between editorial and advertising matter does not stop with the editorial staff's acceptance of the requests of advertisers. It also involves the publication of what have come to be known as "advertorials."

Advertorials, a combination of "advertisement" and "editorial," usually take the form of news. Some advertisers place their advertorials in special supplements while others are thinly disguised as press releases or even news.

The use of advertorials can mislead a reader into thinking that what he is reading is news rather than an advertisement. For example, last Aug. 10, the *Bulletin* published a "false cover" showing a new anti-dandruff shampoo in the market. The special supplement was disguised as the front page of the issue, complete with the day's weather report and index. The articles on it also used the same font as news reports. The "front page" contained information on the ability of the shampoo to control dandruff. On the other hand, the inside pages featured the fashion show sponsored by the shampoo's company and other features of the product.

For Yambot, there is nothing wrong with advertorials as long as there is a clear distinction between advertisement and news. This is done by changing the layout of advertorial texts or labeling these as such.

The *Inquirer*, for example, labels advertorials as "adv't" or "advertisement" or places these inside light purple borders. Yambot said the newspaper also



Joel Reyes Zobel (right) in dzBB booth

**There are advertisers who would like to see their press releases used by a newspaper as well. These are in addition to the space the advertiser has bought to advertise his product.**

..... makes sure that the font type differs from what is used in the editorial material. Sans serif font types (like the Univers and Humanist font types) are used for advertorials instead of the Times New Roman type used in op-ed and news. The headlines of advertorials are also in sans serif and light purple when in a colored page. If an advertorial consists of several pages (like that of a supplement), the dominant color should also be purple.

Yambot added that advertorials are seldom found in the main section of the *Inquirer* because of lack of space. Pascual also mentioned that the newspaper makes sure that an ad does not attack other products in the market.

#### What about the reader?

Such steps, however, do not lessen the possibility of



Winnie Cordero (middle) and Ariel Ureta of dzMM

misleading the reader. Aside from the fact that many readers do not know about the internal guidelines of a newspaper regarding advertorials, many newspapers do not bother to mark their advertisements.

For example, last Sept. 22, the *Manila Standard Today* published a report, "Boy Abunda's Secrets Revealed," in the entertainment section. The article was packaged as entertainment news and was accompanied by Abunda's photo. But the report was actually an endorsement by Abunda of a corned beef product and its new flavors. The paper gave no indication that it was an advertorial or even a press release.

*Inquirer's* Yambot said there are advertisers or advertising agencies that still try to pass ads as legitimate editorial materials because "they think that the reader prefers to read editorial material, not advertising material. So they try to say to the

reader, 'Hey, this is (editorial) material. Read this,' when in fact it's advertising material."

#### Advertising on radio

Radio stations dzBB, dzMM, and dzRH admit that their revenues come solely from advertisements. Given this fact, does it follow that advertisers influence the kind of news and editorial content aired in the radio programs? How do advertisements affect radio operations?

For the three radio stations, the sales department which handles advertisements works separately from the news and public/current affairs department.

Nori Temblor, officer in charge of dzBB news operations, says, "Walang kinalaman ang marketing sa news content and commentaries ng radio. It's a separate division...may kanyang responsibility (Marketing has nothing to do with radio

news content and commentaries. It's a separate division...we all have different responsibilities)."

R. J. Seva, sales director of GMA Marketing and Productions Inc., clarified that if an advertising client gets involved in a controversy, the station would still report the incident.

Temblor stressed that being an advertiser does not exempt one from the station's policy of upholding fair and balanced reporting. "The (advertising) package doesn't include protection (from a controversy) or praise (for the product)," she said.

DzRH news and public affairs director Andy Vital said it is clear that the sales department should not get involved with the news and editorial department or vice versa. But he observed that there have been cases when the sales department requested special coverage of particular events especially if advertising clients were involved. Although he would have denied the requests, he said he had to do so to appease the clients and management.

Vital said that with the huge number of news events that needs to be reported and with the limited number of reporters the station has, such requests by the sales department are a burden to the news team. To accommodate such requests, certain reporters have to be pulled out from their beats.

Saying that covering events involving advertisers runs counter to what journalists are supposed to do, Vital nevertheless admitted that "Pero pakiusapan... sometimes nato-tolerate sa news department (But it's a request and sometimes this is tolerated in the news department)."

#### Policies

The flagship AM stations of media giants GMA Network and ABS-CBN Broadcasting Co. are dzBB and dzMM, respectively. DzRH, on the other hand, is operated by the Manila Broadcasting Company (MBC).

The published rate card of dzBB shows that a 30-second advertisement costs P25,000. But the station often uses different rates for different advertisers. This is called the negotiated rate.

Seva said, "If you use the rate card to compute the revenues we're getting, you will be misled because very seldom do we use the rate card. Usually, it's the negotiated rate (that we use)."

On the other hand, dzMM uses a broadcast order to place radio advertisements. Emmanuel Tadeo, Manila Radio Division sales head of dzMM, says that the

station follows three time classifications: Prime A, 5 to 10:30 a.m.; Prime B, 4 to 7 p.m.; and Prime C, 10:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Their advertisers prefer the tandem of morning primetime and Prime C which has the usual advertising rate of P22,000.

Meanwhile, dzRH charges P28,000 for every 30-second advertisement on primetime. Morning primetime is from 5 to 10 a.m. and in the afternoon, from 4 to 6 p.m. Placing advertisements in dzRH also means placing ads in two other FM radio stations under MBC. What they have is a network-wide sale.

The three radio stations follow a 70-30 proportion of content to ads. Over the years, this ratio has sustained the operation of the stations.

#### Commercial breaks

Seva said that "from a marketing standpoint, as a salesman, I'd rather have more commercial minutes. But I also understand the importance of what you call the programming load and our responsibility to the listeners...so we have public service also, not just business."

According to Seva, advertisements are limited to 18 minutes per hour. The AdBoard must approve all ads before these are aired. But, he explained, an AdBoard clearance does not guarantee airing; the editorial team of dzBB can choose not to run an ad.

DzMM and dzRH are members of the Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas which limits to a maximum of 15 minutes the commercial load for a one-hour radio program in Metro Manila.

Five commercial gaps are allowed for every hour in dzMM programs. In the case of dzRH, there are usually four commercial breaks per hour, none of which should exceed three minutes. And if there are many advertisements, there may be six breaks per hour.

Occasionally, the radio stations exceed their commercial time limits. Because dzMM and dzRH follow KBP rules, they could be sanctioned. DzBB, a non-member, has to answer only to itself, its clients, and the public.

#### Naku po!

DzBB and dzRH allow their broadcasters and commentators to serve as voice talents for advertisers by reading ads on air. This is known as announcer-on-board (AOB) advertisements.

DzBB broadcasters and commentators are allowed to endorse products as long as the

credibility and integrity of the station "are not sacrificed." According to Seva, the station has very strict policies in the sense that broadcasters and commentators do not deal directly with the advertisers. All advertisements have to go through the marketing department. But in the end, it is still up to the broadcasters and commentators to accept the offer or not. If they do accept, the station negotiates with the advertisers.

DzBB and GMA-7 broadcaster Mike Enriquez is one of the top choices of advertisers to endorse their products. While other broadcasters merely read the advertisements, Enriquez "personalizes" his AOBs. He inserts a few quips and adds the famous term of endearment of his home network, "Kapuso."

Monitoring the 8 to 10 a.m. programs of the three stations from Sept. 19 to 21 and Sept. 24 to 27, *PJR Reports* observed that even when Enriquez was on leave during this period, his AOBs were still aired over dzBB.

This is an example of an AOB: "Mga kapuso, si Mike Enriquez po ito. Aba, hindi n'yo ba alam na tayong mga Pilipino kilala bilang isa sa pinakamalinis na tao sa mundo. Ho? Insulto 'yung mapagsabihan tayo na hindi tayo naliligo. Naku po! Parang gumuho na 'yung mundo natin, 'di ba? Kilala tayong naliligo hindi lang araw-araw, eh 'yung iba nga sa 'tin dalawang beses pa. Kaya, mga misis, sinisiguro nating may shampoo ang pamilya ninyo, hindi ba? O eto, mga kapuso, mas abot kaya na ngayon ang (name of the product) shampoo. P3.50 na lang. Three-fifty. P3.50 bawat sachet. Yung ibang shampoong mabibili n'yo d'yan, P5. Pero ang (name of the product), ngayon P3.50 na lang po, mga kapuso. Kaya mas marami kayong mabibili. Ah sigurado, mga kapuso, 'di kayo mauubusan sa mga bata, sa lahat ng miyembro ng pamilya. May shampoo na kayong panligo. Araw-arawin n'yo 'yan para ang buhok n'yo parating malusog, parating shiny, parating soft. Mga kapuso, hindi ba? Bandilang Pinoy ang itataguyod natin, (name of the product) shampoo para malusog ang buhok n'yo parati. Buong pamilya, P3.50 na lang per sachet, mga kapuso. 'Yan po ang suggested retail price (Friends, this is Mike Enriquez. Do you know that we Filipinos are known to be among the cleanest people in the world? It would be an insult if anyone were to tell us that we don't bathe! Our world would come crashing down, wouldn't it? We are known to bathe not just everyday but even twice a day. So, housewives, you make sure



GMA-7's bombastic anchor cum product endorser, Mike Enriquez

that there's shampoo for your family, don't you? So here now, friends, is a shampoo [names the brand] that you can afford. It's only P3.50. Three-fifty per sachet. Other shampoo brands cost P5. But [name of the product] costs only P3.50. That's why you can buy more of it. There will be enough for your children and all members of the family. You will now have shampoo for bathing. Use it everyday so your hair is always healthy, always shiny, always soft. Isn't this so, friends? Let's support Filipino products, [names shampoo brand] for healthy hair all the time. For the whole family, only P3.50 per sachet, friends. That's the suggested retail price."

For dzMM, Tadeo says ABS-CBN 2 has a rule that prohibits broadcasters and commentators of the news and current affairs department from endorsing any product except their shows, the network, for public service, and for "the national interest." Entertainment anchors, however, may advertise. Talents, except for news broadcasters and commentators, may voice the AOBs which are taped or pre-produced.

#### Questions, questions

Does a broadcaster put his credibility and his station on the line when he endorses a product? Can conflicts of interest arise when broadcasters and commentators are allowed to advertise products? Are news broadcasters and commentators not bound to the principles of truth-telling, fairness, and balanced reporting when they endorse a product? Does the audience separate anchors and newscasters from their personalities when they are not

### Does the audience separate anchors and newscasters from their personalities when they are not reporting the news?

reporting the news?

Seva sees nothing wrong with broadcasters and commentators endorsing products. He says Enriquez has been doing it for six or seven years now and his programs are still among the top-rating shows of the station. For Seva, Enriquez's numerous endorsements only mean that he has credibility and this works to their advantage.

But dzMM's Tadeo thinks otherwise. "They (ads) can be biased. At the same time, they cannot maintain the integrity of the newscasters... If you endorse, definitely you favor the (product) you are endorsing," he said.

