



THE MERALCO CONTROVERSY
**MORE HEAT
 THAN LIGHT**



REPORTING UNCLOS
**FOUNDERING IN
 THE SHALLOWS**

PJR REPORTS

Published by the Center for M...

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MAY-JUNE 2008

**THE
 PRICE
 OF RICE
 AND THE
 RISE
 OF PRICES**



165-656-43

EDITOR'S NOTE

PJRREPORTS

PUBLISHED BY THE CENTER FOR MEDIA
FREEDOM & RESPONSIBILITY

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Out of context

ONE OF the long-established principles of journalism is that of providing context. It's a companion principle of accuracy, which in addition to requiring that journalists get the names, dates and places right in news reporting, demands that they also tell their audience – whether readers, viewers, or listeners – the larger story of which what's being reported is a part.

It's more commonly known as backgrounding, or that practice of reminding the media audience of what had gone before. It's easily done either through a few sentences following the lead, or through a separate article, or a sidebar as it's known in print, that can consist of a few paragraphs or several dozen.

A hold-up in a slum community, for example, is better understood if the public is reminded that it's the third in the same vicinity in the last four months. Without context, a report on an encounter between guerillas and government troops in which there were huge casualties on both sides would be no more than just another violent incident, whereas it can be better appreciated if a brief history of rebellions and their root causes were provided.

Backgrounding or contextualization has not been among the strong suits of the Philippine press, whether in print or broadcasting. This is specially true when it comes to those complex stories of public interest the citizenry needs to understand so it can arrive at the informed opinion needed for decision-making. Providing context is a professional obligation of journalists in a democracy, in which making decisions on issues of governance and policy is the sovereign prerogative of free men and women.

In April and May this year, three issues of compelling public interest were duly reported by the Philippine press.

The so-called rice crisis, the debate over the Philippine baselines bills, and the battle for control of the Manila Electric Company vied with each other for prominence on the front pages of the newspapers and in the early evening television news.

As the *PJR Reports* monitors on the coverage of these three matters of public concern ("The Price of Rice and the Rise of Prices," pp.14-17; "The Meralco Controversy: More Heat than Light," pp. 18-19; "Reporting UNCLOS: Foundering in the Shallows," pp.20-21) revealed, however, while the print and broadcast media dutifully reported the debate over these issues, there was little they provided by way of either a history or an explanation of the complexities that the public needed to understand so it could arrive at intelligent conclusions on, for example, whether a shift from the policy of importing rice to a policy of self-sufficiency was needed, what's driving the high cost of electricity and whether government control of Meralco would lead to lower costs, or whether the bills that have been introduced in Congress to define the baselines of Philippine territory would undermine the country's claim to the Spratlys.

The reportage on these three issues in fact underlines the need for the media to reexamine the practice of reporting only what those speaking in behalf of each side in a major public issue said, towards a proactive effort to enhance public understanding of the issues that confront this country and its people through the contextualization that in the first place has always been a press responsibility.

Luis V. Teodoro

The *PJR Reports*
(*Philippine Journalism Review Reports*)
is published by the Center for Media
Freedom and Responsibility. All mail
should be addressed to:

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and Responsibility
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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

The political crisis has highlighted the basic press responsibility of providing information and analysis.

Arroyo vs. Lopezes

“That’s not true. The government is doing this for the people. In fact, the noninterference of the government in ABS-CBN—which continues its media attacks against (Arroyo)—is a good sign of democracy. If she is retaliating, she could use her government to directly hit at ABS-CBN, not Meralco. But Malacañang is not doing it.”

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo’s chief legal counsel Sergio Apostol, reacting to alleged government retaliation against the Lopez family. The Lopez family, which has a controlling stake on dominant energy and power distribution company Manila Electric Company (Meralco), owns major television network ABS-CBN 2, May 7

“Why has government suddenly gone after Meralco?”

“The opposition is right: Because, like Ferdinand Marcos, Arroyo means to cow the Lopezes into submission, or at least tame their criticisms of government in ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corp. and ABS-CBN News Channel.”

Conrado de Quiros, Philippine Daily Inquirer, May 7

Blaming the media

“All of these lead to a shortage, which has been further exacerbated all over the world by panic situations and hysteria created by the media and political opponents in various countries.”

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, partly blaming the media for fanning hysteria and worsening the global food shortage, Inquirer, May 9

Killing the Fourth Estate

“Observing her closely during the past seven years, I have begun to form the conclusion that President Arroyo’s style of governance is seeing her picture in media everyday. “Publicity is the sole purpose of her being footloose. She attends and cuts ribbons of all inaugurations. It does not occur to her that a president operates behind a desk, barks orders and is hands-on on everything, particularly food production.

“The signs appeared early enough. Before she could finish the first year of her grabbed term, she allowed the hiring and employment of media persons in her government.

“A few of us succumbed to the temptation. A few continue to stand their ground believing that media and the state are classical adversaries.

“She has practically succeeded in killing the Fourth Estate. And why not? That is easier than putting the House of Representatives and earning or whatever one calls it the respect of the Supreme Court.”

Amado Macasaet, Malaya, May 8

Media threats continue

“Fewer journalists were murdered or attacked in the country last year, raising the Philippines’ ranking by three points on the world press freedom index. But rising to 97th place from 100th in a field of 195 countries in the index prepared by the US-based Freedom House is still nothing to crow about. The Philippine press was classified as ‘partly free’ and tied for 97th place with Bosnia.

“A similar message was sent by the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), which included the Philippines in a ‘shame list’ of 13 countries in 2007. The report cited the unprecedented number of libel cases filed against journalists by President Arroyo’s husband, First Gentleman Jose Miguel Arroyo, though he withdrew all the 46 cases (sic) on World Press Freedom Day last year after surviving a heart attack.

“As World Press Freedom Day is marked today, the Philippines can boast some progress: it is no longer described as the second most dangerous country for journalists after Iraq or the most “murderous” for the working press. Since the start of the year there has been no raid by state forces on a newspaper office or libel suits filed by powerful individuals who can influence the prosecution service and judiciary.

“But most of the murders committed in the recent past remain unsolved — the reason for the country’s inclusion in the shame list of the Committee to Protect Journalists. From 1998 to 2007, 24 murders of journalists in the Philippines have not been solved, the CPJ reported as it launched a so-called Impunity Index. The failure to solve the murders has reinforced the culture of impunity that prevails in countries where press freedom faces the greatest threat.

“Those threats can take more subtle forms. A recent study undertaken by the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) showed that it has become increasingly harder for mass media to obtain information about government projects. The PCIJ reported that the curbs on access to documents that are supposed to be of public record started shortly after the ZTE corruption scandal erupted. As the nation marks World Press Freedom Day, the Philippine press must confront these new challenges.”

The Philippine Star editorial on World Press Freedom Day, May 3

The right of reply bill

“It is our humble view that the right of reply is not an infringement at all on the freedom of the press. On the contrary, it is an expression of that right so that the people in general will enjoy the right of free speech which should be respected by the media.”

Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Q. Pimentel Jr., explaining his bill on the right of reply, Manila Bulletin, May 8

MONITOR



CHEERS



JEERS



LITO OCAMPO

Sources of corruption

CHEERS TO the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* for a two-part special report that discussed issues of governance and the budget system as well as the problems of the procurement law.

The first article explained the sources of corruption in the country. It also detailed several large-scale corruption cases, which included the national broadband network-ZTE deal, and the Ninoy Aquino International Airport project, among others. The first part also discussed how certain practices related to the budget and other resources—for instance the setting aside of special purpose funds—encourage corruption (April 1, “World Bank lists sources of corruption in RP”, p. B1).

The second article focused on the loopholes in the procurement law and how the budget system can be further improved. It discussed the need for the participation of Congress and civil society in pushing for reforms and strengthening implementing rules and regulations (“April 2, Sealing the loopholes in procurement law,” p. B4).

The two-part special was based on reports presented at the March 2008 Philippine Development Forum, “Accelerating Inclusive Growth and Deepening Fiscal Stability.”

Why they oppose wage policies

CHEERS TO *BusinessWorld* for a two-part special on April 30 and May 1 explaining the complicated nature of minimum-wage setting.

The first part discussed how the almost yearly wage hikes are driving up the minimum wage in the Philippines, thus driving down the country’s competitiveness in attracting foreign investments. The report also detailed how both employers and employees oppose government’s wage-setting policies, which the article also tracked from 1951 to 1989 and com-

pared it with those of other countries (“Frequent pay hikes making RP labor among the most costly”).

The second part of the series focused on the inability of the minimum wage law in the Philippines to protect workers from low pay. The report said the minimum wage—which should be regarded as the floor wage—has instead become the wage standard. This is because of the abundance of workers willing to work for pay below the minimum wage. *BusinessWorld* also noted the weakening of the country’s unions, which could have secured better working conditions for workers.

No chopper for her

JEERS TO the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* for a biased report which drew the ire of the Presidential daughter.

The *Inquirer* reported that Evangeline Lourdes “Luli” Arroyo was one of at least 416 passengers inconvenienced after Asian Spirit’s May 1 flights to Boracay, Aklan were delayed for several hours (“Asian Spirit flights to Bora delayed 8 hrs,” May 2). Only two out of five planes usually bound for Caticlan and then to Boracay were then operational. Furthermore, passengers were dropped off at Kalibo after it was deemed unsafe to land at Caticlan airport at night, with Asian



Luli Arroyo

LITO OCAMPO

JEER OF THE MONTH

Parochial



JEERS TO the Philippine press for again displaying its parochialism despite the tragedy in Burma, which has been in the news since cyclone ‘Nargis’ hit the low-lying river delta around Yangon, the country’s biggest city, last May 2. The cyclone wiped out many communities, killing over 100,000 people.

Despite the ruling junta’s restrictions against media coverage of the disaster, international media still managed to report on it. A look at the Philippine media’s coverage from May 7 to May 20, however, reveals that while the Philippine press did use the reports generated by the wire agencies, it failed to provide the analyses needed that would have helped Filipinos understand why the junta has been blocking foreign relief efforts, which in turn could have led to a second look at Burma’s membership in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Philippines’ own policies towards that country.

Most of the reports that were published in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, the *Philippine Star*, and the *Manila Bulletin* were sourced from wire agencies Agence France-Presse, Reuters, and the Associated Press. The pieces Filipino journalists wrote were mostly columns and editorials, and only PCIJ (“Still reeling from military junta, Burma a mess after cycle,” May 6) had a first hand account of what is happening in Burma in the aftermath of the cyclone.

Both Burma and the Philippines are members of the ASEAN. Burma’s Asean membership was in fact brokered by the Philippines during the term of President Fidel V. Ramos. The junta’s behavior in the aftermath of the calamity—its blocking foreign relief efforts for example—should have been the occasion for the Philippine press to look into the wisdom of ASEAN’s engagement policy, which hopes to encourage the junta to democratize that country. No such effort took place.

Spirit promising to cover their shuttle fees to Boracay.

The front-page story was accompanied by a photo of waiting passengers with a misleading caption. It said: “LULI WAS HERE” and ended with “...Luli was whisked off in a presidential chopper.”

The report did not give Arroyo’s side of the story. In a letter dated May 5, she denied taking a government vehicle and took the *Inquirer* to task for insinuating she had used her privilege to escape a predicament others had to endure (“A letter from Luli,” May 10).

Highlighting the policy

CHEERS TO the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* for its series on the government’s campaign against the communist insurgency.

The reports featured accusations of military oppression from members of human rights and party-list groups. It distinguished itself from other stories on the same issue by using the statements of anonymous military sources who confirmed what critics of the government have been saying—that the Arroyo regime has a policy of condoning the extrajudicial killings of “enemies of the state”.

The reports achieved balance by focusing on the efforts of particular soldiers to combat insurgency through peaceful methods—for example by helping improve the livelihood of people in the prov-

inces—to make the rebels, who tout themselves as providers of social justice, “redundant.”

It also included Supreme Court Chief Justice Reynato Puno’s views on the role of the writ of amparo in the prosecution and prevention of repression against government critics.

(“Political killings not official but an unintended policy,” May 9; “Rights workers’ lament: We’re treated like enemies of state,” May 10; “The ‘missing piece’ in gov’t anti-insurgency drive,” May 11; “Chief Justice: No magic bullet against assassins,” May 12).



Villar

LITO OCAMPO

Why Arroyo?



JEERS TO *Malaya* for a confusing report. Last April 28, it reported that House Speaker Prospero Nograles was bent on deferring House approval of the

cheaper medicines bill unless President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo "gives an assurance that prices of medicines will go down." ("House seeks assurance on cheaper medicines bill," p. 1).

The report did not say why the House needed Arroyo's assurance of lower medicine prices. Similar reports from other papers quoted Nograles differently. Nograles will defer approval of the final version until he is satisfied that the proposed bill could really reduce drug prices, according to *The Philippine Star* ("House to defer approval of Cheap Medicine Bill"). Nograles announced the suspension "after proponents of the measure in the House said the bill had been 'drastically weakened' with the removal in the bicameral conference committee of the provision creating a drug price regulation agency," the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* reported ("Cheaper meds bill hits new snag").

The reports used an April 27 press release from Nograles. What Nograles actually said, according to the release, was that the House of Representatives may defer the ratification until he "is personally satisfied that the law will guarantee cheaper cost of medicines" and that he will discuss the issue with Arroyo and Senate President Manuel Villar. "(W)e have to get the full assurance that if this is passed into law, it will really bring down the price of medicine. If we do not get this assurance, I think that it will be best to defer its ratification because I don't see the point of passing a law that will not really serve its purpose" ("Nograles may endorse deferment of Cheap Med ratification," April 27).