DzMM station manager Angelo Palmones explains that broadcasters and commentators especially of the news and current affairs department should observe a high level of professionalism because they owe this to the public. He said that using the credibility of broadcasters to sell a product is a way of manipulating the audience and taking advantage of the latter.

When advertisements use testimonials, these become effective when they use credible persons like news providers.

Palmones said the audience could not easily see or could not even know that these testimonials were paid for and scripted to serve the interest of a client. He said this situation could eventually lead to a possible conflict of interest if a product being endorsed is later found to be defective or problematic.

In addition, broadcasters and commentators are paid talent fees for AOBs and endorsements. Vital said this is why managements allow their broadcasters and commentators to advertise. "It's also an additional income for announcers," he admitted.

#### Spot the difference

Radio stations make use of sound effects, banter, station IDs, and lead-ins to introduce commercial gaps and get back to the news/commentary proper. But sometimes, these are not applied in the case of advertorials.

Seva said that dzBB is careful when it comes to advertorials. He said the station airs scripted announcements and endorsements but not news items disguised to promote products. He added that it is also the policy of the station not to accommodate paid interviews whether for political or commercial reasons.

But in the one-week period when *PJR Reports* monitored the station, dzBB's morning traffic report seemed to be a paid segment to promote a five-year warranty by a car company. After the traffic report, the broadcaster would do an AOB advertisement of this product before signing off.

Meanwhile, Palmones explained that in dzMM, advertorials usually appear in interviews and plugs. He said advertorials like these go through the sales department and the editorial board composed of the unit managers of the station where the stories, concepts, and scripts to campaign for clients are developed. He added that these plugs and interviews are not aired in the news programs. He said anchors can only provide a lead-in and branding should come from the interviewees.

Vital said that advertorials appear once or twice a week in the news and commentary programs of dzRH. Everything in the news and public affairs is monitored. If problems are spotted, the station calls the attention of whoever is responsible for the mistake. The editorial team tries to talk things out with the sales department or the person involved so that in the future, the advertisement could be put in its rightful place—the commercial block. ■

■ By Booma Cruz, Junette B. Galagala, and Hector Bryant L. Macale  
With reports from Melanie Y. Pinlac and Kathryn Roja G. Raymundo

**R**EVIEWING THE video footage that she took while talking to a Magdalo soldier on the balcony in the Manila Peninsula during the siege, *Probe* producer Zanneth Tafalla froze for a few seconds and gasped. She called her colleagues to look at the tape.

On the television screen, the soldier—who was wearing the red and white armband that was the symbol of the Magdalo group—was calmly telling Tafalla, “*Umiwas na kayo* (Save yourselves).” Until the producer reviewed the tape, she did not notice that a red dot from the gunsight of a sniper stationed somewhere was being aimed between the eyes of the soldier who was asking her to leave.

If the sniper had pulled the trigger, Tafalla knew that she would never get over the horror of seeing a man killed right in front of her.

Tafalla and about a hundred members of media were inside the Manila Peninsula when former Navy Lieutenant Senior Grade Antonio Trillanes IV, now an elected senator, and Army Brig. Gen. Danilo Lim led a few dozen soldiers in calling for the withdrawal of public support from President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. Many other journalists covered from outside the hotel.

“It seemed like a regular coverage... until the intermittent gunshots (were fired) and the tear gas (was lobbed). You didn’t fear for your life when you were holding your camera. But there was tension all throughout,” said Hera Sanchez, senior producer-reporter of *Probe*.

Sanchez was stationed at the hallway of the second floor where Trillanes, Lim, and their supporters were holed up in a room monitoring the situation.

#### Before the storm

Everyone wanted to get the news and to send it out to a citizenry that was at least curious about this latest event in the unstable politics of the Republic. Whenever Trillanes or Lim went out of the room, there would be a mad scramble for any word from the two rebel leaders, who were, however, quite parsimonious with their statements. The two rarely left their room, whetting media’s appetite all the more for the latest developments.

The civilian personalities who were with Trillanes and Lim thus became the media’s alternative sources. Some who were just too willing to be interviewed gave kilometeric statements. But the Magdalo soldiers were mostly silent.

Journalists asked them anything and everything they could think of: Are you ready to die? What’s your name? Do you have a message for your family?

Sometimes, without asking any question at all, reporters would just shove a microphone in front of an officer or a personality in the hope of getting a statement. Most of the time, however, their questions were met with a shrug or a glance at a higher officer.

No doubt, competition was alive among the reporters and photographers at the Peninsula. Television reporters seized every opportunity to bring the news live from any corner of the hotel. When the central news desk of one network hesitated to interrupt the day’s regular programming to make way for the breaking story, a reporter snapped: “No, you have to put me on right now!”

A soldier carefully aims his gun at the hotel and its unexpected guests.



## A confrontation on basic issues THE SIEGE C



(Clockwise from left, top) PNP Brig. Gen. Geary Barias is disallowed by Trillanes’s men from seeing him; a brooding Sen. Antonio Trillanes IV is caught on camera in the Pen’s lobby, with space for more; and a tear-gassed 81-year-old Bishop Julio Labayen (in white), along with Fr. Robert Reyes (face partly covered), is escorted out.



Policemen and the press take shelter beside a GMA-7 van during the siege while Magdalo soldier Navy Lt. James Layug (right photo) watches steadily inside the hotel.



basic issues

# GE OF THE PEN

## Tears and fears

A CNN reporter gave his network a blow-by-blow account of what was happening from a fire exit to which media members had withdrawn to avoid the blinding tear gas that had wafted to the hotel's upper lobby. Every so often, the CNN journalist would open the door and take a peek at what was going on inside the hotel. Every time he did, the other journalists

with him would grumble because of the irritating smoke that assaulted them.

No one had any idea how long the standoff would last. Everyone braced for a long weekend of non-stop work when Trillanes and company ignored the 3 p.m. deadline set by the Philippine National Police. Hungry reporters feasted on the Skyflakes crackers that the rebels shared with them.



The elegant ambience of the hotel is literally broken by a tank that rammed through the entrance.

Photos by LITO OCAMPO

They drank water from hotel taps.

Before government troopers lobbed tear gas into the hotel and stormed the place, Philippine National Police (PNP) chief Gen. Avelino Razon had called up ABS-CBN's Ces Drilon to convince her to pack up and go. The television anchor told Razon that she was staying put. At about the same time, Susan Enriquez of GMA-7 was instructed by her bosses to immediately pull out of the place. Several Filipino correspondents of wire agencies were given the same orders.

"Bakit naman ako paiipit d'yan? Naku, istorya lang 'yan (Why should I let myself be trapped there? It's only a story)," said a veteran reporter for an international agency who sneaked out of the hotel minutes before he was

informed by his office about the planned assault.

Outside the hotel, a group of photographers near the Peninsula driveway chided their colleagues who were rushing out and scampering for safety.

"O, nasaan na ang tapang n'yo ngayon? Akala ko pa naman ang talapang n'yo (So, where's your courage now? I thought you people were brave)," a photographer shouted, his voice almost drowned by automatic gunfire from the tank along the driveway. His companions laughed as they clicked their cameras.

## The best during the worst

Like any tragedy the media have covered, the Peninsula siege

brought out the good and bad sides of the press. Some reports were misleading. For example, one reporter claimed that his colleague, a female television reporter, was among those arrested by the police. The truth was that his colleague just got into the bus going to Bicutan so she could interview the journalists who had been picked up by the police for "processing."

But there were many anecdotes about how competition was set aside for the common good. Reporters and photographers from different media outfits looked after one another before and during the assault. Packed like sardines, journalists nearest the news source didn't mind holding a rival station's microphone or giving a nameless colleague a copy of the rebels' statement.

"I was so thirsty and was looking for water. A cameraman gave me water. I didn't know who he was. But,



Trillanes; a brooding Sen. Antonio Trillanes IV is caught on camera; three tanks and dozens of policemen easily fit into the lobby, along with Fr. Robert Reyes (face partly covered), is escorted out by policemen from the hotel.



All geared up for her own battle, a female journalist pauses to rest.



From left, Ateneo's Chay Hofleña, GMA-7's Malou Mangahas, and KBP's Rey Hulog in a forum at the University of the Philippines.

of course, when pandemonium broke loose and there was the tear gas, it was every man for himself," said Sanchez.

Footage of the siege showed some members of the press calling out the names of their colleagues from time to time just to see how each one was doing. Later, they helped one another in resisting police attempts to handcuff them.

Many of the arresting officers were courteous, but some were rough and disrespectful. A police officer tried to grab and confiscate the camera of *Probe* producer Lucille Sodipe, but she fought back. Another policeman politely intervened before the situation could turn ugly.

At the Manila Pen driveway, a police officer accosted *Probe* producer Macky Fernando and demanded the tapes that had been passed on to her by fellow producer Kala Reyes, who was able to slip away from the first batch of media people who were escorted out of the hotel. The officer got a blank tape.

As the drama was about to end, policemen picked up two journalists for "processing" from the first batch of media practitioners out of the hotel. Tafalla was one of them. With two other co-producers, Tafalla argued with the police until they let her go. Other members of the press were not as lucky. Handcuffed and escorted by the police, they boarded a bus that was to take them to Camp Bagong Diwa.

By any measure, it was no ordinary day.

#### What was it?

The Manila Peninsula event caught the media by surprise. Throughout the coverage and even afterwards, journalists were not even sure what to call it.

The *Manila Bulletin* and *Manila Standard Today* used the terms "coup d'etat," "rebellion," "mutiny," "standoff," "siege,"

"putsch," and "takeover" to refer to the incident. *The Manila Times* described it as the "Peninsula siege," "a failed mutiny," "the failed Makati revolt," "a failed rebellion," and "a caper."

*The Philippine Star* referred to the event as a "coup" in its headline. Most of the time in its stories, however, the *Star* described it as "Trillanes' caper." The *Philippine Daily Inquirer* called it a rebellion and a coup attempt "staged amid fine dining."

The *Inquirer* sought the views of University of the Philippines (UP) political science professor Felipe Miranda and political analyst Jose Abueva on the correct term to be used. Miranda said it was a "critical situation" because the impact "would not be so much on the civilian population but on those within the military."

Abueva said that what Trillanes and Lim did could be considered a mutiny "in a sense" because the two were still members of the military. He added that it cannot be considered a coup d'etat "since a coup required an armed attempt to remove an official." Miranda agreed, saying that a coup involves "sudden and swift action." He noted that both Lim and Trillanes "had repeatedly been voicing their grievances and their call for the resignation of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo for some time now."

The *Inquirer* also provided readers with definitions of a coup ("a sudden and decisive action in politics, especially one resulting in a change of government illegally or by force"), a putsch ("a plotted revolt or attempt to overthrow a government especially one that depends upon suddenness and speed"), a mutiny ("concerted disobedience or seditious action by persons in military or naval service, or by sailors on commercial vessels" and may range "from a combined refusal to obey orders to active



National Press Club president Roy Mabasa files a complaint against the police for curtailing press freedom during the siege of the Pen.