[HTTP://WWW.PAGESBYARLYNDELACRUZ.I.PH](http://www.pagesbyarlyndelacruz.i.ph)

The view from this side

CHEERS TO the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* for providing another angle on the controversy over the Hanjin Subic Free Port condominiums. "Are Hanjin condos sitting on toxic site?" raised the issue of health safety for future tenants of the two high-rise buildings (April 30, p. A17).

South Korean company Hanjin Heavy Industries & Construction Ltd. built the condos to house their employees in the Subic Bay rainforest. Media reports had focused for weeks on environmental concerns, on the condos' being built in a protected forest, and the number of trees cut in the process.

The report said that the site could be hazardous or toxic as the activities of the past occupants, the United States Navy, could have resulted in widespread chemical contamination of the soil, groundwater, or sediment. The report provided comprehensive data, citing several studies and interviews from concerned parties which said that the place is polluted.

The report, however, just raised the possibility of contamination and did not directly say if the site indeed is hazardous. It could have helped if an independent study had been done or cited to actually prove or disprove the claim.

Ad as news

JEERS TO *The Philippine Star* for passing off an advertisement as an ordinary news item. Last May 7, it published on page 3 what looked like a report on a celebrity endorser of a mobile telecommunications company. A closer look showed that it was all about the celebrity's endorsement of the company. The item's text and headline had the same font as the *Star's* other reports. Neither did the paper bother to put any special marks or design on the item to distinguish it from its news stories ("Aga for Sun Cellular").

Self-promoting

JEERS TO the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* for using its pages for self-promotion, this time through its continuing front-page coverage of the winners of a contest marking its 22nd anniversary.

The contest, sponsored by retail giant SM and Cebu Pacific airlines among others, involved readers' sending in their wishes to the newspaper. The *Inquirer* selected 22 readers and their wishes for special attention in January for their loyalty to the paper.

Five pieces were published between March 16-April 15: "Teen helps 'beautiful' old man" (March 16); "Wish come true: 38th birthday for faith-full son" (March 23); followed by "Mang Ramon dies days after getting wish" (March 25, follow-up to March 16); "Wish come true: He'd rather read *Inquirer* than eat" (April 6); and "Wish come true for a wish come true" (April 13).

These winners were all covered in



[HTTP://WWW.SAMCHUIPHOTOS.COM](http://www.samchuiphotos.com)

human interest or "slice of life" stories which were meant to be interesting, but these pieces all served to promote the *Inquirer*. Besides advertising the results of their own contest, two pieces (April 6 and 13) also praised the paper. The winners and/or their families were quoted as saying that the *Inquirer* was "food for the soul;" "has lived up to its name of delivering balanced news and fearless views;" has columns/columnists that are "entertaining, witty, educational, informative, inspiring, and worth reading;" "completes their day; a necessity, not a luxury;" among others.

Since the winners were ardent customers of the paper, that level of praise was not unexpected. But too much is too much.



Baraquel

LITO OCAMPO

Where's the other side?

JEERS TO *Malaya* for forgetting fairness and balance. *Malaya* reported last May 7 that the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) had asked the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) to put lands owned by the Arroyos under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP). The report got the CBCP's side, as well as the supporting views of farmers' advocate Task Force Mapalad and Akbayan Rep. Ana Theresita Hontiveros Baraquel.

But the report did not get the side of the Arroyo family. Instead, *Malaya* got the side of DAR undersecretary Gerundio Madueño who argued there is a process regarding the inclusion. Madueño's one-sentence quote was at the end of the nine-paragraph report, or eight paragraphs after the other side had been presented ("CBCP asks DAR to place Arroyo lands under CARP: *Agrarian reform summit bats for CARP extension*").

Explaining the talent mismatch

CHEERS TO *BusinessWorld* for its May 8 report explaining how more graduates may end up unemployed or underemployed because of talent mismatch—the disconnect between training and jobs.

Citing studies by the Employers' Confederation of the Philippines and University of the Philippines School of Labor and Industrial Relations, the report discussed how the Philippines may again experi-



[HTTP://WWW.ETHISCORE.ORG](http://www.ethiscore.org)

ence high single-digit unemployment rates due to talent mismatch. The report also noted how job generation in the country is still geared towards the agricultural sector—accounting for 41 percent of the 14.7 million jobs produced from 1980 to 2003. It added that while the manufacturing sector in other Southeast Asian countries is the source of quality jobs, in the Philippines this sector has generated only a million jobs in the last 22 years.



Arroyo

LITO OCAMPO

Unraveling a lie

CHEERS TO the *Philippines Free Press* for belying government claims that the Philippines is a preferred choice of foreign investors in Asia. In its March 29 story "Investors' Last Choice," the *Free Press* noted the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development report showed that the Philippines scored the lowest amount of direct foreign investments (a total of \$2.5 billion) and a growth of only 4.3 percent, or three percent smaller than official claims. The report noted that the central bank expects foreign investments to rise this year, but that they may be greatly affected by the US financial crisis.

But what is turning investors away more, according to the report, is official corruption. Citing what Philippine Business Forum Chairman and CEO Michael Clancy said, the report noted that 50 percent of investors' cost of operations goes to bribes. The *Free Press* report also said the preference for Chinese loans by the Arroyo government over western investments is also hurting the economy. ■





CHEERS




JEERS

One sided, as usual

 JEERS TO *Teledyaryo* for a biased report in favor of the Hanjin project last April 10. The report said that the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority officials maintained that Hanjin Heavy Industries & Construction Ltd. had not violated any laws and added that the controversy might discourage possible investors in the project. The report did not provide the views of other parties, particularly those against the project.

Was it or wasn't it Faeldon?


 JEERS TO *TV Patrol World* and *Bandila* for not verifying the identity of a man claiming to be Marine Capt. Nicanor Faeldon before airing an interview with someone who claimed to be him.

Last May 15, *TV Patrol* and *Bandila* aired a phone interview by ABS-CBN 2 reporter Ces Drilon with Faeldon, who has been in hiding since his escape from the Nov. 29 Manila Peninsula siege.

In the interview, the man claiming to be Faeldon detailed how he escaped during the siege and declared that no member of the media had helped him. He also criticized Senator Gringo Honasan for siding with the government and those Magdalo soldiers who had asked for a presidential pardon.

However, Faeldon's lawyer Trixie Angeles denied that it was her client who had called ABS-CBN 2. Without disclosing the manner by which Faeldon reached her, Angeles told *PJR Reports* in a phone interview that Faeldon had asked her to deny that he was the man Drilon had interviewed. Angeles said that the station neither contacted her nor Faeldon's family prior to the airing of the interview. ABS-CBN 2 talked to her only after she had issued a statement on the interview.

Is this a story?


 JEERS TO *Teledyaryo* for promoting resorts in "reports" that were disguised ads.

The program featured Jed's Island resort last April 17 in one of its news segments. Running for about a minute-and-a-half, the segment featured the resort's amenities, activities, and range of fees.

It described the resort as a "cool" place, adding that people continuously flock to it. Video footage focused on the resort's attractions, as viewers were invited by the management and resort guests to come over. The report also added that the resort provides summer jobs to underprivileged youth.

The April 17 report was just the latest in a series of *Teledyaryo* "reports" promoting resorts.

Conspiracy theory


 JEERS TO *24 Oras* for serving as a propaganda platform for GMA-7's newest fantasy series, *Dyesebel* and for suggesting that the Manila Electric Company deliberately triggered a power interruption last April 29, during the premiere episode of the soap opera.

In the report, *24 Oras* interviewed some Manila residents who expressed their frustration over the blackout that supposedly lasted for 10 to 15 minutes. Some of them were quoted as requesting GMA-7 for a replay of the pilot episode. The newscast also claimed that other parts of Manila had also suffered from blackouts.

24 Oras also interviewed Elpi Cuna, vice president of the Corporate Communication Department of Manila Electric Co. (Meralco), who explained that a power plant failure in Pangasinan had caused the blackout.

But the lowest point of the *24 Oras* report was when the reporter mentioned that the pilot episodes of GMA-7's previous soap operas were also disrupted by blackouts, as if implying that it was intentionally done to sabotage the shows. GMA-7's rival network is ABS-CBN 2 which is owned by the Lopez family. The Lopez family also controls Meralco, the country's dominant electric distribution company.

Manic over Manny

 JEERS TO *24 Oras* for devoting so much airtime not only to the fight between Emmanuel "Manny" Pacquiao and Mexican boxer Juan Manuel Marquez, but also to nearly everything connected with it.


Not content with an 11-minute report that gave its viewers a blow-by-blow account of the 12-round fight last March 17, *24 Oras* also had reports on the Filipino singers who sang before the fight started, the Filipino personalities who watched the fight, the reactions of Pacquiao fans across the country, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's greetings to Pacquiao, and the welcome ceremonies Pacquiao received on his return to the Philippines.

There were also interviews with Pacquiao's family members and friends. A number of reports on the controversial decision that favored Pacquiao were also aired, as well as reports on what boxing analysts and fans thought of the fight.


In its November 2007 issue, the *PJR Reports* had already noted the station's penchant for putting so much attention on Pacquiao, a GMA-7 talent, when he fought Marco Antonio Barrera ("Money on Manny?").



The ineligibleibles


 CHEERS TO the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism for unraveling the extent and repercussions of the appointment of ineligible political appointees under the Arroyo administration. The two-part report ("New CSC chief faces pack of ineligible bureaucrats" and "Malacañang is no. 1 agency with excess exec hires—CSC") detailed the rampant "invasion" of career service positions by Arroyo political allies and its effect on the bureaucracy and governance. The report was published April 24 (<http://www.pcij.org/stories/2008/ineligible-bureaucrats.html>) and 25 (<http://www.pcij.org/stories/2008/ineligible-bureaucrats4.html>).

The policy of concealment

 CHEERS TO the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism for detailing how the Arroyo government has increasingly limited access to public information. "Access to data held by state agencies not only remains limited, it has become nil in some cases, apparently because of the current Senate scrutiny of

particular government projects," according to PCIJ's March 31 report ("Gov't curbs access to information amid senate scrutiny of projects," <http://www.pcij.org/stories/2008/access-to-info.html>). The report's findings were based on a recent PCIJ story on official development assistance projects.

Sabotaging CARP


 CHEERS TO *Newsbreak* for its two-part report which exposed how the awarding of lands to farmer-beneficiaries through the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) is sabotaged.

The report said that cattle-raising is not just a status symbol for land owners in Masbate. "Landowners develop ranches to evade agrarian reform" (http://newsbreak.com.ph/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4327&Itemid=88889066) stressed that it has also been used to exempt their lands from CARP.

The second part of the report ("LGU's help keep agri lands out of farmers' reach", http://newsbreak.com.ph/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4344&Itemid=88889066) focused

on the role of local government units in the reclassification of agricultural lands into commercial and industrial use.

Profiling governors

 CHEERS TO *Newsbreak* for its survey that looked into the political profile, educational background, and professional training of provincial governors in the country.


While a majority of the governors (37 out of 58 respondents, or 63.79%) still belong to political clans, the report "Most governors still from political clans, but with varied trainings" (http://newsbreak.com.ph/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4394&Itemid=88889066, April 22) revealed that many local officials had practiced their professions first before entering politics—a digression "from the college-to-politics path that many members of political dynasties had been traditionally known to take."

According to the report, 45 out of the 58 respondents had practiced as businessmen, doctors, engineers, professors, and lawyers before pursuing a political career.

Looking at the educational attainment

of the governors, the report noted that a majority of them (70.68%) have bachelor's degree, while those who have master's and doctorate degrees accounted for 17.24% and 8.62% respectively (http://www.newsbreak.com.ph/democracyandgovernance/Profile_Of_Governors.htm).

Remembering the past

 CHEERS TO *MindaNews* for a detailed article on the meaning of the March 18, 1968 Jabidah Massacre ("40 years after Jabidah, Moro struggle continues"). The report, published on the 40th anniversary of the massacre, featured several public figures from Mindanao who related the incident to the national government's policies and treatment of the Mindanao people through the years (http://www.minda.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4032&Itemid=75).

The Jabidah massacre, in which government forces supposedly killed at least 26 Muslim youth recruited for a mission to "liberate" Sabah, helped inspire the Bangsamoro "struggle for self-determination," the report explained. ■

■ By JB Santos and Melanie Y. Pinlac

JOURNALISTS COMMEMORATED World Press Freedom Day by honoring the father of press freedom in the Philippines.

In an event organized by the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) last May 3, journalists from the National Capital Region and provinces of Central Luzon offered “press freedom wreaths” at the National Shrine of Marcelo H. del Pilar in Bulacan and called for an end to the culture of impunity and violence. Roses were also offered to slain journalists.

WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY JOURNALISTS VISIT PLARIDEL SHRINE

NUJP chose to honor Del Pilar, editor of the reformist, anti-colonial paper *La Solidaridad*, “to emphasize the need for journalists not to forget the past, particularly periods of history during which the media played a very important role to defend freedom and democracy.”

The NUJP, the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR), the Philippine Press Institute (PPI), the College Editors Guild of the Philippines, the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, ABS-CBN 2, ABC-5, and Bulacan-based newspapers such as *Punla* and *NewsCore* participated in the event.



PPI's Jose Pavia

The need for solidarity and unity among media practitioners was also stressed during the celebration.

“*Kailangan nating magkaisa, kailangan nating magsama-sama, at pakinggan ang kalayaan ng pamamahayag na sinimulan ng ating mga bayani tulad nila Marcelo H. del Pilar* (We need to unite and listen to the freedom of the press started by our heroes like Marcelo H. del Pilar),” said NUJP chair Jose Torres Jr.

Inquirer publisher Isagani Yambot compared our situation to the Spanish period when the Propaganda Movement started, stressing the need for the media to be more vigilant today.

“*Ngayon ang kalaban natin ay hindi na mapang-abusong prayle kung 'di ang mga mapang-abusong opisyal ng pamahalaan. Ngayon*



Journalists offer roses to slain colleagues.