From left, ABS-CBN's Gin de Mesa, Luchi Cruz-Valdes, Charie Villa, and Maria Ressa attend a dialogue between the KBP and the PNP.

revolt or going over to the enemy on the part of two or more persons") and rebellion ("open, organized, and armed resistance to one's government or ruler. In the most general sense, a refusal to accept authority and may include a range of action and behaviors from civil disobedience to a violent organized attempt to destroy established authority").

Writing for *BusinessMirror* five days after the *Inquirer* report on the term usage, *Philippine Graphic* editor Inday Espina Varona also reviewed the terms being used to describe the event. She decided it was a coup attempt, albeit a failed one.

"About the only element missing in this most recent episode of military adventurism was swift and decisive action," Varona wrote. "Only because the renegade soldiers failed to muster this are Filipinos lucky enough to call their action a coup attempt."

#### Media as the news

The name of the event was not

the only problem with the Manila Peninsula story. The incident started out as a protest action by Trillanes, Lim, and their followers, with the police coming in to quell the disturbance. By late afternoon, however, it had become a press freedom issue.

The Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR), the National Press Club, the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines, and the Philippine Press Institute denounced the arrest of the media members. In its statement, the CMFR said, "The arrests can only be interpreted as one more attempt, together with libel suits and other harassments, to intimidate the Philippine press into either minimal or less aggressive reporting of political events. Media practitioners will remember this incident well, and some are likely to be affected enough to soften future coverage."

The police insisted that members of media leave the

hotel so they could do their job of arresting the mutineers. The press—or those of them who chose to stay—said they, too, had a job to do and that was to cover the news.

Days after the incident, the role of the police and the press would continue to be the subject of debate. A dialogue was held on Dec. 5 between the Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas (KBP) and representatives of media outfits on one hand and the PNP and government officials on the other, supposedly to draw up rules in covering crisis situations such as the one that happened at the Manila Pen.

The meeting ended without any agreement. The media asserted their duty to report the news as they saw fit.

KBP executive director Rey Hulog said in a subsequent forum at UP Diliman that the government believed that the media was obstructing justice since the police were kept from serving a warrant on the "mutineers". The PNP claimed that it was only trying to separate participants and non-participants in the crime which it described as sedition and said that the arrest of media practitioners was part of standard operating procedure.

That procedure, as stated in the PNP's manual, was to gather, process, and question civilians in crime scenes to check their involvement. The PNP also said that the media had been sufficiently warned to vacate the Peninsula. The arrest of the journalists should therefore not be blamed on the police since they were instructed to detain whoever was left in the hotel, the PNP said.

Hulog said the media, on the



The PNP, led by Brig. Gen. Barias, is surrounded not by rebels but by the media.

other hand, insisted that they were only doing their jobs, were not participants in the crime, and should not have been arrested in the first place. Media representatives added that the decision to leave or stay should be left to the journalists. Furthermore, the journalists said that police procedures—which included arbitrary arrests and curtailment of the public's right to information and the freedom of the press—constituted a violation of constitutional rights.

#### Find a compromise

Ateneo de Manila University instructor and journalist Chay Florentino Hofileña—who was among the panelists at the UP forum—said there were three actors in the Peninsula incident: the media which focused on the public's right to know; the police which wanted to ensure public safety; and the military that was keen on maintaining democracy and securing the state.

"If you look at the three interests, they are all equally legitimate. (They are) not necessarily competing interests.... If all three are equally important and legitimate, who takes precedence? Which is the most important value that should have prevailed there?.... Could there have been a possible compromise among the three actors and the three interests so that each would allow the other to do their job?" Hofileña said.

She added that the police request was legitimate and that there should be a balance of interests. The press, she said, shouldn't always get what it wants since reporters are also citizens after all.

Hofileña added that, "We also saw that the media took center stage at a certain point... The danger of reporters or journalists being part of the story is that they lose objectivity. (They) become partisan... no longer an objective

observer and reporter of what is going on."

She also said that the press became distracted and Trillanes was forgotten in the coverage. "And we all shifted to press freedom; that again is very dangerous... It's not the media's job to report on itself," she said.

Another panelist in the UP forum, Malou Mangahas, GMA-7 vice-president for research and content development, said, "I would not discount the fact that the police probably went overboard when it handcuffed the people of the media who went out of the main gate. But it must be stressed as well that there were people who came out from the other side or doors of the hotel who were not prevented from leaving and they're also journalists."

Stressing the importance of independence for media, Mangahas said that while being an eyewitness is the best means to cover a story, it is not the only path.

Hofileña also said that the adversarial relationship between the government and the press is already an old paradigm. "If this country is to move forward...there are instances when there would have to be critical engagement, when media and government will have to work together because at times, their interests and agenda do converge," she said.

#### No to compromise

Vergel Santos, chair of *BusinessWorld's* editorial board and a CMFR board member, told *PJR Reports* there was no need for media to reach a compromise with the authorities regarding news coverage. "The military should strategize around us and we should strategize around them," he said.

He warned that "if you show any sign of compromise, or willingness to compromise, *tapos ka na* (you're dead)."

Santos did not share Hofileña's concern that media had become the story in the Manila Pen incident. He said, "It's not that we wanted to be the story. We became the story because we were put in that situation."

Replying to the observation that an adversarial relationship between government and media constituted an old paradigm, Santos asked, "So now we must be conspirators?" He said that whenever journalists decide to cover an event, they do so with full knowledge of the risks.

Santos also dismissed Mangahas's claim that there had been journalists who were allowed by the police to leave the hotel. "She missed the point," he said, adding "they should have let all media go."

CMFR deputy director Luis V. Teodoro said the concept of media's "critical engagement" with the government should take into account the current context in which the press operates.

"What kind of government do we have in the first place? Is this government willing to listen to reason?" he asked.

"Critical engagement" itself is not a new concept. "It was at the heart of the martial law regime's effort to coopt the media into becoming its collaborators. The situation today is in many ways similar to the martial law period—which means that critical engagement can only lead to collaboration," Teodoro said.

Journalists should ask themselves whether this can be applied in countries like the Philippines "where the government has been systematically assaulting press freedom for years, and constantly looking for an excuse to shrink the space in which journalists can freely function," he said.

Teodoro agreed with what Gil Santos, former publisher and editor with the Philippine Journalists Inc. group of newspapers, told *PJR Reports*: that one cannot compel journalists to adopt an inflexible set of guidelines for covering the news. "No two events are exactly alike," Santos said.

"In any case, the newperson's actions and reactions on the spot is purely his own judgment call. He alone will be the one responsible for his own safety or survival," Santos continued.

Whatever decision a journalist makes, he "must be loyal to the truth and he must get the story," said Gil Santos. "If he cannot do that, then he has failed in his job and as far as I am concerned, that is enough reason to fire him," he said. ■



## LESSONS FROM COVERING A CRISIS

■ By Ellen Tordesillas

**A** MID THREATS that reporters who had covered the Manila Peninsula incident would be charged with obstruction of justice, the joke went around that Ces Drilon of ABS-CBN should be charged with "wearing improper attire".

Drilon was wearing three-inch high heels when she went to the Makati City Hall that morning for the hearing on the case of coup d'etat against the Magdalo officers led by Sen. Antonio Trillanes IV and Brig. Gen. Danilo Lim of the Scout Rangers. She said she had flip-flops in her van but it was only after walking for more than 30 minutes and reaching Paseo de Roxas that she was able to change footwear.

There were more lessons for journalists to remember besides wearing sensible shoes.

Always bring not just one ball pen but a stack of them. One reporter lost his only ball pen. I lent him my extra pen. Later on, I too couldn't find my pen among the garbage in my bag. A Manila Pen waiter had to lend me his.

Another important lesson: always bring cell phone chargers and a laptop electrical cord. Better yet, like reporters from the international news agencies who are used to covering conflict situations, make sure you have more than one cell phone. *Malaya* reporter Ashzel Hachero and other reporters exhausted their cell phone batteries by early afternoon. They were forced to queue for the hotel phones which took them away from the coverage site.

From Makati City Hall to Manila Pen, it was more or less a 45-minute walk. More reporters and photographers had caught up with the march. It was raining and everyone was getting wet. I

noticed that someone with a blue umbrella was interviewing Trillanes. Photographers began swearing as her umbrella blocked our view of the Magdalo leader. I took a closer look at her. It was Tress Reyes of *Nikkei Shimbun*. She had to leave her coverage at the NEDA office to rush to where the action was. Having an umbrella on a rainy day is often a good idea, but when covering a coup, one had better be prepared to get wet.

While it was sad that police arrogance showed in the way that media members were handcuffed, there were acts of kindness by some members of the police force.

Policemen who arrested Trillanes and Lim and made their way through the throng of media members were surprisingly polite as they said, "*Mawalang-galang po* (Please excuse us)." Some reports later said that National Capital Region Police Director Geary Barias hit the senator, but we did not see that.

When we got to the lobby, the police gave us plenty of bottled water with which to ease the sting of the tear gas. Some even poured water on us. They also told us to keep low on the floor where the tear gas fumes were not as bad.

A final lesson: in tough situations, be prepared for some rough play—and hope for random acts of kindness. ■

Ellen Tordesillas is a *Malaya* columnist.

## Christmas time in the newsroom

# A SEASON OF GIVING—AND ACCEPTING

■ By Junette B. Galagala

**W**HO DOESN'T like Christmas? In this country, everyone celebrates the occasion—rich and poor, soldier and rebel, religious and non-believer. In this season, there is a pause in nearly every activity, a truce in every battle, an exception to every rule.

Rules like giving gifts to journalists.

In the Journalist's Code of Ethics (which was formulated by the Philippine Press Institute), Rule No. 5 states: "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."

In a culture where Christmas means gift-giving, does this rule get a little bent during the holiday season? Like the election period, Christmas is also the time of year when news sources blatantly woo the press—which leads to an interesting question: how do journalists and their media offices respond?

Ding Marcelo, sports editor of the *Manila Bulletin*, says that during the holidays, the *Bulletin* is typically deluged with gifts—from friends, clients, and politicians—"in the spirit of the season." As a media practitioner, he says that he looks at such practices with skepticism. He notes that while it is almost impossible to know what happens in the beats gift-wise, editors reprimand reporters when they receive complaints about reporters asking for gifts.

Asking for gifts is a no-no, despite the season of cheer. But how about accepting?

The answers would vary. Marcelo says that money is either

sets, which clearly do not fall under the latter, are returned to the sender.

A *Bulletin* reporter says that the paper has not been explicit about its policies on gifts; there is no overt ban. Reporters are supposed to exercise their own judgment. Since gifts are given to the reporters in their beats rather than in their newspaper offices, such judgment is freely exercised. In the hierarchy of prohibitions, she adds that the *Bulletin* management is not as particular about journalists accepting gifts as it is about employees writing for other publications.

*Philippine Daily Inquirer* correspondent Tonette Orejas makes sure that the gifts she receives are passed on to others, such as the Malaya Lolas, an organization of World War II victims of sexual exploitation. These gifts include rice, wine, cake, and clothes. She says she refuses money and expensive gifts, like DVD players.

### Asking for gifts is a no-no, despite the season of cheer. But how about accepting?

returned to the giver or donated to charity. Gifts, while generally discouraged by management, are accepted when these are small, inexpensive items. Television



Orejas

LITO OCAMPO



[HTTP://BLOGS.IONA.COM/NEWCOMER](http://blogs.iona.com/newcomer)

Three years ago, however, Orejas says she was shocked by the presents that flooded the *Inquirer* main office lobby. There were television sets and refrigerators. However, she points out that she doesn't receive tokens, even T-shirts, from the *Inquirer* during Christmas.

The *Philippine Star* has not responded to requests for an interview by *PJR Reports*.

Karl Wilson, Manila bureau chief of Agence France Presse (AFP), says that while tokens like pens or wine are accepted during the holidays, the office draws a line when it comes to more expensive gifts like a five-star hotel accommodation.

No gifts are given to news sources but the AFP would send T-shirts to their stringers, clients, and newspaper editors.

The *Daily Manila Shimbun* managing editor Yoshihiko Sakai says that as early as November, his office is already preparing Christmas gifts for their contacts. It is important,

he says, that reporters are able to establish good relationships with their contacts to ensure the continuous flow of information.

The company asks its reporters to submit a list of their contacts or sources. The reporters then determine the type of token that will be given to their contacts. Class A gifts, the nicest, are usually umbrellas or planners; Class B are T-shirts or windbreakers; and Class C are ballpens marked with the company's name. Other gifts are lighters and pencils. Sakai notes that these giveaways are also given to their employees. He, too, receives tokens, usually an airline calendar.

The *Daily Manila Shimbun* does not have a written rule on accepting gifts but Sakai makes it clear to his reporters that they should not accept money.

The *Associated Press*, *Reuters*, and *Tokyo Shimbun* declined to comment on their practices concerning giving or receiving gifts. ■

Gains and setbacks in the fight for media freedom

# DO FEWER DEATHS MEAN A FREER PRESS?

■ By Jose Bimbo F. Santos

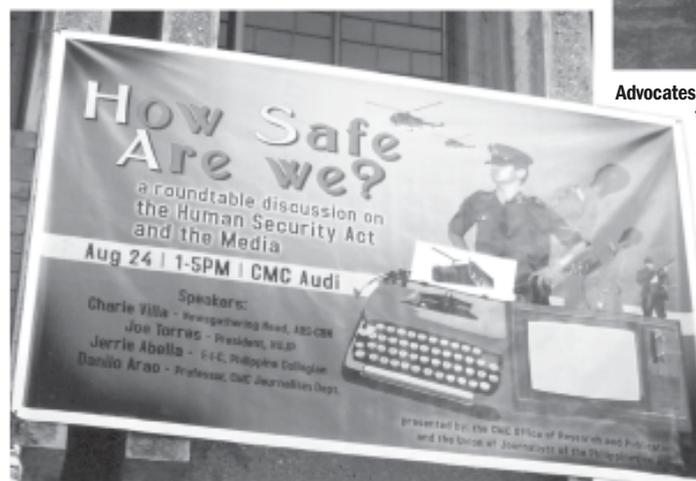
**T**HE STATE of press freedom in the Philippines has been mostly evaluated through the lens of statistics, specifically on the number of journalists killed.

When the Philippines sprang to international notoriety in 2005—after being tagged by various international media watchdogs Committee to Protect Journalists, Reporters Without Borders (RSF), and the International Federation of Journalists as the second most dangerous place for journalists next to Iraq—it was because of a spike in the number of journalists killed. From the count of the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility's (CMFR) Freedom Watch desk, the number of journalists and media practitioners killed in the line of duty more than tripled in 2003. From two in the year 2002, those who were killed in the line of duty rose to seven. The number increased to eight in the year 2004, and went down to five the following year. Although the numbers fluctuate, such scale of journalist murders has not been

seen in the country since 1980s. In the year 2007, one journalist has so far been killed in the line of duty as compared to six in 2006. Would this be sufficient reason to say that the state of press freedom in the country has improved? The Philippines, in fact, moved 14 places higher in the press freedom index of the Paris-based Reporters Without Borders (RSF) this year, placing 128th from last year's 142nd. Under the classification, "Unexpected Improvements," RSF noted that



Advocates of press freedom deliver a message big enough for the government to see. Photos by LITO OCAMPO



the improvement of the Philippines' ranking was because there were "fewer murders than in previous years. And President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's associates brought fewer defamation actions against journalists and

news media." So was it a good year then for press freedom in the Philippines?

**Security conscious**  
The significant decrease in the number of journalists killed in the line of duty this year is an unquestionable improvement in the press freedom situation in the country. But aside from the slay attempts and libel suits filed against journalists, there have also been a number of attacks and threats against press freedom in

**A forum is held to discuss the new law.**



Families of slain journalists link arms to oppose the killings.

other forms.

National Union of the Journalists of the Philippines chair Jose Torres Jr. said that it would be “superficial” to say that the state of press freedom this year has improved based solely on the decrease in the number of journalists killed. This, alone, he said “does not reflect the real situation.”

“Even though there were fewer killed this year, there are still a lot of threats and harassments against the media,” Torres said.

For *BusinessWorld* editorial board chair Vergel Santos, it would be a “misreading” to equate press freedom with the number of journalists killed.

This year, a correspondent from a national daily became the target of a slay attempt, a telling indicator of how brazen the killers have become as attacks in the past have mostly been against community journalists in the provinces.

Delfin Mallari Jr., Southern Luzon correspondent of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, was shot and wounded by an unidentified gunman riding pillion on a motorcycle last April 19. Johnny Glorioso, publisher of the community newspaper *Ang Diyaryo Natin*, was with Mallari at the time of the incident but was not hurt.

“The prevailing sentiment, I think, is that if it can happen to someone from the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, the country’s leading newspaper, it can surely happen to journalists from any of the lesser-known papers and community newspapers,” Luz Rimban, freelance journalist and journalism instructor at the Ateneo de Manila University, wrote in her blog *Journ Classroom* shortly after the slay attempt on Mallari.

After the attempt on his life, Mallari noted a “chilling effect” on the press community as news reports and commentaries

### ‘The truer measure of press freedom is freedom of information.’

became more subdued. Media practitioners also became more “security conscious,” avoiding traveling alone as much as possible.

“Up to now there is still the climate of impunity because not many of the killers have been punished,” Mallari said.

Then, after surviving the ambush, Mallari, and Glorioso were both sued for libel by the man whom they suspected of being behind the attack.

Quezon Province Gov. Rafael Nantes sued Mallari and Glorioso, saying that both journalists had maliciously tagged him as a drug lord as well as the mastermind in the attempted murder.

“I don’t really know how to explain it. It can happen only in the Philippines,” Mallari said of the libel suit lodged against him and Glorioso.

A month after the attempt on the two, television reporter Ricky Carandang and radio reporter Noel Alamar of the ABS-CBN news network both received death threats in Lanao del Norte after reporting election irregularities in that region.

According to Carandang, his guides in the province received calls from people inquiring about his whereabouts. Armed men, whom Carandang suspected of being members of private armies, were said to be roaming the province looking for him and Alamar.

#### Legal threats

In addition, two radio broadcasters were also sent to



The list of slain journalists becomes even longer.

prison this year after being convicted of libel.

Alex Adonis, who used to be a commentator for dxMF *Bombo Radyo*, was arrested on Feb. 19 and sent to jail for libel while Alegre, who used to report for dzRH Bicol, was arrested last April after being convicted for a 10-year-old libel case.

Lawyer Harry Roque will file an information with the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Committee to bring attention to the plight of Adonis while another lawyer, Theodore Te, will appeal the case of Alegre to the Supreme Court (SC). Davao First District Rep. Prospero Nograles filed the libel complaint against Adonis after the latter reported that the congressman was seen running naked in a Manila hotel after being chased by the husband of his alleged paramour. Nograles has denied the allegation.

Alegre, meanwhile, was convicted on a libel complaint for a report he did about an official in an electric cooperative.

Aside from libel threats, the Human Security Act (HSA), signed into law by President Arroyo last March 6, is the object of journalists' criticism for its dire implications for the press.

"The assault on press freedom has been institutionalized this year in our country through the passage of the Human Security Act which has huge implications for journalists," Torres said.

Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez himself told reporters last July that HSA permits the wiretapping of journalists.

Aside from the possibility of being wiretapped, media could also be crippled by the HSA through the sequestration or freezing of one's assets on mere suspicion of violating that law.

Aside from local media and human rights groups that condemned and filed petitions at the SC, Martin Scheinin, United Nations special rapporteur for human rights and counterterrorism, also issued a statement six days after HSA's passage. Scheinin stated that "many provisions of the Human Security Act are not in accordance with international human rights standards," and urged the government to amend, if not repeal, the HSA.

#### Access to information

An executive order (EO) issued by Mrs. Arroyo last April 20 has also further restricted media and public access to government information. Through EO 608, a National Security Clearance System has



UN's Philip Alston lends his voice to the clamor for government action on the killings.

been created which will "protect and ensure the integrity and sanctity" of classified information against "enemies of the state."

EO 608 directs "all government departments, agencies and offices to implement security measures that will protect and ensure the integrity and sanctity of classified or sensitive materials or information they have access to or (are) in their possession (of)."

Under the EO, unauthorized use or disclosure of classified documents will be considered a "grave offense" and shall be punishable in accordance with civil service rules and regulations.

Santos, also a CMFR board member, said that suppression of freedom of information, more than the killing of journalists or filing of libel suits, is an indicator of the extent to which press freedom is being violated.

"The truer measure of press freedom really is freedom of information," he said, adding, "It seems to me that the setting is such that it is becoming increasingly difficult for the media to get enough facts that would make for a story that can be aired or published according to the prescriptions of their profession."

#### Gains

Despite the drawbacks, however, there have also been quite a few gains for press freedom this year.

After slumbering for more than half a decade, the case of Rolando Ureta was reopened earlier this year through a Department of Justice resolution overturning an earlier dismissal of the case. Ureta was murdered on Jan. 3, 2001. He was criticizing illegal gambling, illegal drugs, and local government corruption at the time of his murder.

Intervention by international organizations this year, which

policy of the military against rebel groups and the failure of the country's justice system to bring justice to those responsible for the executions. He attributed this situation "to a distortion of priorities that has law enforcement officials focused on prosecuting civil society leaders rather than their killers."

The initiatives of the SC under the leadership of Chief Justice Reynato Puno have also been instrumental in arresting the problem of extrajudicial killings. The SC, through Administrative Order 25-2007 issued last March, has created 99 special courts across the country which will try cases of extrajudicial killings in a marathon hearing of 60 days without postponements. Decisions are to be issued no later than 30 days. The Ureta case has the potential of being tried in a special court should it proceed to trial. The high court also held a two-day National Consultative Summit on Extrajudicial Killings and Enforced Disappearances on July 16-17, with the intention of drafting recommendations to the three branches of government through the inputs of various stakeholders. CMFR was invited to the summit to present the media perspective.