Photos by LITO OCAMPO

kailangan pa rin nating ipagtaggol ang ating karapatang-pantao at ang ating mga kalayaan kasama na ang kalayaan ng pamamahayag (Our enemies now are not the abusive friars but the abusive government officials. Today, we still need to defend human rights and civil liberties including freedom of the press),” Yambot said.

Davao-based journalists meanwhile marched on the eve of World Press Freedom Day to the local Hall of Justice to protest the imprisonment of radio commentator Alexander “Alex” Adonis over a libel case filed by House Speaker Prospero Nograles. In a statement, the Davao journalists called on the courts to “look into the facts of the case that has already caused so much undue suffering to our colleague.”

Nograles filed libel charges after Adonis claimed over his radio program in *Bombo Radyo* that Nograles and a married female broadcaster had been caught by police operatives and the woman’s relatives in an uncompromising situation during a raid at a hotel in Metro Manila. Adonis said he supported his report with interviews with one of the operatives involved in the raid.

Adonis was jailed after he missed several hearings, therefore forfeiting his right to present evidence and to plead not guilty. Adonis was unable to attend the hearings due to financial constraints, he said. Adonis is currently serving his sentence at the Davao Penal Colony.

Adonis now faces another libel case on the basis of the same report, but now filed by the female broadcaster. Last April, Adonis, with the help of lawyer Harry Roque filed a complaint, with CMFR as co-signatory, before the UN Commission on Human Rights regarding Adonis’s plight and calling attention to the country’s archaic criminal libel law.

NUJP also held a poetry/singing night for journalists “Pa-imPRESS ka JAM” at the Freedom Bar in Quezon City. Conrado de Quiros, Pete Lacaba, and Inday Espina Varona were among those who read poetry and sang.

Spotty coverage

Judging from the spotty coverage of the occasion, Philippine news organizations themselves were not very excited over World Press Freedom Day.

Most of the articles about World Press Freedom Day activities were mainly spot reports about the celebration in Bulacan, while no national daily reported the march of Davao journalists



De Quiros CHARLES RAMOTO

for Adonis.

Few news reports provided background on the current situation of media practitioners in light of the celebrations. No stories were published regarding what has happened to the many cases of the suspects in the killing of journalists now pending in court.

The *Inquirer*, however, published a report on May 5 “ARMM more journalist-friendly, says press group,” which cited updates on the cases of slain journalists Gene Boyd Lumawag, Hernani Pastolero, and Vicente Sumalpong. The report also cited instances of attacks against journalists which had occurred in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao during the 1990s.

On the other hand, *The Manila Times* May 4 report, “Journalists mark World Press Freedom Day by honoring Del Pilar,” provided a listing of the number of killings of journalists and the number of cases filed in court. High-



The Inquirer’s Yambot: defend press freedom

lighting other forms of attacks on press freedom, the report also interviewed a journalist in Pangasinan on the status of libel cases filed in the province.

The *Philippine Star* meanwhile ran a front-page report on May 3 about observations by the European Commission regarding press freedom in the Philippines, “EC: Press freedom still under threat.” The article cited the Freedom House report on the Philippines as background.

Some newspapers reported the findings of international press freedom watchdogs the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and Freedom House. Though newspapers published articles from the wires on the global state of press freedom and the culture of impunity, the reports fell short of underlining the ef-

fects of global trends on the country’s press.

There were also no reports on the activities and celebrations held by other countries. Only Florangel Rosario Braid’s column in the *Manila Bulletin* mentioned the UNESCO panel on “Access to Information and Empowerment of the People” – the 2008 World Press Freedom day theme.

The importance of freedom of expression and of the press was mostly discussed in the opinion pages. The *Bulletin*, the *Star*, and the *Times* ran editorials on May 3 about press freedom. The *Times* and the *Star* editorial discussed the reports by Freedom House and the CPJ about the Philippines. The *Bulletin’s* editorial meanwhile talked about certain “ingredients” needed for freedom of the press to survive.

“To make freedom of expression a reality, there are certain ingredients required, some of which are the existence of a legal and regulatory environment which allows for an open media sector to exist, political will to support the sector and the rule of law to protect it, a law ensuring access to information, and media literacy skills to analyze information,” the *Bulletin’s* editorial said.

TV Patrol Sabado and GMA *Weekend Report* also did spot reports about the celebration in Bulacan. *Sentro* meanwhile did a roundup last May 5 in its “Side-tracked” segment by reporter Jove Francisco of relevant news and blog sites reporting and commenting on World Press Freedom Day.

The press can argue that press freedom is not a reality in the Philippines, as shown in the high number of unsolved journalist killings and threats and attacks. But the press ironically did not go the extra mile in promoting an event dedicated to its own freedom and practice. Moving beyond spot reports regarding the celebrations and country reports by international press freedom organizations, the press could have done feature stories on the killings, or a status report on the cases of the killing of journalists pending in court. An article featuring probable reasons and explanations for the decline in the number of journalists killed could have further increased public awareness of the continuing threats to press freedom.

Impunity index

A few days before the celebration of World Press Freedom Day last May 3, several international organizations meanwhile released reports mapping out trends in the global state of press freedom.

The New York-based CPJ released its Impunity Index, placing the Philippines in sixth place worldwide with a rating of 0.289 unsolved murders of journalists per one million inhabitants.

CPJ’s Impunity Index calculated the number of unsolved journalist murders as a percentage of the population in each country, from the years 1998 to 2007. CPJ arrived at the 0.289 rating by dividing 24, its tallied number of unsolved cases since 1997, by 83.1, the population of the Philippines in millions as per CPJ’s research data. Afghanistan, Nepal, Russia, Mexico, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India, in that order, registered lower impunity rates than the Philippines.

“Most countries on the Impunity Index are democratic, are not at war, and have functioning law



Lacaba sings during “Pa-imPress Ka Jam.”

CHARLES RAMOTO



In front of a press freedom icon, journalists vow to defend press freedom and call for the need for solidarity and unity among media practitioners.

enforcement institutions, yet journalists are regularly targeted for murder and no one is held accountable," CPJ's Impunity Index noted.

"While the country has a free and vibrant press, journalists covering corruption, crime, and politics have repeatedly been targeted with violence. Broadcast commentators and reporters in provincial regions are especially vulnerable. Politicians and police have been implicated in a number of slayings, but corruption in the local court system has stymied efforts to prosecute," the CPJ Impunity Index country report on the Philippines stated.

Joel Simon, executive director of CPJ, said that the failure to punish perpetrators "sends a terrible signal to the press and to others who would harm journalists."

In response to the numerous unsolved cases of killing of journalists, an anti-impunity campaign for the Philippines was launched by the Freedom Fund for Filipino Journalists (FFFJ), CPJ, Open Society Institute, and the Southeast Asian Press Alliance at the culmination of a three-day conference on impunity and press freedom last Feb. 27.

The FFFJ is a coalition of six media organizations formed in 2003 in response to the increasing number of slain journalists. The FFFJ members are the Cen-

ter for Community Journalism and Development, Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaser ng Pilipinas, PPI, US-based newspaper the *Philippine News*, and the CMFR which serves as secretariat.

The campaign involves a public awareness drive, generating more research data and reports into the killing of journalists, and mobilizing quick-response teams that will act when journalists are killed.

Freedom House report

Freedom House issued a report on April 29, "Freedom House: Press Freedom Losses Outnumber Gains Two to One in 2007," stating that "(g)lobal press freedom underwent a clear decline in 2007, with journalists struggling to work in increasingly hostile environments in almost every region in the world."

In Freedom House's recently released *Freedom of the Press 2008: A Global Survey of Media Independence*, the Philippines registered a slight improvement as it climbed three places higher from being ranked 100th in 2006 to 97th in 2007, but remained under the classification "partly free."

The Philippines shares the 97th spot in the 2008 Freedom House survey with Bosnia Herzegovina, where journalists have been "subject to political pressure and

threats of violence," with organized crime also posing as a potent threat to media practice.

"Press freedom in 2007 continued to face limits due to the ongoing threat posed by journalist-targeted violence and the use of defamation suits to silence criticism of public officials, while the arrests of 30 media workers covering a coup attempt in November and subsequent warnings infringing upon news coverage of a significant national event," Freedom House's country report on the Philippines said.

CMFR counted two journalists/media practitioners killed in the line of duty in 2007, while six were killed in 2006. Despite the decline in the number of journalists killed, CMFR has recorded instances of journalists attacked and harassed as well as other forms of incursions, like legal harassments into the Constitutionally-guaranteed right to freedom of the press and expression. President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo has also issued Executive Order 608 which further restricts media and public access to government documents while the country's version of the anti-terror law, the Human Security Act, was signed into law last year.

"Tenuous gains"

But the unity among media practitioners provided signifi-

Judging from the spotty coverage of the occasion, Philippine news organizations themselves were not very excited over World Press Freedom Day

cant advances in press freedom protection in the early half of 2008. On January 28, media organizations filed a civil suit before the Makati Regional Trial Court (RTC) against government agencies involved in the arrest of more than 30 media practitioners on Nov. 29, 2007 at the Manila Peninsula. Hours after the filing of the suit, Makati RTC, Executive Judge Winlove Dumayas granted a 72-hour temporary restraining order prohibiting the involved agencies from issuing "threats of arrests or from implementing such threats" against the media.

The Supreme Court meanwhile granted last March 11 the petition of Mindoro-based journalist Nilo Baculo Sr. for a writ of amparo after he discovered a plot to kill him by persons mentioned in one of his exposés. It was the first writ of amparo granted by the high court to a media practitioner.

A week after, on March 18, the Supreme Court also approved the transfer of the cases of the suspects in the killing of Rolando Ureta and Herson Hinolan from Kalibo, Aklan to Cebu City. The petition for change of venue was filed by the FFFJ and the NUJP, citing the influence of the accused in Kalibo as likely to affect the trial and compromise the safety of witnesses.

In a statement by the NUJP, Torres said these positive developments are but the fruits of media's unrelenting drive to protect press freedom.

"As we celebrate (World Press Freedom Day), however, let us be reminded that the tenuous gains attained are not gifts from government," Torres said.

"Indeed, that things are not worse than they are today is mainly a tribute to the local media community's tenacity in defending press freedom." ■ — with reports from Ergrace G. Reyes and Jennilyn Ruth A. Tamayo and research by Kristine Joy V. Ramos

TEST CASE FOR PHILIPPINE LIBEL LAWS



House Speaker Nograles

LITO OCAMPO

■ By Germelina Lacorte

ON THE eve of May 3, World Press Freedom Day, Davao journalists trooped to the Regional Trial Court (RTC) for the hearing of the motion to reopen the case of Davao broadcaster Alexander "Alex" Adonis, jailed on a libel suit filed by House Speaker Prospero Nograles.

"No journalist should be jailed for doing his job," read the bright stickers the journalists wore, prompting Helen Macagalat, chief of the probation and parole office, to ask who was the journalist in jail.

When they told her it was Adonis, Macagalat immediately recognized the name among the list of inmates granted parole earlier this year.

"We already have an order for his discharge," she said,

The filing of the complaint before the UN is the first in Asia and should test how well Philippine libel laws can stand the scrutiny of the international human rights body



Davao journalists troop to the Davao Penal Colony to show support for Adonis.



Adonis Photos by BARRY OHAYLAN

showing reporters a copy of the order issued by the justice department's Board of Pardons and Parole. It was approved on Dec. 11 last year but Macagalat's office only received a copy in February this year.

Adonis, however, was not aware of the order. Macagalat said it was the Davao del Norte provincial parole office that was tasked to inform him of the case. But the revival of another case filed against him by Jeanette Lomanta-Leuterio had put his re-

lease on hold.

Leuterio's case, which sprang from the same libel case filed by Nograles, was revived six years after it was filed at the precise moment when Adonis could have availed himself of parole, having spent six months in jail.

Wary over where his case was heading and languishing for over a year in jail, Adonis brought his case to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) last month, questioning the country's criminal libel law as a violation of its responsibility to uphold free expression.

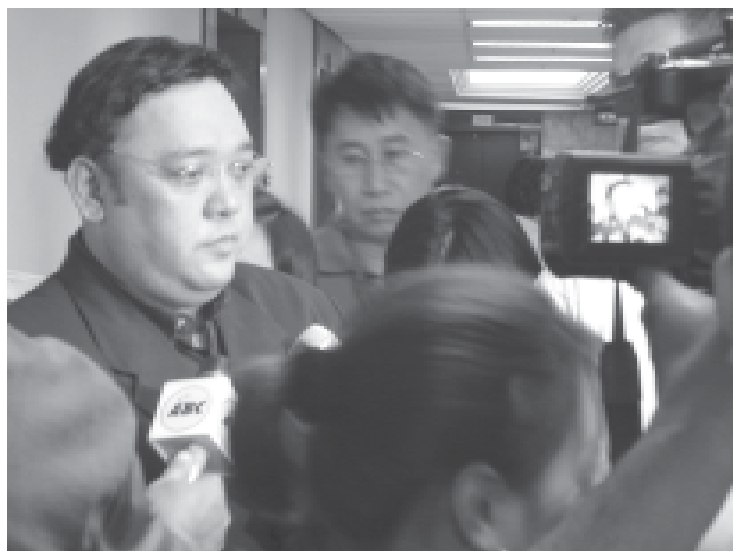
Adonis's lawyer Harry Roque, chair of the international lawyers' advocacy group Center for International Law (CenterLaw), said jailing a journalist for libel is inconsistent with the country's treaty obligations to uphold press freedom under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

The filing of the complaint before the UN, invoking the freedom of expression clause of the ICCPR to challenge Philippine libel laws, is the first in Asia, and should test how well Philippine libel laws can stand the scrutiny of the international human rights body. It was filed when libel, a crime in the Philippines, has been increasingly used by powerful politicians to harass journalists and to silence critical media, according to the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP).

Represented by his brother Colly, Adonis filed the motion before the UNCHR by email at 11:35 a.m. of April 18, only hours after he had attended a pre-trial hearing of the libel suit filed against him by Leuterio.

Aside from Adonis, the signatories to the complaint include the press freedom group Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility and the NUJP.

"We're filing the case, not only in the name of Adonis but also in the name of all media people in the Philippines and in the name of press freedom in the whole world," Roque said. He also said that the jailing of Adonis for libel not only violated freedom of expression but also the freedom of



Lawyer Harry Roque

LITO OCAMPO

thought provision (Article 18) of the ICCPR and the right to equal protection of the law and the prohibition against discrimination (Article 26).

"Criminal libel in the Philippines is contrary to freedom of expression and is inconsistent with Philippine treaty obligations in the ICCPR," he said. He argued that Nograles, as a public figure, had ceased to be a private person the moment he accepted public office.

Roque also said that the UN complaint was filed only as a last resort, after Congress failed to enact a law decriminalizing libel.

"Considering that the present Speaker of the House is the same man that filed the case that convicted Adonis, we need to explore other options and tap all available international remedies," Roque said, referring to Nograles.

Nograles wrested control of the Speakership of the House of Representatives early this year, ousting former House Speaker Jose de Venecia Jr. a few months after De Venecia's son exposed the controversial NBN-ZTE deal late last year.

Roque said that hopes for Congress to pass a law to decriminalize libel have dimmed with Nograles as Speaker of the House.

Adonis was sentenced to four and a half years for libel early last year for a series of commentaries titled the "Burlesque King." Adonis, who was hospitalized early this year for an ailment contracted while in prison, showed up at the Regional Trial Court Branch 14 to face charges on the second libel complaint filed by Leuterio.

Handcuffed and wearing a blue prison uniform, a gaunt Adonis sat side by side with cell phone-snatching and murder suspects.

Roque sought the dismissal of Leuterio's complaint on the basis of the Supreme Court ruling dis-



couraging the lower courts from imposing jail terms for libel. He argued that there is no reason for the state to continue prosecuting Adonis because he has already been serving time in jail.

Adonis is not the only journalist to be harassed for libel in the country, although he is one of the very few who has been convicted



Davao journalists call for the release of their colleague.



Journalists listen as the regional director of the Bureau of Corrections explains why Adonis was not released.



Romel Bagares, one of the lawyers handling Adonis's case, helps file the motion for its reopening.

But state prosecutor Victoriano M. Bello Jr. inhibited himself, effectively moving the case to another pre-trial hearing on May 26.

Invoking the same Supreme Court ruling that prevents journalists from being jailed for libel, Roque also sought to reopen Adonis's case. When journalists

trooped to the RTC for the hearing, however, they learned that the hearing for the case had been postponed, as the RTC Judge had ordered the prosecution to comment on the motion filed by Adonis's lawyers.

Lawyer Romel Bagares, Center Law executive director, challenged Nograles, who recently said he was supporting the decriminalization of libel, to take concrete steps to set Adonis free. Roque also dared Nograles to persuade Leuterio to drop her complaint to allow Adonis to avail of his parole.

Adonis is not the only journalist to be harassed for libel in the country, although he is one of the very few who had been convicted. Jose Miguel "Mike" Arroyo, the husband of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, had filed 11 libel suits against 46 journalists which he later dropped in the face of a journalists' class suit alleging that he was abusing his right to sue.

Adonis's conviction for libel has highlighted the urgent need to pass the bills currently pending in Congress that would decriminalize libel. According to NUJP-Davao, the victory of Adonis will mean a victory for journalists in the fight to decriminalize libel. "We would like the international courts to heed our call in decriminalizing libel in the country," an NUJP statement said. "We would like the government to be held accountable for Adonis's case before the UNCHR." ■

Germelina Lacorte is a correspondent of the Philippine Daily Inquirer and associate editor of Davao Today.

SO YOU WANT TO WORK IN THE MEDIA



Photos by LITO OCAMPO

■ By the *PJR Reports* staff

MEDIA PRACTITIONERS have yet to see better wages and benefits, despite years of campaigning for an improvement of working conditions. Issues of wages, tenure, and job security have also haunted media workers for decades.

"Talents" not employees

Contractualization is common in the Philippine media. Most TV networks hire reporters and other media workers as "talents" or program-based employees. Talents have no job security as they are not officially employed by the media companies. Positions considered as talents include reporters, producers, researchers, and production assistants.

Most ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corp. reporters, for example, are hired by Internal Job Management (IJM), an in-house agency overseeing the influx of talents and their assignments. Accord-

ing to Felisberto Verano, president of ABS-CBN's Rank and File Employees Union, reporters under the IJM receive only a quarter of the usual rice subsidy, their health plans do not include dependents, and their bonuses depend on performance.

On the other hand, Union members—who are regular employees under Republic Act (RA) No. 6715—receive full rice subsidies, insurance and bereavement pay, and bonuses including up to 15th month pay especially when company profits are up. RA 6715, or the Herrera Law, prohibits contractual workers from joining rank-and-file workers' unions.

Contractualization is common among broadcast networks because contractual employees allow it, Samson Cordova, president of the National Alliance of Broadcast Unions (NABU) explained. NABU is an alliance formed in 2001 by 10 company-based unions in six television stations and one radio station.

Some talents work for one program or more while accepting projects from other networks. They call this "naglalagari" which means more earnings for employees. This would not be al-

lowed if employees were regular. For example, Jocarlos Morales, cameraman, audio man, and lights man for GMA-7's documentary program *I-Witness*, has chosen not to apply for regularization because the management will prohibit him from accepting extra jobs. It is considered a "mortal sin" for a regular employee in GMA-7 to work for other programs, he said.

Prepaid cell cards

Morales receives a net pay of P7,000 per month with only a monthly P300 prepaid cell card

allowance and meal allowance as his benefits. Even worse, talents are not allowed to consume their meal allowances unless they have already worked for 10 hours, he said.

Media workers in ABC-5, on the other hand, are better off compared with their counterparts in other networks. Ed Lingao, head of ABC-5's News Operation Department, said ABC-5 newsroom employees get higher wages compared to those in other, bigger stations. ABC cameramen could earn from P15,000-P20,000, depending on seniority. Reporters' salaries range from P13,000 to P30,000. Senior reporters or correspondents who are already in the supervisory level earn more.

More stable

Manila-based broadsheets, on the other hand, generally offer a more stable working environment. Most Manila-based journalists working for major national broadsheets are regular employees and receive benefits like transportation and food allowances.

The *Philippine Daily Inquirer* pays the highest salaries among



the Manila broadsheets. Employees' benefits include 13th month pay, parental and other kinds of leaves, rice subsidies, and insurance, mostly because of the efforts of the workers' union.

According to *Inquirer* reporter Jeannette Andrade, who has been with the *Inquirer* since March 2007, she receives a monthly salary of between P15,000 to P20,000. She gets the usual benefits such as bereavement and hazard pay, rice subsidies, 13th month pay, and health insurance among others. The company, she said, also has a regularization policy through which a reporter is regularized after six months.

Similarly, *The Philippine Star* reporter Iris Gonzales described her working relationship with *Star* as "healthy." "I have a healthy professional relationship with my superiors. The paper is run by a competent team. The compensation is also very competitive," Gonzales said in an e-mail interview.

Measly rates

The same salary and benefits cannot be said to apply to correspondents. Unlike Manila-based reporters, most correspondents are not considered regular employees, so they do not receive standard salaries and benefits. Most correspondents also do not have any contract with the news organizations, meaning they have no employer-employee relationship with the news organizations they work for.

Each month's take home pay varies for each correspondent. There are months when some correspondents would only take home a measly P3,000 while others receive about P10,000 to P25,000. This is because everything depends on how many of their stories got printed.

Most news organizations pay correspondents only for published stories. *Inquirer* correspondents, for example, are paid based on the length and placement of their printed articles. One *Inquirer* correspondent said the company pays P0.30 per character or P35 per column inch. Thus, correspondents could get as low as P150 and as high as P2,000 per story. If their story is merged with that of other reporters, the payment would be divided among the number of reporters (one could get as low as P20 for a merged story). Other newspapers pay their correspondents for published stories regardless of length. Tabloids have lower rates compared to broadsheets, going as low as P5 per column inch.

Manila Bulletin correspon-

dents, for their part, are treated as talents and are paid on a per article basis.

Some correspondents receive certain benefits only after meeting certain criteria, while others do not receive anything at all. *Inquirer* correspondents who reach the 50-column inch minimum each month "could avail of transportation, Internet, and cell card allowances totaling P2,150," according to *Inquirer* correspondent Nestor Burgos Jr. Some newspaper correspondents also qualify for a monthly retainer's fee as low as P1,000 in addition to what they're paid for published stories.

All work and no pay

There are also correspondents—either based in Manila or in the provinces—who are not paid at all. Eight months after leaving *The Daily Tribune*, Rommel Lontayao has yet to receive his complete paycheck from the paper. At the end of his three-month stint as a *Tribune* correspondent covering the Manila City Hall and nearby government agencies, he received only P5,000. That was a month's pay, he told *PJR Reports*. He does not know how the *Tribune* came up with that figure considering that the paper had regularly published two or three of his articles each day for three months. The *Tribune*, he said, promised to pay him P100 for every published article. Lontayao is now a full-time reporter for *The Manila Times*.

Since provincial correspondents generally get lower salaries compared with those based in Manila, some work elsewhere for extra income without, they say, succumbing to corruption. Correspondents, for example, can send articles to local or regional newspapers.

"There are also NGOs which commission writing assignments, and Internet-based news outfits that pay hefty sums for contributed articles," Bong Sarmiento, *BusinessWorld* correspondent in Mindanao, said.

Photographers share a similar fate with correspondents. Dennis Sabangan, chair of the Philippine Center for Photojournalism, said that while photographers for wire agencies are paid P1,500-P3,000 per picture, the biggest newspapers in the country pay only P150-P250 per picture, P500 if it is used on the front-page. He said tabloids pay a meager P50 per picture. Aside from having more freedom with their work, wire-based photojournalists are given more time to create pictures and are provided with all



necessary equipment and support.

'A long and trying campaign'

The poor economic conditions of media workers undermine the quality of journalism in the country. "How can a journalist write critically if his pay is low, if he can be fired anytime by his newspaper, or if his newspaper does not have an advertisement because the journalist criticized a multinational corporation?," asked National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) chair Jose Torres Jr. "That company would not advertise in the newspaper and because of that, the (journalist's economic) situation will not improve."

The poor economic conditions of journalists thus affect the exercise of press freedom. Torres said that in reality, the Philippine media are not as free as many think, since journalists are dependent on the economic interests of media organizations.

These conditions are among the factors responsible for media corruption. Torres said that while some reporters can be challenged and inspired by poor working conditions to fight harder for press freedom and better working conditions, some succumb to unethical practices such as accepting bribes. Some reporters also double as public relations officers of local government officials, while others solicit and/or accept money in exchange for favorable coverage.

It is not surprising, according to Philippine Press Institute executive director Jose Pavia, to find journalists who are unethical because they have to make ends meet. Some, he told *PJR Reports*,

line up at politicians' offices to ask for transportation money, which can be as little as P20.

Pavia said journalists should be properly compensated to stop the mediocrity—abundant as it is at present—in the news coverage. "If you give peanuts, what do you get?" he asked. "Monkeys."

Redmond Batario, executive director of the Center for Community Journalism and Development, agreed.

"One cannot expect a media worker to turn in high quality output when she is paid a pittance, is not given benefits, forced to work long hours, not provided with the necessary training and equipment, and generally considered simply as part of the fixture(s)." The campaign to improve the economic conditions of journalists will be a long and trying effort, former National Press Club president Roy Mabasa said. "This is the toughest problem that we (journalists) face," Mabasa said, adding "(w)hat we need to have is a sustainable (solution), not a one shot (deal)."

Pavia said news organizations should ensure that they pay journalists well and on time. Otherwise, the credibility and integrity of the profession will continue to be affected.

Advancing workers' rights

Media unions have been vehicles in advancing workers' rights, looking for long-term solutions to worsening labor problems. Joel Paredes, chair of the defunct Kapisanan ng mga Manggagawa sa Media sa Pilipinas, discussed in the book *Labor and Mass Media in the Philippines* (1988) that the tough

competition in the media industry has prompted media workers to organize.

He said "(n)ewspapers continue to flood the market despite the uncertainty of profit. So many media owners expand operations at the expense of the workers' economic benefits." This led, he said, to the organization of unions as workers were exploited by their respective newspaper companies.

The *Bulletin Progressive Union* (BPU) is one of the five established unions in the print medium. Other print organizations which have unions are: *The Inquirer*, *Malaya*, *Manila Standard Today*, and the *Journal Group of Publications*.

June Usuan, president of BPU, said a regular employee is now given benefits and allowances such as sick and vacation leaves, midyear and Christmas bonuses, health insurance, and retirement pay among others. Usuan, however, noted that correspondents, together with the employees under probation, are not covered by the CBA and thus are not entitled to benefits.

Contractual workers like correspondents and talents, as stated in the Herrera Law, do not have bargaining rights like regular employees. "So dahil wala kang status, kung ano iyong nadatnan mong systema, iyon ang susundin mo (Because you do not have an employment status, you just follow whatever system they have when you arrive)," Tonette Orejas, a correspondent for the *Inquirer*, said. She said *Inquirer* correspondents are lucky to have bureau chiefs who help them in dealing with management.

In 2003, the *Inquirer* granted their correspondents' plea for higher rates. NUJP has also been successful in helping correspondents get free copies of newspapers from their respective companies.