The most comprehensive assessment of the extrajudicial killings situation in the Philippines came from UN special rapporteur Philip Alston who released his final report recently after conducting his investigation from Feb. 12 to 21.

Alston outlined in his 66-page report the counterinsurgency



Candles are lit to remember those journalists who passed away.

#### Much work left

Torres, however, noted that despite some improvements, much work still needs to be done to improve the state of media practice in the country.

"The only difference really this year was that there were fewer journalists killed, but the situation remains the same, and has even worsened, because harassment has been institutionalized," Torres said.

According to Santos, the peculiarities of Philippine democracy have made it hard to even practice "textbook journalism."

"Textbook journalism does not apply today because textbook journalism presupposes a mature and democratic society, a government that is open, or a government that will share with the public through the media the information that the people have a right to know," Santos said.

He asked, "On top of the absence of a truly free and open society, we have a situation where a journalist operates at the risk of life and limb, so where is freedom there?"

Torres also noted the case of the National Press Club (NPC) mural, where certain elements in the painting were altered because the NPC didn't "want to be politicized."

"The NPC's censoring the mural does not help the promotion of press freedom in the country, as it is proof that press freedom is really not that alive and well, because some media practitioners are afraid to offend the president," Torres said.

And with the year just about to draw to a close, a seeming representation of the government's attitude toward press freedom has been made evident with the wholesale arrest of more than 30 media practitioners who were covering the standoff led by Sen. Antonio Trillanes IV inside the Manila Peninsula Hotel in Makati last Nov. 29. A host of media practitioners, including some prominent ones, were handcuffed and transported to Camp Bagong Diwa in Taguig for "processing," and to ensure that no Magdalo soldiers were camouflaged as media. ABS-CBN is reportedly planning to sue the police for the arrest.

Like the other incidents before it, the experience of media in the Peninsula incident showed that press freedom is constantly under threat and must be resolutely defended and advanced. ■



and quietly shot her to death in her apartment building. The killer muffled the sound of the gun with a silencer. Her murder made headlines around the world in October, but from the Kremlin there was nothing. No statement. No condolence. Silence.

When Vladimir Putin was finally asked by reporters about the murder of one of his nation's most prominent investigative journalists, he said Politkovskaya's influence in Russia was "insignificant." Anna Politkovskaya was anything but insignificant. Her reporting on human rights abuses in Chechnya had upset many powerful people. Threats against her life were nothing new. She was an award-winning writer for *Novaya Gazeta* and had been named by Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) as one of the most prominent defenders of press freedom in its 25-year history. She deserved more than silence.

According to CPJ, Politkovskaya was the 13<sup>th</sup> journalist killed in Russia in a gangland-style hit since Putin became president in 2000. Guess how many of the people responsible have been brought to justice? None.

As CPJ documents in this important book, all too often, attacks on journalists go unsolved. Authorities either refuse to investigate, or refuse to acknowledge the possible link to the reporter's work. When a bomb exploded outside Yelena Tregubova's Moscow apartment in 2004, police said it was an act of hooliganism—nothing to do with her reporting.

In Turkmenistan, there is silence surrounding the death of Ogulsapar Muradova, a radio reporter arrested in June 2006. Branded a traitor by Turkmenistan's president, she was imprisoned for more than two months and wasn't allowed contact with anyone. Then she was put on trial. It lasted all of a few minutes. She was sentenced to six years in prison, and three weeks later she was dead. Authorities refused to say what happened when they handed her body to her family on September 14. They would not allow an autopsy or an investigation.

Silence.

x x x

In Pakistan, especially in the tribal areas along the Afghan border, journalists are under constant threat. While Pakistani authorities made arrests in the 2002 killing of *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl, investigators have produced nothing in the slayings of seven journalists since.

Iraq, of course, remains the most dangerous place for journalists, but...there are many countries where editors and writers, correspondents and photographers risk their lives daily to report the truth. In Ethiopia, more than 20 journalists are in jail. Only China and Cuba imprison more members of the press.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, massive corruption and a complete lack of judicial protection allow gunmen to operate with impunity. Tens of thousands of women have been raped, and rarely are the attackers arrested. Journalists are killed or threatened, and there is no investigation, no justice. Silence.

It would be easy to pretend that all these attacks on journalists do not have an impact, do not stop reporters from pursuing important stories. But, of course, they do. In the former Soviet Union... that attacks on the press have a "chilling effect on media coverage of the sensitive issues of corruption, organized crime, human rights violations, and abuse of power." In countries around the world, the chilling effect is the same.

#### RP ranks 5<sup>th</sup>

It will interest you to note that this worldwide survey made by the CPJ also reveals that the Philippines ranks fifth in the number of journalists killed from 1992 to 2006. We ranked behind Iraq, Algeria, Russia, and Colombia. It will also interest you to know that broadcast reporters occupy the second place in the number of media people murdered. The most number of media practitioners who lost their lives were the print reporters and writers.

In the local front, statistics tell us that since 2001, 33 of our journalists have been killed in the line of duty—29 of them were exposing corrupt government practices in their home provinces



Relatives and supporters of victims of enforced disappearances continue to hope for justice.

or illegal activities such as drug trafficking and gambling.<sup>2</sup>

It is chilling to think that the lives of so many brave souls have been reduced to mere statistics. It is even more painful to know that only one of these cases has seen a court's conviction. In October 2006, the assassins of Marlene Esperat, an investigative journalist killed in May 2005, were sentenced to life imprisonment by Judge Eric F. Menchavez of Branch 21 of the Regional Trial Court of Cebu City. Still, this lone conviction hardly counts as a significant victory, as a great majority of the other cases remain unsolved, the killers still stalking this land of vitriol and violence.

The problem of extralegal killings and enforced disappearances has become endemic and remains one of the gravest threats to our democratic society. It is a deplorable reality that mocks the Rule of Law, for it nullifies the mother of all human rights—the right to life, which no man can dilute without due process of law.

We in the judiciary are as heavily invested in putting an end to these atrocities as you in the media are. We cannot, nor do we wish, to wash our hands of the responsibility of putting an end to extralegal killings, despite how easy it is to lay the blame on another branch of government. We cannot in good conscience use the passive excuse that we are only empowered to decide cases brought to us by the prosecution. The Constitution has empowered the Supreme Court, through the grant of an expanded rule-making power, to address this problem. And so, with the help of the other sectors of our society, we have seized this opportunity to do our part in putting an end to this horror.

Using this expanded rule-

making power, we have promulgated the Rule on the Writ of *Amparo* to provide a remedy to any person whose life, liberty, and security has been violated or even threatened to be violated by an unlawful act or omission, whether committed by a public official or a private person or entity.

When Latin America was besieged by the same problem of extralegal killings and enforced disappearances in the '70s and '80s, during the successive reigns of military dictators, judges were able to use the writ of *amparo* to stop those killings and disappearances. It is our fervent hope that we can achieve the same success here and now.

#### Due course

The Rule on the Writ of *Amparo* took effect on Oct. 24. In the Supreme Court alone, four petitions have been filed, and all of them have been given due course on the day after they were filed. They were given due course even if the high court was officially in recess.

The first successful use of the Writ of *Amparo* was effected in the Philippines on Nov. 7 by Judge Reinerio B. Ramas of Branch 18 of the Regional Trial Court of Pagadian City, Zamboanga del Sur. On that day, he ordered the release of 33-year-old Ruel Muñasque, leader of the Christian Youth Fellowship of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, upon finding that the military had no reason to detain him. Mr. Muñasque's family had filed the petition on Oct. 30, after the 53<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Battalion's failure to release him from custody. He was released at 5:30 in the afternoon, on the same day the order was issued.

We now have reason to hope that these extralegal killings and enforced disappearances will

dissipate from our landscape. The writ of *amparo* addresses many of the problems that previously prevented cases of this nature from seeing judicial conclusion, such as lack of witnesses and insufficiency of evidence. But most importantly, it gives expedient relief to those being victimized and prevents the victimization of those being threatened.

Let us not bewail that we, in the media and the judiciary, have no physical weapons to use in the fight against those who seek to destroy democracy, against those who undermine the society we all covet.

Let all beware that the media and the judiciary have the mutual duty to hold high the torch of truth for the people to behold, for it is truth that is the bedrock of democracy; it is truth that is the touchstone of justice; it is truth that sets men free—free from man-made chains, free even from their self-made spiritual chains. The media provide information and data to our people to enable them to have an enlightened participation in our democratic process, for a democracy in which the people are kept in the dungeon of ignorance cannot last. The judiciary dispenses justice on the basis of truth, for justice based on falsity is injustice in disguise.

Let it be known that to discharge the duty of preserving the sanctity of truth, you in the media and we in the judiciary do not need the power of coercion or the power to purchase. We need no more than a clear conscience, no more than an incorruptible commitment, and no more than the courage to translate our creeds into deeds.

Finally, let all remember and let all be warned that the light of truth has never been extinguished, not by any man, not by any might; and that those who try to bury truth succeed only in digging their own graveyards, for truth is eternal—it cannot be extinguished; it is beyond murder. ■

.....  
*This was from a speech delivered by Chief Justice Reynato S. Puno at the 33<sup>rd</sup> Top-Level Conference of the Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas on Nov. 15, 2007.*

<sup>1</sup> Dennis McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory* (1991).  
<sup>2</sup> Rachel E. Khan and Jose Bimbo F. Santos "The Deadly Journalist's Task of Exposing Corruption," Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (2007).

A widow's long wait

# STILL CRYING FOR JUSTICE

Ureta's widow Emely longs for judgment day for her husband's killer.

**The Ureta case is just one of the many killings of journalists that have been going on but have been mostly ignored by both the justice system as well as the general public.**

since 2001 that have resulted in a conviction. Damalerio, who was a radio, TV, and print journalist and a vocal anti-corruption crusader, was gunned down in Pagadian City, Zamboanga del Sur, the same province where Jalapit was killed. Damalerio's killer, police officer Guillermo Wapile, was convicted on Nov. 29, 2005, and sentenced to life imprisonment.

Puno, noting a recent CMFR study, said "It is chilling to think that the lives of so many brave souls have been reduced to mere statistics." (See pages 22-23 for the text of Puno's speech.)

#### There's hope

Like many of the journalists slain since 1986, Ureta was a critical journalist who made it his life work to campaign against illegal gambling, the illegal drug trade, and government corruption. His evening radio program *Agong Night Watch* in radio station dyKR, where he was program director, was the vehicle for his blistering reports and commentaries.

Half a decade after his death for his work, Rolando may yet find justice. Early this year, on Jan. 16, the Department of Justice (DOJ), acting on a motion filed by Emely, released a resolution to reopen the case after it was dismissed in 2004. It was exactly six years and 14 days after the broadcaster's assassination.

The Jan. 16 DOJ resolution overturned the dismissal of charges against suspects Amador Raz and Jessie Ticar by Third Assistant Prosecutor Apolinar Barrios on Dec. 6, 2004. The

■ By Jose Bimbo F. Santos

**E**MELY URETA will never forget that day. She had noticed a man eyeing her husband Rolando and had called his attention to it. Rolando responded with a joke: "*Baka nagu-guwapuhan lang siya sa akin* (Maybe he just finds me handsome)."