On NABU's part, Cordova said the alliance is trying to address the contractualization issue among TV and radio workers by working for an Industry Tripartite Council (Government-Employers-Employees) that would agree on defining the structure of the broadcast media. He explained that the council would serve as a venue for concerned parties to talk about labor issues: allowing all employees to join unions, stating which jobs are suitable for contractual and/or regular employees, the standardization of the wages of entry level employees, and a CBA, among others. ■ —with reports from Andres Paolo V. Tanchuling and Marrian P.R. Ching

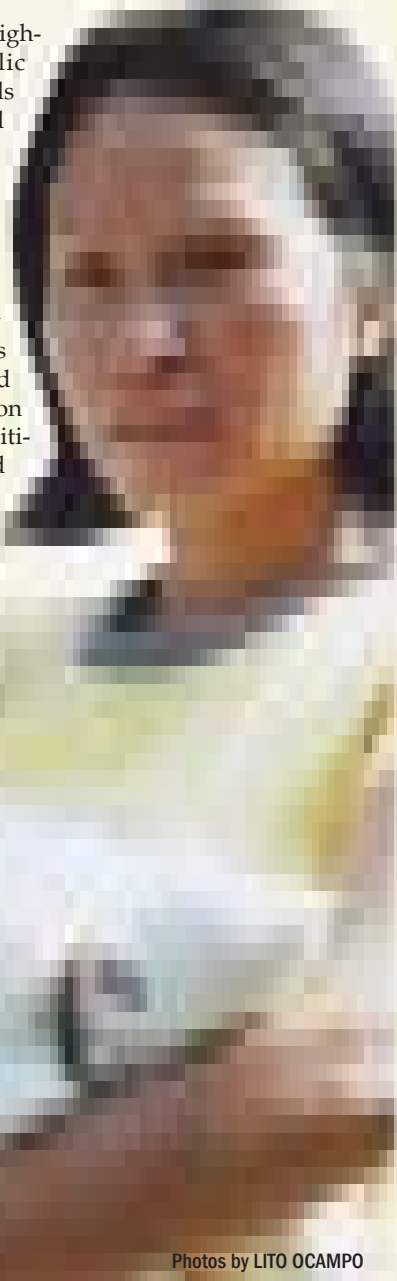


■ By Hector Bryant L. Macale, Don Gil K. Carreon, and Kathryn Roja G. Raymundo

TO ITS credit, the Philippine press was already sounding the alarm over a possible rice shortage in early March as grain costs rose world wide. But the coverage intensified only after the agriculture chief's call on fast food restaurants in late March to serve half-portions to prevent waste, while at the same time assuring the public of adequate supplies.

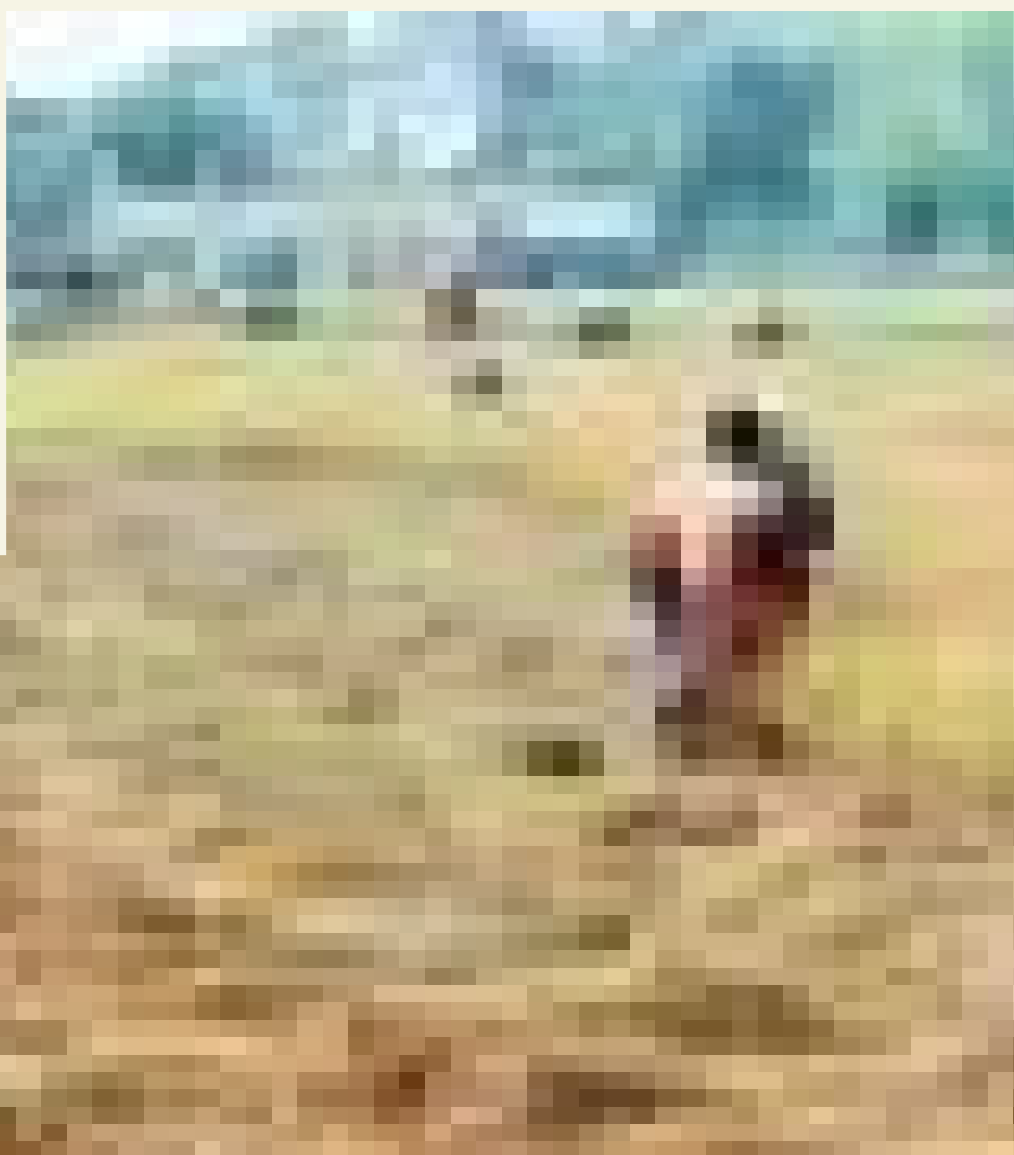
The press, however, failed to highlight and explain to the public government's contradictory signals on the rice situation. Both print and broadcasting offered conflicting and confusing news and views on whether the country had a food shortage or a rice price crisis. Instead of analyzing data available such as the ratio between supply and consumption to conclusively report the situation, most reports relied on the conflicting views and reactions of political personalities on the issue. Media's reliance on political statements and reactions instead of on the statistics and other information available further confused Filipinos.

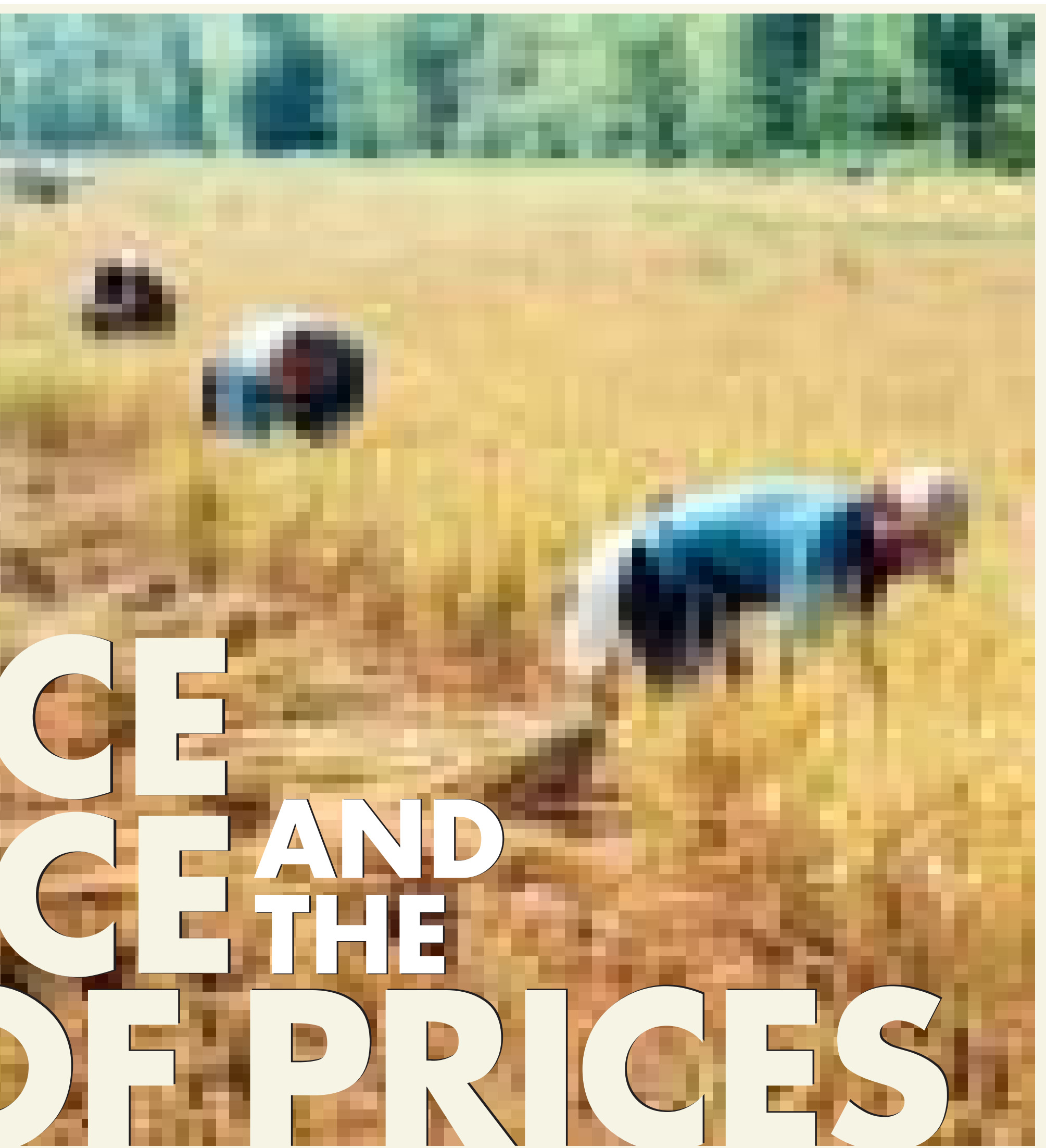
The press should have looked into why the government was sending discordant messages to the public on the issue.



Photos by LITO OCAMPO

THE PRICE OF RICE RISE





CE CE AND THE OF PRICES



"We hear the government saying that we have adequate supplies of rice. But on the other hand we also hear government people saying they may come up with an emergency plan," said Ramon Clarete, an agricultural economics professor at the University of the Philippines. "That's an inconsistent message."

Gaps and claims

The news organizations also failed to follow up other leads and to close gaps in the coverage. These included accusations and claims that were not verified. The press should provide background and context on complex issues such as the rice problem, Clarete said. The government's rice policy, for example, should have been explained better in the news reports.

The press should have also studied whether the government should continue importing rice

News organizations failed to follow up other leads and to close gaps in the coverage

or aspire for self-sufficiency. Clarete said that going for self-sufficiency or continuing the importation policy involves risks and the government has to assess which is more efficient.

"If we go for self-sufficiency at any cost, there is really nothing much we can do if there is a drought or if super typhoons hit us," he told *PJR Reports*. Another concern with regard to self-sufficiency, he said, is that current



government programs are not protected from financial wastage due to corruption and bureaucratic inefficiency.

But if the country decides to continue its importation policy, he said, there are also risks that are already evident. "The world

market is disturbed by major supply problems and demand shocks that are pushing prices up."

The press mentioned the P728-million fertilizer fund scam in 2004 and the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program in relation to the current rice problem, but did not sufficiently explain how these issues affected prices and supply.

When President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo announced that she would appoint a deputy ombudsman for agriculture to ensure transparency in the budget allocation for food production last April 4, the press did not look at the exact nature of this new office, given the possibility of duplication of functions with other departments, agencies, and officials.

Neither did the press check if the government-issued family access and barangay identification cards could be tampered with or used for political purposes.

When Sen. Aquilino Pimentel Jr. claimed that Agriculture Sec. Arthur Yap's father-in-law was involved in the rice trade and therefore raised the issue of conflict of interest last March 27, the reports did not ask Pimentel for his source. Neither did the press go to other sources. When Yap denied the accusation the following day, the press accepted his denial.

In an interview with *PJR Re-*



ports, former agriculture and trade and industry under-secretary Ernesto Ordoñez also wondered why the press did not investigate whether Yap had consulted with senior government officials, academics, bureaucrats, and farmers regarding the rice issue.

The press also kept referring to a “rice crisis” but did not explain what it meant. Ordoñez said that what the country was experiencing was a crisis in its “mild form” because of relatively high rice prices. He added that the crisis will reach an “extreme form” when the rice supply expected to come from imports does not arrive, since prices will go up even more.

Ordoñez said the press should have known that, one, there is no rice supply shortage in the Philippines at present; but that second, there will be one if imports do not come. Lastly, the country has had always experienced shortages in rice production.

Propaganda tool

The government-owned NBN-4, through its news program *Primetime Teledyaryo*, consistently presented the statements and actions of the government in a positive light without airing opposing views. It also frequently aired interviews with ordinary people praising government efforts and asking the opposition to stop politicking amid the rice problem.

Positive efforts

To be fair, there were some efforts to provide in-depth discussion. For instance, the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* published a four-part in-depth report from April 24 to 27 that analyzed issues related to the rice situation. The first part (“Most Filipinos ignored warnings of a ‘perfect storm’”) tackled the global problem of food shortages. The second looked at the National Food Authority’s (NFA) role and activities (“Senator says NFA has become cash cow”), while the third discussed reforms in farming mindsets and practices (“Mindset change needed for richer harvests”). The last part discussed the activities of the Laguna-based International Rice Research Institute (“IRRI’s new miracles: Aerobic, submarine rice”).

The *Manila Times* provided a two-part special on the country’s agricultural problem and the government’s wrong macroeconomic policies on agriculture (“Rice crisis ‘imminent’ a long time ago,” April 6; “Rice sufficiency not impossible, experts



say,” April 7). *Bulatlat*’s Benjie Oliveros also analyzed the situation, explaining that the country’s rice problem can only be completely solved with a reversal of government economic programs and priorities (“Missing the Point in the Rice Crisis” April 6-12, <http://www.bulatlat.com/2008/04/missing-point-rice-crisis>).

Some reports and editorials also reviewed the role and capacity of the NFA, its problems and history. On April 17 and 18, *BusinessWorld* explained how the food agency is partly responsible for the slow development of the country’s agriculture sector (“The clock ticks for the state grains

agency,” April 17; “NFA’s bleeding cannot be sustained,” April 18). The two-part report looked into NFA’s operating losses that could eventually be passed on to taxpayers. *BusinessMirror*’s April 11-12 editorial also provided background on the NFA and its history (“The NFA is not a business,” p. A10). The long lines at NFA rolling stores had created the impression of “severe shortage, consumer panic, and an administration that seems to be losing control of the situation,” *BusinessMirror* noted.

A special feature by *abs-cbnNEWS.com/Newsbreak* comprehensively discussed the differ-

The press kept referring to a “rice crisis” but did not explain what it meant

ent ways of increasing rice yield particularly with the use of the system of rice intensification (SRI) rather than planting hybrid rice (“Science community divided over new way to increase rice yield,” April 11, <http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/storyPage.aspx?storyId=114393>). The Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism did a similar report last April 21, which traced the SRI’s history and differences from traditional rice planting practices (“Alternative planting method key to rice self-sufficiency,” April 21, <http://www.pcij.org/blog/?p=2297>). *Times* columnist Dan Mariano also discussed SRI as a method of increasing rice yields several times in his column (“Big Deal”).

An April 24 *GMA News.TV* discussed the problems of the country’s irrigation system, and why the P6 billion pesos Arroyo promised to improve the system may not be enough to boost rice

production. It also said that only 46 percent or 1.4 million hectares of irrigable land in the country is actually irrigated while the rest has yet to be developed (“P6B for irrigation not enough to address food security problem,” <http://www.gmanews.tv/story/91347/P6B-for-irrigation-not-enough-to-address-food-security-problem>). *GMA-7’s 24 Oras* also aired a similar two-part special report on the problem of the country’s irrigation system from April 22 to 23. The report said that the country can have an additional harvest of 4.6 million metric tons of *palay* if all the irrigable lands available are actually irrigated.

Other notable efforts which fell outside the monitoring period of *PJR Reports* included *BusinessWorld* columnist Rene Azurin’s explaining that an international rice cartel will not work (“A silly idea,” May 8). The *Inquirer* also provided an analysis of the issue by economics professor Ernesto Pernia (“RP food crisis not simply a supply problem,” May 5).

The *Inquirer* should also be credited for publishing several commentaries on the country’s agricultural situation by former agriculture and trade and industry undersecretary Ordoñez. Ordoñez wrote four analytical pieces on the rice problem during the period *PJR Reports* monitored. He wrote at least two more pieces after. ■



■ By Hector Bryant L. Macale, Kristine Joyce G. Magadia, and Apple Jean C. Martin

THE MANILA Electric Company (Meralco) has always been a controversial on again, off again news subject, the high cost of electricity being a major target of consumer ire. This time—from late April up to this writing in May—it stayed in the news because of too obvious government moves to take the power company over.



Photos by LITO OCAMPO

THE MERALCO CONTROVERSY: MORE HEAT THAN LIGHT

While legitimate, however, the focus on the political side of the Meralco controversy edged all else out of the news, including why the cost of power has been so high it is regarded as a major and steadily growing burden by consumers.

Much of the necessary information came only last May 12, during the first hearing on electricity rates by the joint congressional power commission of the Senate and the House. The hearing came almost three weeks after Meralco announced another increase on power costs April 22. Full-page ads either favoring the Lopez-controlled Meralco or the government also provided facts and figures on electricity costs. But the press did not bother to check which of these claims were true or distorted or mis-interpreted to serve the interests of either contending party. The result was a failure to explain what is in every Meralco consumer's mind—

the reasons behind the high cost of electricity.

Meralco's April 22 announcement of a rate increase was another missed opportunity—for the press to provide informative reports on why the increase despite already high electricity rates. Much of the press chose to report the announcement of the increase as just one more item in the business section.

From there, press coverage focused on the political side of the rate increases when Winston Garcia, president and general manager of Government Service Insurance System (GSIS), complained that the company was not transparent with its documents and its transactions with independent power producers (IPPs) owned by the Lopez family. The Lopezes own 33.4 percent of Meralco, while GSIS owns around 25 percent. President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo followed Garcia's complaint with a call for lower electricity rates.



The possibility of a government takeover of Meralco was widely viewed as Arroyo's attempt to get back at the Lopezes for ABS-CBN's supposedly biased and critical coverage of the administration. The television giant is also a Lopez company. The press coverage focused on the personalities involved, and produced the usual he-said, she-said reports.

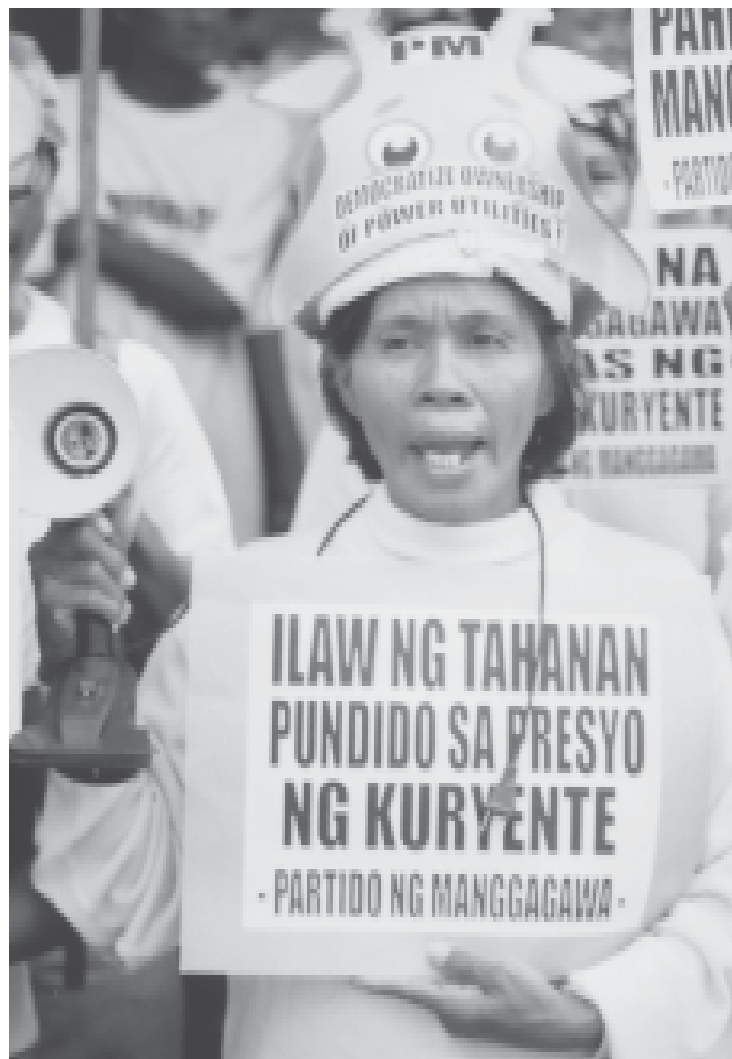
PJR Reports reviewed the coverage of the Meralco controversy by the three biggest newspapers and two major business dailies, as well as the primetime newscasts of the country's two major networks and government-owned NBN-4, and the reports by the major news websites. The reports monitored were from April 23, a day after Meralco announced another increase in electricity rates, to May 13, a day after the joint congressional hearings on the issue began.

In an interview with *PJR Reports*, economist Cayetano Paderanga said that technical issues that directly affect electricity prices were not adequately discussed by the press. These issues include rising oil prices, the cost of inputs for both Meralco and the National Power Corporation (NPC), and government taxes. Paderanga said that the press should have explained these technical issues so consumers could understand why electricity costs were rising.

Paderanga, who teaches at the University of the Philippines School of Economics and was director general of the National Economic and Development Agency, said the press should have also scrutinized the NPC's financing and stranded costs that determine the price of the energy they generate and which appears in electricity bills, as generation charges.

Elpi Cuna, Meralco's vice president for corporate communication, told *PJR Reports* in a phone interview that while the news reports have been "quite fair," they do not explain many important points. Most reports stated that Meralco's administrative costs are being charged to consumers, said Cuna, but did not point out that only one percent of the company's costs can be so charged under existing laws. Cuna pointedly suggested that reporters improve their knowledge of the electric industry so they can put the facts in context.

The coverage should have also looked into the capability and competency of the Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) and if there is a need to review the Electric Power Industry Re-



Protests for and against

form Act (EPIRA)—the first major bill Arroyo signed into law when she became president—and why seven years after its implementation, it has failed to lower electricity costs. There was also a dearth of reports explaining how government taxes on electricity, among them taxes imposed on local usage of natural gas, boost those costs.

Despite its frequent mention of the Wholesale Electricity Spot Market (WESM), the press did not provide enough explanation on the nature of WESM and its possible contribution to high elec-

tric charges either.

Neither did the press look into allegations that Garcia personally stands to gain from a possible government takeover of Meralco because his family is involved in the Visayan Electric Company, the country's second largest power utility.

Laudable efforts

Departing from the usual he-said-she-said accounts, some reports and columns, however, tried to close some of the gaps in the coverage.

BusinessWorld published a



three-part explanatory report on the factors that contribute to high electricity rates last May 12-14. The first part discussed how the slow privatization of state-owned power plants contribute to high rates and Meralco's "unexplained" rate increases ("Expensive Meralco power justified?"). The second part tackled the difficulty of lowering power costs because of the highly-regulated electric industry and the heavy government taxes and royalties it collects ("Reducing Meralco's power rates easier said than done"). The last part looked at the "give and take" relationship between the government and Meralco, pointing out that the Arroyo administration had used Meralco to boost its public popularity and image ("Power sector give and take").

For its part, *BusinessMirror* published a primer from the Freedom from Debt Coalition (FDC) last May 13 listing and explaining the reasons for the high cost of electricity in the country. "The issue of high electricity prices is a result of a confluence of factors, from bad governance to corruption, to mismanagement to rent-seeking to framework concerns," the FDC primer said, stating that

the real problem is rooted in "structural, management, policy, governance, and paradigmatic causes."

Government interest

If most reports in the privately owned press were generally fair, *Batingaw*, the new news program of government-owned NBN-4, was clearly used to promote the government position and even to mislead the public. Most of *Batingaw*'s reports on the controversy focused on government officials' denial of a possible government takeover. Others reported only the side of government officials, and allowed their claims against Meralco to air without verification.

As if to further show viewers the extent of its bias, its reports also highlighted how high Meralco's electricity charges are and the government's alleged efforts to bring these down.

Much heat and too little light was generated in the reportage on the Meralco issue, as a result of which the public has remained uninformed as it was when the controversy started on an issue that is among those at the heart of homeowners' concerns. ■ — with a report from Karen Nicolas



■ By Don Gil K. Carreon and Kathryn Roja G. Raymundo

SHALLOW IS a fitting description for most of the reports on the proposals to amend the country's archipelagic baseline laws. A monitor of selected newspapers, news programs and news websites showed that most reports on the issue focused on the political squabbles showing the press's failure to fully appreciate the implications of the bill. The reports on the proposed amendments to the baseline law were treated as a side note to the more controversial Joint Marine Seismic Undertaking (JMSU) agreement of Spratly Islands the Arroyo administration signed with China and Vietnam.

The press's decision to zero in on the more controversial JMSU, which critics said was unconstitutional, limited the discussion on the baselines bill which has implications as far-reaching as the JMSU agreement.

To determine how the media covered the issue, PJR Reports monitored from March 15 to May 15 *The Philippine Star*, *The Philippine Daily Inquirer*, *TV Patrol World*, *24 Oras*, the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, *Newsbreak*, and *VERA Files*.

Where were the experts?

Most of the reports on the baseline bills were in the usual he-said, she-said format and centered on government official's bickering, which only served as a distraction from the real issues: whether it would bolster the Philippine claim to the Spratlys or shrink Philippine territory. The views of experts who could have better explained these issues were lacking. The public would have had a better understanding and appreciation of the baseline bills if the media had given it more attention.

For instance, the *Inquirer* published several reports on the disagreement between Sen. Miriam Santiago and the proponents of House Bill (HB) 3216, the Archipelagic Baselines Law of the Philippines, authored by Cebu Rep. Antonio Cuenco, but failed to provide information on whether citizens should support the bill or not.

Last March 26, the *Inquirer* reported Sen. Miriam Defensor Santiago's remarks that the new baseline bill would shrink Philippine territory if it became an archipelagic state following UNCLOS guidelines ("Esperon admits RP lacks firepower to defend Kalayaan, pins hope on UN").