The incident happened at a gasoline station in Aklan on New Year's Day 2001. Emely recalled that prior to the incident, her husband had expressed alarm over the recent murder of a Mindanao journalist.

The journalist Rolando was referring to was Olimpio Jalapit, Jr., a radio commentator for dyKR in Pagadian, Zamboanga del Sur, who was assassinated by motorcycle-riding men on Nov. 17, 2000 along Purok Esmeralda, Sabate St, Pagadian City. Jalapit was slain for his commentaries on government irregularities.

Two days after the incident at the gasoline station, on Jan. 3, Emely's husband suffered the same fate as Jalapit. Rolando Ureta, a radio commentator known for his criticisms against illegal gambling, the illegal drug trade and government corruption, was assassinated along a lonely highway in Aklan.

Ureta was on his way home onboard his motorcycle in Lezo, Aklan, after his evening news broadcast when an assassin riding pillion on a motorcycle shot him three times.

Ureta was 30. His son with Emely, Kent Christopher, was two years old then. He is now eight, but his father's killer is yet to spend a day in jail.

#### Dismissed twice

The Ureta case is just one of the many killings of journalists that, as Chief Justice Reynato Puno has pointed out, have been going on but have been mostly ignored by both the justice system as well as the general public.

In a conference hosted by the Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas (KBP) on Nov. 15, Puno said that it is "painful to know that only one of these cases (of media killings since 2001) has



Ureta

seen a court's conviction."

Puno was referring to the case of Marlene Esperat, a columnist for the community paper *The Midland Review*, who was killed on March 24, 2005, while she was having dinner with her children in their home in Tacurong City, Sultan Kudarat. Suspects Gerry Cabayag, Randy Grecia, and Estanislao Bismanos were convicted for Esperat's murder



Esperat: Another victim

on Oct. 6, 2006 and sentenced to life imprisonment.

The Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) has recorded 33 cases of journalists and other media practitioners killed in the line of duty since February 2001, and 70 cases since 1986.

The Esperat and Edgar Damalerio cases are the only two work-related media killings



Many of the journalists killed reported corruption, illegal drug trade, and illegal gambling.



Chief Justice Reynato Puno: Extrajudicial killings must stop.

Photos by LITO OCAMPO

defendants' alibis were insufficient, said the resolution, which also directed the Aklan prosecutor to file the appropriate charges against Raz and Ticar.

Barrios had earlier dismissed the case for lack of probable cause. He rejected the testimony of the eyewitness, a *balut* vendor named Gerson Sonio, who claimed he was ten meters from where Ureta was shot. Sonio's testimony was contradicted by the testimonies of Perlito Sonio, his father, and of Diego Masangya, his uncle, who contended that Sonio was in Iloilo City at the time of the killing.

Supt. Odelardo Magayan, who was then the Aklan police director helping Emely in the case, was quoted as saying that Perlito Sonio and Masangya may have been pressured by powerful individuals to contradict Gerson's testimony.

#### Grave abuse of discretion

Gerson's testimony was corroborated by his employer Anthony Tolentino, who said that Gerson was in Lezo when Ureta was killed. A certain Dindo dela Cruz also manifested that he had bought *balut* eggs from Sonio at Lezo on the night of Ureta's assassination.

Ticar and Raz had questioned Sonio's credibility, noting that the latter did not indicate in his affidavit that he was a *balut* vendor.

After Barrios dismissed the case on Dec. 6, 2004, the local police and Emely filed a motion for reconsideration on Jan. 4, 2005, which contained the affidavits of additional witnesses supporting Sonio's claim. Barrios denied the motion on Feb. 10, 2005.

The local police and Ureta

then filed a petition for review before the DOJ on April 27, 2005, alleging that Barrios "gravely abused his discretion in dismissing the complaint for murder based merely on the conjectures of Sonio and Masangya who alleged that the lone witness was in Iloilo City and was not at the place where the incident happened."

On July 7, 2005, Senior State Prosecutor Leo Dacera III wrote a letter to Chief State Prosecutor Jovencito Zuño of the DOJ requesting that the case be given preferential attention.

After the case was reopened last Jan. 16, Raz and Ticar filed a motion for reconsideration to the DOJ asking for the retention of the case's earlier dismissal. The decision has since been pending before the DOJ. If the DOJ dismisses Raz and Ticar's motion, the case will then proceed to a special court designated in Aklan, the first media killing to be tried in such court.

On Nov. 27, despite the pending DOJ resolution on the defendant's motion for reconsideration, Raz was arrested on the strength of an arrest warrant issued by Aklan Regional Trial Court (RTC) branch 4 Judge Marieta Jomena Valencia dated Nov. 16, 2007.

#### Long, trying years

"The last six years have been a long and trying time, waiting for justice in my husband's case," Emely said.

The case had moved at a snail's pace from the very start, with the local police only managing to file the case on 2004, or three years after Ureta's assassination. It was in 2003 when the number of journalists killed in the Philippines escalated,

**"I pray, even though sometimes I still ask why my husband, a good and kind man, had to die in such a manner."**

spiking to seven from 2001 and 2002's two each.

The Freedom Fund for Filipino Journalists (FFFJ) was formed in 2003 in response to the rising number of attacks and threats against journalists. FFFJ was formed by six media organizations: CMFR, the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, the Philippine Press Institute (PPI), the Center for Community Journalism and Development, the KBP, and the US-based newspaper *The Philippine News*.

FFFJ has since then provided financial assistance to the families of slain journalists, as well as in the prosecution of cases involving work-related media killings. Individually, each FFFJ member organization has also been active in advancing press freedom and working against the killings.

FFFJ contacted Emely in 2004. In January 2006, FFFJ commissioned a study on the status of six cases of journalists' killings, including the Ureta case, to determine the specific needs of each one. One of the findings of the study was the need for legal support, specifically the services of a private lawyer. To address

such needs, a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was signed between the Integrated Bar of the Philippines (IBP) and CMFR, which serves as the FFFJ secretariat, on Dec. 5, 2006. Through the MOA, the IBP provides free legal services to journalists being harassed or threatened, as well as to the relatives of those killed because of their work.

FFFJ also helped in securing the Damalerio and Esperat convictions, by amplifying public awareness of the issue through campaigns, and lobbying for both the case's transfer to Cebu in order to have a more neutral hearing and also to address security concerns of the witnesses.

Aside from being the first case to be potentially tried by a special court, the Ureta case is the first to be taken up by the IBP through the MOA. After the case was reopened last Jan. 16, IBP assigned a lawyer who will serve as the private prosecutor in the case once it proceeds to trial.

"We are committed to this case in the same sense that as journalists, we have been committed to uncovering the truth. As long as there is no justice, as long as the truth has not been told and honored, we will continue to support this case," Jose Pavia, executive director of PPI as well as board chair of FFFJ, said.

#### A good man

"Prayers. Just prayers. I just prayed, daily," Emely said when asked of how she had coped with her husband's death.

"I pray, even though sometimes, I still ask why my husband, who was really a good and kind man, was the one who

had to die in such a manner," Emely added.

Ureta in fact seemed to have been more than just a "good and kind" man. His involvement with the media began in the late '80s, when he took a vocational course in radio operation at the Panay Technical Institute from 1989 to 1990. In 1990, Ureta went to Manila and worked as a messenger for different companies. He went back to Aklan in 1993 and enrolled at the Northwestern Visayas College (NVC), while at the same time working as a reporter for radio station IBC-dyRG and *The Daily Reporter* and *Panay News* (community newspapers circulated in the Visayas).

Despite his many activities, Ureta graduated ahead of time and with honors from NVC in 1996 with a degree in English, cum laude. After graduation, he was immediately accepted as a part-time teacher at NVC, teaching English, Math, Psychology, and Social Sciences. His students remember him as a caring teacher who would go out of his way to look into their concerns.

As a broadcaster, Ureta was known to be very vocal about the problems that troubled his home province, among them corruption and criminal activities.

Gus Tolentino, who was the station manager of Ureta in dyKR, said the fallen journalist was really passionate in his job as a broadcaster.

"He was balanced in his reporting (but) when it came to issues like illegal gambling, drugs and corruption, he really had a tendency to be fiery in his commentaries," Tolentino said. ■

## NATIONAL

**Politician, family attack broadcaster**

A RADIO broadcaster claimed that he was attacked in his own booth by a local politician, his wife, and his daughter last Oct. 24 in Compostela Valley. The broadcaster was airing his program at that time.

Roel Sembrano said he was in the middle of his radio show, *Ang Haring Lungsod, Ikaw Nasayod (Nation, You Are the One Who Knows)*, over MBC Radyo Natin, when provincial board member Neri Barte barged into his booth allegedly armed with a gun.

Sembrano's radio show is a public affairs program in which he airs political commentaries. Sembrano said that Barte punched him in the right cheek, grabbed a wooden trophy, approximately a foot in length, from one of the cabinets in the booth, and hit him on the forehead with it.

Barte's 21-year old daughter followed a few minutes later together with her mother, according to Sembrano. She grabbed a cup of water which was on Sembrano's desk and poured it on him, after which she threw the cup at the broadcaster's face.

Barte's wife, Sembrano said, was at the same time pulling his shirt while slapping and scratching him. Barte, along with his wife and daughter, were shouting at him while the program was on air, prompting some members of the municipal government, located a few kilometers away from the station, to go the station, according to the broadcaster.

"What is your problem? What did I do to you? You jerk! You bastard!" Barte allegedly shouted at Sembrano in Filipino.

Barte, however, has a different account of the incident. According to him, it was his daughter and wife, both of whom upon hearing Sembrano criticize Barte on air, who went to the station from their house, which was about 500 meters away.

Barte said he only accompanied his wife and daughter to "pacify them." Barte also added that he did not lay a finger on Sembrano. He added that he was not carrying any gun.

But according to Daisy Alejandro, who was then being interviewed by Sembrano, it was Barte who first came to radio booth shouting and cursing at Sembrano, and it was only after around 15 minutes

when his wife and daughter came to the station to join the provincial board member in shouting, cursing, and harassing the radio broadcaster. She said she did not see any gun, but that she left the booth to look for someone who could mediate between the two. Alejandro did not see any police official who could intervene, so she went back to the booth after around 15 minutes, and it was then that she saw the wife and daughter of Barte in the booth.

Barte told the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility that he was angry at Sembrano because the latter was a "fake journalist" who had no right to criticize him. Barte added that Sembrano had no right to say he was a good-for-nothing government official since he had already garnered many awards. He also denied laying a finger on Sembrano, because according to him, he is a martial arts expert and if he indeed punched the broadcaster, the latter would now be in critical condition.

Police Inspector Leopoldo Mantilla, who came to the radio station after being called by a concerned citizen, said that he did not see any gun. Mantilla added that when he came to the radio station, the situation was already calm as Barte had already been pacified by Juncel Taquilo, the station manager of *Radyo Natin*. He said that he did not frisk Barte since he did not have a search warrant.