Santiago was quoted in the report as saying that if the bill is passed, the Philippines would have less jurisdiction over foreign vessels in matters of national security and marine pol-

lution and would lose sovereignty over Sabah. In the next day's report ("House to pursue baselines bill"), the paper did not provide the reactions of the bills' proponents to these statements. Neither did they try to seek expert opinion or past studies to confirm whether



Media coverage of the UNCLOS controversy focused on the political tussle between Sen. Santiago and Cebu Rep. Cuenco, author of the House Bill 3216 or "The Archipelagic Baselines Law of the Philippines"

Photos by LITO OCAMPO and MARK SANTOS (PISU-DFA)

Reporting UNCLOS FOUNDERING IN THE SHALLOWS



LITO OCAMPO

Santiago's claims are valid or not. Santiago cited Merlin Magallona, a former foreign affairs undersecretary and dean of the University of the Philippines College of Law, as her source for her claims, but the *Inquirer* did not get Magallona's reactions.

In another report, the *Inquirer* highlighted Santiago's statements that the proponents of the baseline bills in the House of Representatives were *tarantado* (idiots) for not understanding the impact of changing the country's territorial limits ("Santiago calls lawmakers idiots over baselines bill," April 23). In the follow-up report ("Santiago draws solons' ire," April 24), the *Inquirer* simply focused on Cuenco's response to Santiago's *tarantado* statement. His refutation of the senator's claim was relegated to the last paragraph and did not say why his bill would not be disadvantageous to the Philippines as Santiago claimed.

Unexplained terms

Like the *Inquirer*, the *Philippine Star* also resorted to the he-said, she-said format in reporting the proposed baseline laws. While the *Star* was less prone to highlighting the squabbles, it failed to explain some of the technical

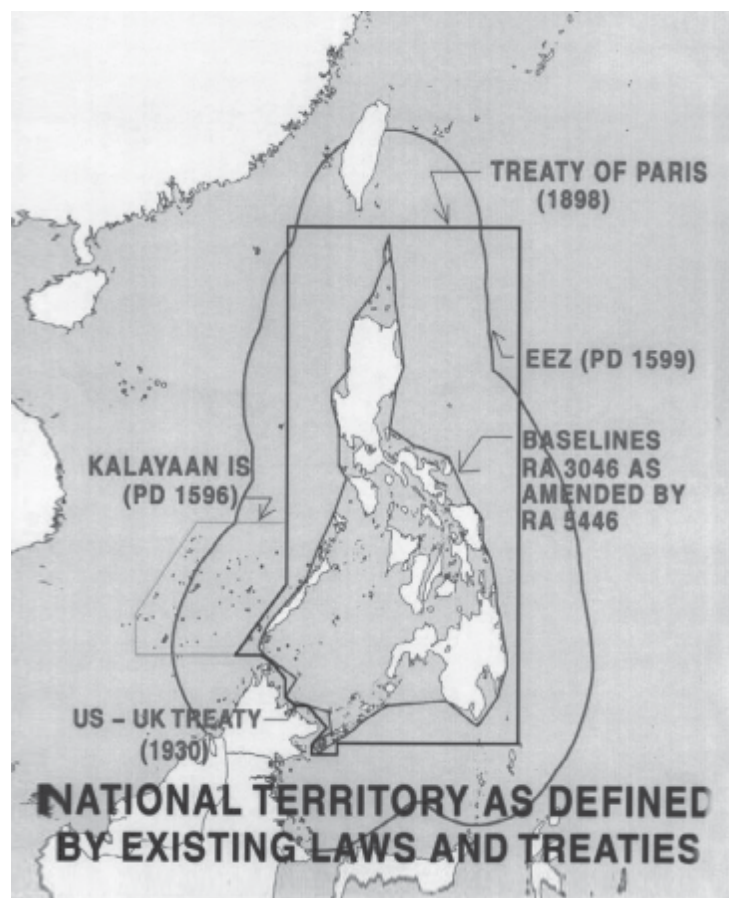
provisions of the baseline bills. On more than one occasion, the paper mentioned such terms as “archipelagic baselines,” “exclusive economic zone,” “continental shelf,” and “regime of islands” without explaining what these terms mean.

The reports also frequently mentioned the amendments being proposed for the Philippines’s baselines law to conform with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), a treaty on the legal order for the use of the oceans ratified in 1982. But there was little explanation of UNCLOS and how this related to the baselines bill.

The *Star* was also remiss in following up leads that could have expanded the discussion on the subject. In an April 22 report, the paper quoted Cuenco, who said the House version is the correct one as those who crafted the bill had the advantage of hearing the arguments of the experts for and against it. But the *Star* did not present the views of any of these experts.

The reports mentioned that there are several versions of the archipelagic baselines bill in the Senate and the House but did not explain the differences and similarities among them. Aside from Cuenco’s bill, already approved for third reading in the House, Sens. Juan Ponce Enrile, and Antonio Trillanes IV have their own versions. Ilocos Sur Rep. Ferdinand Marcos Jr. is set to introduce another bill which would classify the disputed Kalayaan Island Group (KIG) and the Scarborough Shoal under a “regime of islands” (“New baselines bill to be filed Monday,” April 26).

The TV news programs reviewed did not fare any better. The



The press resorted to the he-said, she-said format in reporting the proposed baseline laws.

highly-technical baselines bills were largely ignored by the networks, which did not devote a single report to it. News on rice shortage fears and the government’s efforts to gain control of Meralco dominated the airwaves during the monitor period.

Very few commendable reports

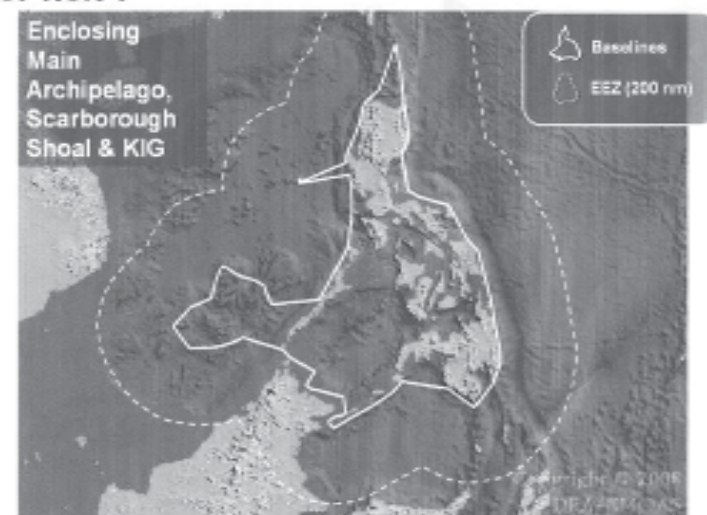
The *Star*, however, redeemed itself by publishing on March 24 and 25 some of the few laudable reports on the issue, a two-part special by The VERA Files.

The first part of this special detailed how neglect and infighting within the Arroyo government have jeopardized efforts to define new baselines for the country. The second part reported the government’s last minute effort to meet the UN deadline for countries to identify their continental shelves—an effort to which an archipelagic baseline law is crucial—to gain exclusive rights to exploit natural resources there. The Vera Files report also pro-

OPTION 2



OPTION 4



In its reports, VERA Files explained the consequences of including the Scarborough Shoal and Kalayaan Island Group as part of the main Philippine archipelago or as “regime of islands” in the baselines bills. It also provided the three infographics above.

vided one of the crucial facts missing from most reports: the size of the area the Philippine stands to gain if the baseline bills were implemented (“Arroyo neglect, gov’t infighting jeopardize RP’s territorial claim,” March 24).

But although much better than most stories on the issue, the VERA Files reports missed out too in providing the perspective of those experts opposed to UNCLOS who are not necessarily politically motivated. ■

THE PHILIPPINES SIGNED UNCLOS ON MAY 8, 1984. IT BINDS THE COUNTRY TO THE FOLLOWING:

1. The signing of the Convention by the Government of the Republic of the Philippines shall not in any manner impair or prejudice the sovereign rights of the Republic of the Philippines under and arising from the Constitution of the Philippines.

2. Such signing shall not in any manner affect the sovereign rights of the Republic of the Philippines as successor of the United States of America, under and arising out of the Treaty of Paris between Spain and the United States of America of 10

December 1898, and the Treaty of Washington between the United States of America and Great Britain of 2 January 1930.

3. Such signing shall not diminish or in any manner affect the rights and obligations of the contracting parties under the Mutual Defence Treaty between the Philippines and the United States of America of 30 August 1951 and its related interpretative instruments; nor those under any other pertinent bilateral or multilateral treaty or agreement to which the Philippines is a party.

4. Such signing shall not in any manner impair or prejudice the sovereignty of the Republic of the Philippines over any territory over which it exercises sovereign authority, such as the Kalayaan Islands, and the waters appurtenant thereto.

5. The Convention shall not be construed as amending in any manner any pertinent laws and Presidential Decrees or Proclamations of the Republic of the Philippines; the Government of the Republic of the Philippines maintains and reserves the right and authority to make any amendments to

such laws, decrees or proclamations pursuant to the provisions of the Philippines Constitution.

6. The provisions of the Convention on archipelagic passage through sea lanes do not nullify or impair the sovereignty of the Philippines as an archipelagic State over the sea lanes and do not deprive it of authority to enact legislation to protect its sovereignty, independence and security.

7. The concept of archipelagic waters is similar to the concept of internal waters under the Consti-

tution of the Philippines, and removes straits connecting these waters with the economic zone or high sea from the rights of foreign vessels to transit passage for international navigation.

8. The agreement of the Republic of the Philippines to the submission for peaceful resolution, under any of the procedures provided in the Convention, of disputes under article 298 shall not be considered as a derogation of Philippines sovereignty.

Source: <http://www.un.org>

Photos from [HTTP://WWW.MIZZIMAPHOTO.COM](http://www.mizzimaphoto.com)

IN BURMA, NO NEWS IS BAD NEWS

■ By Roby Alampay

EXACTLY four years ago this month, a cyclone, the strongest in 30 years, hit Burma (Myanmar). A journalist, writing one month later in *The Irrawaddy* (a news magazine published by Burmese exiles), wondered how the country's state-controlled news media could fail to mention a typhoon that the United Nations said killed at least 140 people, sunk vessels, and left an estimated 18,000 people homeless.

The journalist, Dominic Faulder, wrote that "a town of 100,000 could burn to the ground here and nobody would ever know about it." Here, he concluded, is a country "where disasters don't happen, officially." For the people of Myanmar, this truth is more devastating—and its tragedy more lingering—than anything that nature may bring.

If information can flow as freely as nature's elements, the

consequences of many calamities—be they earthquakes, floods, droughts, hurricanes or storms—are manageable and even preventable. Absent such freedom in news and information, all "natural" disasters are ultimately man-made.

When the military junta in Myanmar refused to accept relief workers into the country, its actions underscored a terrible reality: the ruling generals view in-

dependent information as more dangerous to them than Cyclone Nargis, which may have killed 20,000 to 100,000 people and left up to a million people homeless. And for the Burmese people, a drought in information can be deadlier than the forces that despots seek to deny.

Catastrophes of this scale are inconvenient to governments of this peculiar character because they give aid agencies compelling arguments to be allowed to operate in even the most notoriously secretive of states. Once inside, relief workers can afford the world a glimpse of the poverty within the world's most restricted borders.

In Myanmar, caught between the need to aid its people and the reflex to hide any suggestion of vulnerability, the junta has been consistent in its choice. After the tsunami of Dec. 2004, Myanmar's

generals made the World Food Program wait two weeks before its workers could even visit the affected areas.

Four years later, Indian meteorologists were warning of Cyclone Nargis as early as April 26. As predicted, the cyclone made landfall in Myanmar on May 2—the eve of World Press Freedom Day. The irony is worth noting because the tragedy was not that India's advisories fell on deaf ears. Rather, they were relayed to the gagged.

Myanmar has the worst conditions for press freedom and access to information in Southeast Asia. All broadcasting systems are state-owned and the largest newspapers are controlled by the government. The junta's censorship of publications is so thorough (and deliberately slow) that daily papers do not exist. The Internet, too, is heavily restricted

and monitored and foreign journalists are routinely denied visas into the country.

As a result, the rescue and relief efforts in Myanmar will inevitably continue to be tragic. By now it is plain that the junta's uncompromising policies regarding the press and access to information are a source not only of political repression, but also of humanitarian emergency. Aid workers are not the only essential element for relief and recovery that the country's callous leaders are denying their people.

Until free and reliable news and information becomes available in Myanmar, the Burmese will continue to suffer horrors that are literally untold. ■

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This article was first published in The New York Times last May 10. Roby Alampay is executive director of the Southeast Asian Press Alliance (SEAPA).

PLAGIARISTS THE VAMPIRE CHRONICLERS

■ By Hector Bryant L. Macale

IN THE age of Web 2.0, when computers and the Internet have become necessary research and writing tools for reporters, any one can plagiarize by using online search and copy-and-paste technology. But this convenience is a double edged sword: the same tools can also be used to detect plagiarism.

Investigative journalist Alecks Pabico found that out one Sunday. Since he had been writing about the generics drug law for the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ), Pabico kept himself updated on the issue through Google Alerts. A useful tool that journalists can use to monitor issues, Google Alerts can send anyone information on whatever topic s/he wants through e-mail.

One item from Google Alerts caught Pabico's attention: a special report on the issue from *The Manila Times* posted online that same day, Feb. 3. He was surprised that the *Times* report contained sentences and quotes that were eerily familiar. Pabico found that the *Times* report as well as an accompanying story had lifted several portions of a story he did on the generics law almost two years ago. The stories contained several paragraphs nearly identical with portions of Pabico's Sept. 2006 report. Even several of the quotes in his story two years ago were in the *Times* stories.

How could the *Times* story have carried the same quotes two years later when the quotes in his earlier story were based on one-on-one interviews? "*Malinaw na nag-lift talaga*," said Pabico, who is PCIJ's multimedia program director. Curiously, the *Times* used a quote in Pabico's report but instead attributed it to an unnamed source. More curiously, the *Times* credited the same PCIJ report in one portion but did not do the same for the rest of the copied portions.