**2 broadcasters escape ambush**

TWO RADIO broadcasters were shot by a gunman riding pillion on a motorcycle last Oct. 25 in Digos, Davao del Sur.

Block timers Marlan Malnegro and Ruben Oliverio, who had both just finished their radio programs in dxDS *Radio Ukay (Dig)*, were riding on their motorcycles on their way home when an unknown man on a motorcycle drew a handgun and fired at them. The incident happened at about 8:15 a.m. on Gumao-as street, about 200 meters away from the radio station.

Malnegro told the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) that he and Oliverio were not hurt. The would-be assassin, according to Malnegro, tried to fire a second shot but the gun apparently jammed.

"After the first shot was fired,

Ruben and I sped toward the mayor's office. I then saw them (the would-be killers) retreat to a nearby compound," Malnegro said.

Malnegro and Oliverio proceeded to the office of Digos City Mayor Arsenio Latasa, who is the sponsor of their blocktime radio program. Oliverio hosts the 7-7:30 a.m. block time program *Gabayán (Guide)* while Malnegro hosts the 7:30-8 a.m. *Dangpanan (Grievance Desk)*, both sponsored by the local government. *Gabayán*, which has been around since 2001, is about developmental news about local government projects, while *Dangpanan* focuses on political commentaries.

After seeking refuge in the office of Latasa, the two broadcasters proceeded to the local police precinct to file a complaint. The police afterwards provided them with one bodyguard each.

Malnegro, who serves as the consultant on media and public relations of Latasa as well as the chairman of the tri-media association in Davao del Sur, believes that the attack was politically motivated, triggered by the then ongoing campaign for village elections.

Digos police chief Major Cezar Cabuhat, who said that they are already closing in on certain suspects, told CMFR that the attack may be related to Malnegro and Oliverio's work in the media.

Days prior to the incident, Malnegro told CMFR that he had questioned in his radio program the provincial government's scholarship program, saying that it was not well explained to the people. Oliverio, on the other hand, said that he is not aware of any issue he may have tackled in his radio program that might have provoked the incident.

Out of the 70 journalists killed in the line of duty since 1986 in the Philippines, about 42 worked for radio.

## INTERNATIONAL

**Protests in Malaysia roll despite gov't threats**

THOUSANDS OF Malaysians joined a rare rally in Kuala Lumpur on Nov. 10 to petition to the Agong (Supreme Monarch), Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin, for free and fair elections, the Southeast Asian Press Alliance (SEAPA) reported. The Center for Media Freedom and Responsi-

bility is a founding member of SEAPA.

Braving heavy rain, police roadblocks and riot police beatings, tear gas and chemical-laced water jets, government threats of action against the "illegal" rally, and even Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's warning the day before that he "will not be challenged" by the defiant organizers, most of the participants succeeded in reaching the National Palace to deliver the memorandum to a palace aide and make their point en masse, if not in the mainstream media.

The need for one of their demands—equal access to the media—was proven by the dearth of coverage of the event the following day in the mainstream media, which are largely controlled by the government through ownership and legislative restrictions. As per a government order prior to the rally, their reports quoted only the authorities—police and government officials—condemning the rally as "illegal" for not having a police permit, and either denying police high-handedness or justifying it, in a clash with participants at one of the meeting points.

Wearing yellow, the rally participants numbering about 40,000 flooded city streets, according to the organizer, the Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections. Yet none of such pictures made it in the mainstream media, which merely quoted the official count of 4,000 participants instead of making their own assessment. None of the thousands who dared defy the ban on the gathering was heard in the mainstream media as to why they took to the streets.

Instead, eyewitness accounts were found on blogs and websites of participants, the opposition party and independent online daily *Malaysiakini*, most of which recorded high traffic on the day of the rally, to the point that visitors had to be diverted to alternative sites. Amateur videos and pictures of the rally were also uploaded on popular online networking utility *Facebook* and video-sharing site *YouTube*.

Rally participants and an *Al-Jazeera* journalist reported how an initially peaceful scene at one of the gathering points near the Jamek Mosque turned chaotic when scores of riot police aimed jets of chemical-laced water at hundreds of people and tear-gassed them about a dozen times, allegedly

without warning. About 4,000 police personnel were reportedly deployed to seal off roads and prevent rally-goers from reaching the intended starting point at Independence Square in the heart of the capital city. The day before, roadblocks had already been set up on major roads into the city to screen out participants.

Police said 245 people had been arrested, with all released the same day after their statements were recorded. However, the rally organizers said only 34 had been arrested. A flawed electoral system has

resulted in legislative representations that are grossly disproportionate to the popular vote and a one-party state since the country gained independence in 1957. Sixty-seven civic society organizations and opposition political parties thus came together to form the coalition calling for electoral reforms, and went ahead with the rally despite being refused a police permit on fears of public disorder.

The 1967 Police Act stipulates a permit for gatherings of more than three people. Opposition and civil society groups, however, have consistently held up the Constitution's guarantee for freedom of assembly under Article 10 and insisted on exercising their right to peaceful assembly as a means of free expression, given the lack of democratic space in the mainstream media.

**FFFJ hits media crackdown in Pakistan**

THE FREEDOM Fund for Filipino Journalists (FFFJ) has protested the crackdown on media in Pakistan following the state of national emergency declared by President Pervez Musharraf.

The statement was issued on Nov. 15, Global Day of Action, by the organization which is composed of six media groups formed in 2003 to address the numerous attacks against journalists and news organizations in the Philippines.

Since the declaration of a national emergency in Nov. 3, the Pakistani government gave itself excessive powers, including the power to suspend news publications for up to 30 days, confiscate media equipment, and impose stiff fines on violators of the new regulations. The government has also suspended a number of local and international news channels and blocked news websites. ■

## OBIT

## Claude Jean Bertrand, pioneer in the advocacy of media accountability

By Melinda Quintos De Jesus

I NEVER met Claude Jean Bertrand in person. We corresponded when he sent me his questionnaire on the state of media accountability systems operating in the Philippines. While this task took some time, I found the experience instructive as the questionnaire introduced me to more developed strategies and mechanisms than those that the CMFR had started in the country, such as the media monitor and journalism review. It was encouraging to know that someone like him was pushing the frontier in this very difficult effort of promoting responsible journalism.

I felt privileged to be linked to his international effort and the brief exchange of views reflected his warm personality and sense of humor, making it terribly sad to hear later on that he was stricken with lung cancer and that the illness forced him to move the project to a university in the United States. I felt sorer still that I did not keep up the conversation through the period of his illness.

To honor the man and his work, CMFR reprints the information culled from various Internet sites:

Claude Jean Bertrand, a media accountability pioneer and an expert in the fields of global journalism and media ethics, died of cancer last Sept. 21 in Paris, France.

Bertrand promoted media ethics and accountability systems worldwide. In the website [www.media-accountability.org](http://www.media-accountability.org), he catalogued over 100 media accountability systems (M.A.S.) in use by individuals, groups, and media outlets around the world.

Bertrand defined an M.A.S. as any non-governmental means of "inducing media and journalists to respect the ethical rules set by the profession."

Explaining his decision to create a website dedicated to media ethics and M.A.S., Bertrand wrote: "News media, in order to serve the public well, must be free, free from distorting pressure exerted by political or economic forces. To obtain, keep, increase their freedom, media need to

be trusted and protected by the general public. To gain that support, media need to inform readers/listeners/viewers properly—but also to listen and render accounts to them."

According to Bertrand, all M.A.S. aim at improving news media—but they are extremely diverse: documents (codes of conduct, for example); people, individuals (ombudsman or reader's advocate) or groups (media advocacy groups); and processes, long (such as academic research) or short (like an ethical audit).

Bertrand added: "Some are born within the media (like a correction box); others develop outside (like a journalism review); and then some involve the cooperation of media and public (like a press council)." Among the best known M.A.S. are "correction boxes, ombudsmen, journalism reviews and press councils," he wrote in another online piece in July 2001. "Among the least acknowledged: readership surveys, awareness programs, higher education and non-profit research. Among the least used: in-house critics, ethical audits, and associations of media consumers."

Among the M.A.S., Bertrand believed that a press council is not only the most popular but the best M.A.S. available. The press council is a permanent autonomous institution and has the capacity to be multifunctional and adapt to various cultural contexts at various levels of society. Most importantly, in its ideal shape, a press

council is "the only one that (most often) gathers and represents all three major actors of social communication, the people who own the power to inform, those who possess the talent to inform and those who have the right to be informed. Proprietors, reporters and public."

His advocacy of media accountability highlighted the importance of media's role in a democracy and the public's role in demanding press transparency and accountability.

"Half-British, half-French, he was always an advocate of ethical journalism," wrote veteran American journalist Juan Antonio Giner in his blog ([www.innovationsinnewspapers.com](http://www.innovationsinnewspapers.com)) when he learned about Bertrand's passing. "Being ethical is good business," he remembered Bertrand saying often.

Bertrand had taught in various universities in the United States, France, Spain and Africa. He was professor emeritus at the French Press Institute at the University of Paris 2, where he specialized in the fields of global media and media ethics. Since 1990, he had participated in various press councils, journalism organizations, and media ethics conferences worldwide. He had also lectured on media ethics in more than 50 countries.

He wrote, co-wrote, and edited numerous books on media ethics that have been published in numerous languages. His last publications included *Médias: introduction à la presse, la radio et la télévision* (2000) and *Media Ethics and Accountability Systems* (2000). He edited a 2003 publication on M.A.S., *An Arsenal for Democracy: Media Accountability Systems*.

He is survived by his wife Michele, four children, and five grandchildren.

## Filipinos top Asian TV Awards

RIVAL NETWORKS ABS-CBN 2 and GMA-7 were both recognized at the 12th Asian Television Awards held in Singapore last Nov. 30.

GMA-7's documentary program *Reporter's Notebook* bested entries from Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan to take home the Best Current Affairs Program category for its coverage of the war in Lebanon.

ABS-CBN 2's late-night newscast *Bandila* won Best News Program for its coverage of the promulgation of the Subic rape case, topping entries from Malaysia, Taiwan, and India, as well as GMA-7's *24 Oras* and ABS-CBN 2's primetime news program *TV Patrol World*. *Bandila's* winning entry was also nominated in the Emmy Awards last September.

## Community journalists top 3rd Annual PopDev Awards

THE COMMUNITY press, led by *Sun.Star Cebu*, swept the awards in the print division in the third Annual Population Development Media Awards last Nov. 27.

A *Sun.Star Cebu* team of reporters, including managing editor Cherry Ann Lim, won the top prize as well as the two runner-up positions in the investigative category. The team's winning entry was a four-part series on the plight of the elderly in the province.

Linette Ramos, also of *Sun.Star Cebu*, was adjudged best in news reporting for her articles on the local government's efforts and shortcomings in addressing the province's problems in education, sanitation, and health. Declared as best opinion writer for print was *The Mindanao Times's* Rene Ezpeleta Bartolo.

Baguio-based reporter Frank Cimatú was best in investigative writing for his *i Report* article examining Ifugao's new Reproductive Health Code and the changes it could bring to the remote town of Tinoc.

Samira Gutoc was best online opinion writer for her *i Report* piece on how she became a peace journalist in Mindanao. *GMA News.tv* was best in new writing for articles on how issues were tackled during the campaign period.

## A sweep for *Inquirer*, GMA-7 at CMMA

GMA-7 and the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* bagged six awards each in the 29th Catholic Mass Media Awards last Oct. 28.

Among the awards *Inquirer* won were Best Investigative Report for a series on the state of education in the country and Best News Coverage for their reports on the Guimaras oil spill. The paper was also cited best in editorial cartoon and news photograph while columnists Michael Tan and Nestor Torre, were recognized, together with *The Philippine Star's* Bum Tenorio and Wilson Flores, for their opinion and entertainment columns respectively.

On the other hand, GMA 7's *24 Oras* and its election special *Philippine Agenda* were recognized as the best news and adult educational program, respectively. The network also topped the categories: public service (*Wish Ko Lang*), the adult educational magazine (*Kapuso Mo, Jessica Soho*), children's program (*Mga Kwento ni Lola Basyang*), and drama (*Magpakailanman*).

## 2<sup>nd</sup> win for Filipino journalist in New Zealand

AN AUCKLAND-BASED Filipino journalist has won the New Zealand Hi-Tech Journalist of the Year award for the second year in a row.

Divina C. Paredes, editor of *CIO New Zealand* magazine, was named the Fronde Hi-Tech Journalist 207 during the PricewaterhouseCoopers New Zealand Hi-Tech Awards in Wellington on November 3.

Paredes was the inaugural Fronde Hi-Tech Journalist in 2006 for her articles in *MIS* magazine, which has since merged with *CIO New Zealand* (<http://www.cioco.nz/>).

*CIO*, published by Fairfax Business Media, is a monthly magazine for information and communications technology executives.

The judges, composed of ICT leaders from New Zealand and overseas, said of her entries: "Her distinctive articles focus on the management challenges IT executives face. Meticulously researched, Divina's interviews provide insights from New Zealand and offshore IT directors, analyst firms and management experts."

Paredes was also named 2007 Qantas Media Awards magazine feature writer for information and communications technology. ■

### Trinidad, 71

JESUS V. Trinidad, station manager of FM radio station dwYC, died of multiple organ failure last Nov. 9 at the Silliman University Medical Center, Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental. He was 71.

Trinidad was also the project officer for Panamin, a non-government organization that protected cultural minorities in the Philippines for ten years. He also served as a councilor and a barangay chairman in Guinhulngan City.

### Norman Mailer, 84

AMERICAN JOURNALIST and novelist Norman Mailer (born Norman Kingsley) died of acute renal failure on Nov. 10. Known for applying techniques in writing novels to journalism, he co-founded one of the United States' underground newspapers, the *Village Voice*. A prolific essayist, he won the Pulitzer Prize twice for pieces that mixed fiction and nonfiction.

Among his novels that ushered in the "new journalism" is *The Naked and the Dead*, which tackled World War II, when he served in the US army as a rifleman in a reconnaissance platoon in the Philippines. ■

A coverage leads to an unexpected trip

# BEING THERE

■ By DJ Yap

**L**OOKING BACK on the events of that rain-soaked Thursday, it embarrasses me to report that I was scared as hell.

I was crouched on the carpet of the second floor lobby of the Peninsula Manila wondering what was going to happen next. Sen. Antonio Trillanes IV and company were holed up in the Rizal boardroom a few steps from us.

The 3 p.m. deadline the authorities gave them had long passed, and the police had requested that all reporters leave.

Quite

naturally, we felt obliged to stay. At past 4 p.m., gunshots sounded from the lobby below. In the next few minutes, more of the shots—actually they sounded more like crashes—boomed across the hall. Each shot drew a gasp, or a shudder.

Everywhere around me, people were going about their business, chattering, walking around, talking on the phone. On the surface, it seemed everything was fine, but the air was thick with tension. (Now, I knew very well the authorities couldn't possibly open fire at us. But knowing the military...some-how logic didn't work.)

Somebody said the police were going to use tear gas to try to flush the rebels out. A white table cloth was passed around, and the reporters tore strips out of it using the sharp edge of a key, or a nail cutter. I cut a long strip, doused it in water,

and hung it around my neck.

People were joking around. "It's been nice knowing you," one broadsheet reporter said to another. "Ay, walang ganyanan (Please don't say that)," the other replied.

From out of the blue, an online news reporter said: "Picture, picture." In one instant, all the tension dissolved in the laughter that followed as we took group photos. Say what you will about how unprofessional that was, or how juvenile. But that moment did a lot to soothe our frayed nerves.

At 4:50 p.m., somebody shouted, "Tear gas!" just as my eyes began to sting. I wrapped the cloth around my face, covering my nose. We ran toward the enclosure where the function rooms occupied by Trillanes's group were located. (Previously, we were barred from going beyond the entrance to the hallway.) We searched for exits and found none.

The fire exits were blocked, and all other doors were locked.

Trillanes declared they were coming out, out of concern for the safety of the civilians present. We waited for the tear-gas to dissipate. At 6:20 p.m., we walked out of the Rizal boardroom with him. There were about 30 of us reporters and cameramen. The rest were Magdalo soldiers, civil society and church leaders, and some civilian supporters.

With tear-gas fumes still wafting in the air, we filed out on the steps of the main staircase. The Special Action Forces (SAF) troops in gas masks ordered us to sit down. They offered bottled water to those who could not tolerate the fumes.

After several minutes, we were asked to stand up. They separated the media from the rest of the civilians. By then, Trillanes and all the Magdalo soldiers had been escorted out, almost bodily carried.

An SAF member came up to me with the plastic clamp to tie my wrists. I asked: "What's that for? Am I a suspect?"

He replied, "Sir, para sa lahat po ito (this is for

everyone)."

I shook my head, no, and moved to the side. He made no further attempt to bind my wrists.

At this point, the other reporters had started raising their voices, objecting to the handcuffs. The journalists began jeering the soldiers and the police. Finally, Senior Supt. Asher Dolina said, "No handcuffs."

To this, everyone cheered. It seemed a small battle had been won.

The next day, the papers would headline our arrests. It would seem we were victims. Or maybe we were but I never felt it. That moment was one reason. We weren't victims because we never allowed ourselves to be.

We were asked to line up in a single file. We boarded a bus that was to take us to Bicutan. They said it was standard protocol for any witness or suspect in a crime scene.

The mood on the bus was jovial. To onlookers in the streets, reporters screamed: "We're journalists. Look at what they're doing to us."

The trip took more than an hour, and I took the chance to call up the desk, trying to make sense of my notes as I dictated my story off the top of my head.

Finally, we reached the covered court of the National Capital Region Police Office where a policeman took our names and the details on our identification cards. We were released several minutes later.

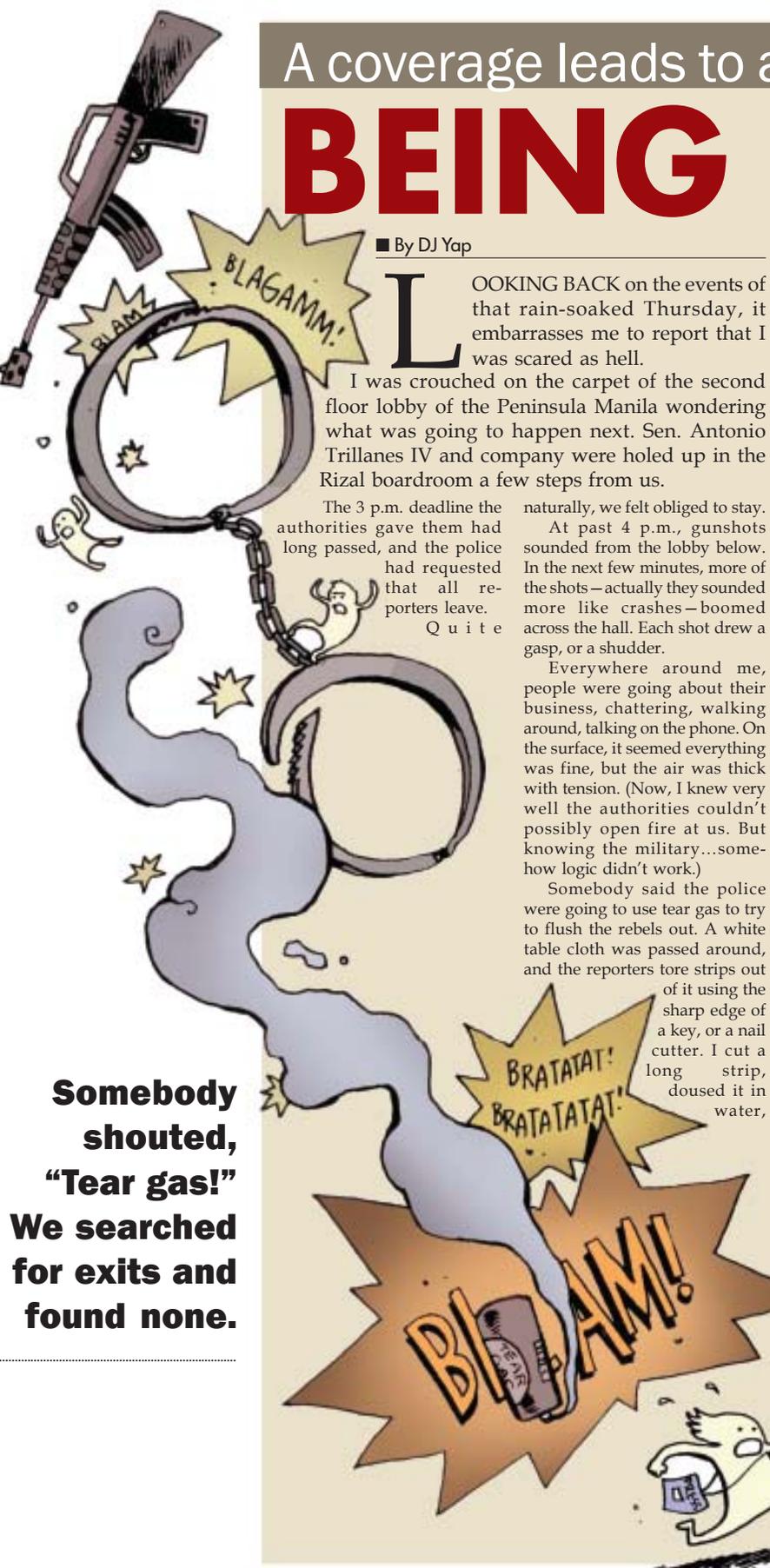
I got home 15 minutes before the 12 midnight curfew. I couldn't sleep.

I told friends via text: "It was mildly traumatizing but definitely a good topic for future conversations."

A part of me felt relieved we all came out of it unharmed. A bigger part felt proud that I was right there, in the middle of everything, as history unfolded in a hurry.

These are interesting times we live in. ■

DJ Yap is a reporter for the Philippine Daily Inquirer.



**Somebody  
shouted,  
"Tear gas!"  
We searched  
for exits and  
found none.**