PCIJ immediately complained to the *Times*: first, by calling the paper's editor that same day, and by writing a formal let-

The availability and ease of getting information from the Web is one new factor in the proliferation of plagiarism

ter a day later. Although some news organizations have used PCIJ stories that did not give proper credit to the organization, Pabico told *PJR Reports*, it was the first time that PCIJ had formally complained, given the portions copied.

"The similarities in quotes, we contend, are too glaring to be ignored," PCIJ said in its letter to *Times* executive editor Dante Ang II. We hope that "you will promptly take appropriate action on the writer and the editors who may have been remiss in their duties and (who) thus wittingly or unwittingly caused this unhappy situation," PCIJ deputy director Jaileen Jimeno wrote in the Feb. 4 letter.

The *Times* responded by publishing a front-page apology. "The editors apologize to Mr. Pabico, PCIJ, and our readers for publishing the articles which without our knowledge, had made plagiaristic use of the PCIJ-Pabico material," the *Times* apology said. The *Times* also published the full version



Pabico LITO OCAMPO

of the PCIJ letter on Feb. 6.

When PCIJ informed the *Times* of what happened, it immediately conducted an internal investigation and confirmed that one of their staff had plagiarized the PCIJ report, Ang told *PJR Reports*.

"It warranted a front-page apology," he said, explaining that the *Times* regarded the issue very seriously. "We felt that it's very important that to keep the respect of the readers, we must also be equally passionate about getting the truth."

The plagiarism case will certainly have a negative effect on the *Times*, Ang said. "But I hope our readers would also appreciate the fact that we acted as quickly as we could, that we alerted them to this issue, apologized on page one, and we also printed the full letter of PCIJ which detailed all of the material that was printed on our report without proper attribution."

Ang did not want to explain in detail the results of the investigation and the kind of disciplinary action meted on senior reporter Sherryl Anne Quito.

"I don't want to talk about somebody's reputation but suffice it to say that she feels terrible about it, she doesn't deny any-

JOURNALISTS BEWARE

HERE ARE some quick facts about plagiarism from Plagiarism.org

- Simply put, plagiarism is "the use of another's original words or ideas as though they were your own."

- All of the following are considered plagiarism:

- ☞ turning in someone else's work as your own
- ☞ copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit
- ☞ failing to put a quotation in quotation marks
- ☞ giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation
- ☞ changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit
- ☞ copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of your work, whether you give credit or not

- "Changing the words of an original source is not sufficient to prevent plagiarism. If you have retained the essential idea of an original source, and have not cited it, then no matter how drastically you may have altered its context or presentation, you have still plagiarized."

- "Most cases of plagiarism can be avoided, however, by citing sources. Simply acknowledging that certain material has been borrowed, and providing your audience with the information necessary to find that source, is usually enough to prevent plagiarism."

From University of the Philippines journalism professor Danilo Arao:

- "There's no difference between somebody who copied and pasted an entire work from that of somebody who just copied one sentence."
- Journalists can also be guilty of committing auto-plagiarism. Auto-plagiarism happens "when the author passes off as original something he or she has written in the past."
- Submitting a press release in its entirety and passing it off as one's own story is considered plagiarism. A press release should be viewed as a mere secondary source. If publishing a full version of a press release, it should be attributed to the source of the release—not to a reporter.

thing. In fact, she offered to resign," Ang said. He added that Quito's byline will not be seen "for a while." According to Ang, he has known Quito for around 10 years. "This is the first time that I've encountered anything negative about the work of Sheryl," he said.

A Compliment?

If Pabico stumbled upon the plagiarism of his report using Google Alerts, former *Malaya* reporter Anthony Ian Cruz discovered that someone had plagiarized him through the traditional way: by checking newspaper websites. And if Pabico's article was plagiarized two years later, Cruz's report was plagiarized the day after it was published.

As part of his daily work as a journalist, Cruz surfs news websites every day to check if *Malaya* used his stories and to monitor rival papers and other institutions. When he saw the item from the other reporter, he thought he was "just developing a story based on mine."

"That's no problem for me," Cruz told *PJR Reports*. "The problem was that the entire article, except for the first four paragraphs, was copied in toto."

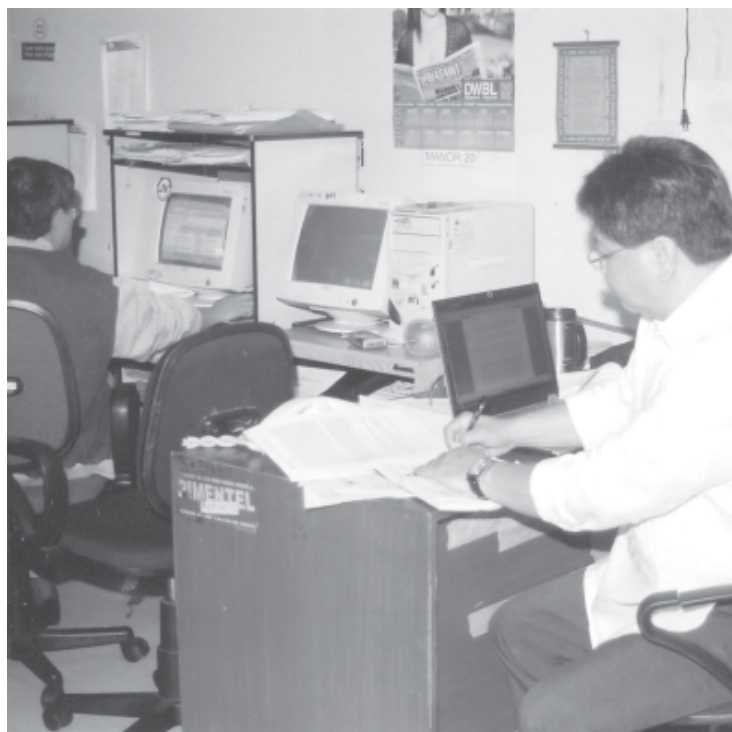
PJR Reports reviewed Cruz's Jan. 28 report ("Influential US journal says GMA sank RP into morass of corruption") and compared it with the other report published the next day ("Palace downplays US journal's charges vs GMA") bylined by Sherwin Olaes of *The Daily Tribune*.

Except for four paragraphs of the government's reaction to the issue as the story lead, the rest of the *Tribune* report was the same as the *Malaya* account published the previous day. Not one word or sentence structure had been changed.

His article was not based on a press release so there was no way Olaes could have used the same words and sentences, Cruz said.

"I took over an hour reading the 15-page academic paper and made use of the interesting portions of it," he explained. "I found (the deed) very insulting for myself and journalists in general," said Cruz, who is now a reporter for the Manila bureau of the Japanese newspaper *Asahi Shimbun*. "The other person did not even make any effort to adapt my story to his own story."

Cruz told *PJR Reports* he notified his then editor and colleagues at the *Malaya* of the incident. He did not know if his editor informed the other paper about what happened, but Cruz remembered what one desk person told him: "Well,



Journalists can use the online medium to detect plagiarism. LITO OCAMPO

Online tools in detecting plagiarism can be combined with more traditional ways of checking —Arao

you could look at it as a compliment."

Detecting plagiarism

The availability and ease of getting information from the Web is one new factor in the proliferation of plagiarism. Because reports are easily accessible online nowadays, anybody can copy and pass them off as original stories. Journalists, however, can also use the online medium to check whether their reports have been plagiarized.

One way is to put a phrase or sentence in online search strings, journalism professor Danilo Arao said. If the phrase or sentence appears in other websites, then there is a high possibility that it was plagiarized.

"There's no difference between somebody who copied and pasted an entire work from that of somebody who just copied one sentence," he added. "It's plagiarism, plain and simple." A former chair of the University of the Philippines journalism department, Arao has also served as chair of the anti-plagiarism committee of the College of Mass Communication (CMC). Currently the director of the CMC Office of Research and Publication, Arao is

managing editor of the CMFR academic journal *Philippine Journalism Review*. He also writes a column for *Pinoy Weekly* and is a member of the board of editors of the online publication *Bulatlat*.

As search engines sometimes do not give useful query results, journalists can also go to human-edited directories such as the Open Directory Project (www.dmoz.org) to check, Arao also said. Entries and bibliographies posted on Wikipedia may also be a good way to start. There are also sites available that were specifically made to detect plagiarism such as Copyscape (www.copyscape.com). Google Alerts (www.google.com/alerts) or even a simple online roundup, as in the cases of Pabico and Cruz, may also prove helpful.

For more information about plagiarism and journalism, Arao also recommended visiting websites such as Plagiarism.org (<http://www.plagiarism.org>) and the Poynter Institute (<http://www.poynter.org>).

Online tools in detecting plagiarism can be combined with more traditional ways of checking, such as contextual analysis, according to Arao.

"You try to trace the sources that were used and from there you can more or less detect if number one, the writer was honest in terms of citing the data that was gathered there." Other ways include detecting changes in the writing style, tone, and/or orthography (spelling) of the articles. Another way of identifying plagiarism, Arao added, is if the article in question does not offer "value-added knowledge" such as additional sources of in-

IT'S PLAGIARISM

PJR REPORTS consulted three journalism educators on whether the *Times* and *Tribune* reporters were guilty of plagiarism. They were shown copies of all the involved stories with the reporters' bylines removed.

All three said Quito and Olaes had indeed plagiarized.

In the *Times* case, there was even an attempt to hide the plagiarism, said Danilo Arao, an assistant journalism professor at the University of the Philippines in Diliman. The *Times* cited another person instead of the PCIJ source, but used the same quote. There should have been an effort to credit PCIJ every time the report used information in its story, and not just in one portion, he said. As a result, the impression readers got was that the information in the *Times* report had been gathered by the reporter.

"There was a conscious effort to deceive," Arao said. Or at the very least, to get away with plagiarism.

Meanwhile, Olaes had clearly lifted paragraphs from *Malaya*. "It's a clear case of plagiarism," Arao said.

Both Lito Zulueta and John Paul Galang agreed that both Quito and Olaes plagiarized. The *Times* report clearly contained "passages, ideas, quotations, and paraphrases that came from an article put online two years ago," said Zulueta, who teaches journalism and literature at the University of Santo Tomas (UST). He is also lifestyle sub-editor for the *Inquirer* and is the adviser of *The Varsitarian*, the UST student paper.

Journalists are not prevented from using information, ideas, and quotes under fair use, Zulueta said, but they should not be excused from citing sources.

Galang, a former *Manila Bulletin* reporter who currently teaches journalism ethics at Far Eastern University, explained why he believes the *Tribune* had clearly copied *Malaya's* report. "It's highly unlikely that two persons had come up with similar words," Galang said, unless the report is a wire report, or the two rival papers had agreed to do a collaborative report.

formation or evidence, or data updates.

Identical

PJR Reports conducted an online check of three random special reports Quito wrote for the *Times*. The check also showed portions copied from other news reports, documents, and accounts that were not properly credited.

Two of Quito's three-part series on barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan elections published from Nov. 25 to 27 last year contained almost identical paragraphs from three different online sources, all posted earlier than the *Times* series.

Quito's Dec. 2007 series on bombs and other explosive devices did not cite some of the online sources she used. She used a quote from a BBC report but neither did she identify the source. Quito apparently relied as well on—but did not credit—an article from online technology news website *Wired News* about bomb detection. She also copied several paragraphs about bombs, including their definition, from *Wikipedia*—a popular user-edited online encyclopedia which has its share of inaccurate and plagiarized information.

For her three-part series on

incineration and medical-waste disposal published from Oct. 28 to 30 of last year, Quito also copied some paragraphs from articles posted online—one article was even dated Oct. 1994. No credit was given to the online articles.

An online check showed Olaes had two articles that copied paragraphs from other reports without proper attribution. An April 15 report on the Japan Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement bylined by Olaes was entirely sourced from a Malacañang press release. His Jan. 21 report on the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland extensively used material from an Agence France-Presse report, but did not cite it.

However, it takes more than just online tools to curb plagiarism. Plagiarism continues to be a rampant problem in journalism. Likening the plagiarist to a vampire, American journalist and slate deputy editor David Plotz wrote in 2002: "The plagiarist is, in a minor way, the cop who frames innocents, the doctor who kills his patients. The plagiarist violates the essential rule of his trade. He steals the lifeblood of a colleague." ■

NATIONAL

Case against Esperat masterminds stalled

THE CEBU Court of Appeals issued last May 14 a writ of preliminary injunction prohibiting the Cebu City Regional Trial Court (RTC) from proceeding with the case against the suspected masterminds in the 2005 murder of journalist Marlene Esperat.

In a five-page resolution penned by Associate Justice Francisco Acosta and co-signed by Associate Justices Amy Lazaro-Javier and Florito Macalino, the Cebu Court of Appeals granted the May 7, 2008 petition for a writ of preliminary injunction filed by Osmeña Montañer and Estrella Sabay, both accused of ordering the killing of Esperat, preventing Cebu City RTC Branch 7 Judge Simeon Dum Dum Jr. from hearing the case for an indefinite period. It also stopped the Feb. 4, 2008 warrants of arrest against Montañer and Sabay from being served.

Esperat, known as "Madame Witness," was killed on March 24, 2005 in full view of her children. She had exposed numerous cases of graft and corruption in the Department of Agriculture Region 12 office, where Montañer and Sabay serve as finance officer and regional accountant, respectively.

Based on the arguments during the March 24, 2008 hearing on the petition for certiorari and the April 3, 2008 manifestation of the Office of the Solicitor General (OSG), which sided with the accused, the Court of Appeals was "convinced that justice would be better served if the status quo is preserved until the final determination of the merits of the case."

The OSG serves as the law office of the Philippine government.

The Cebu Court of Appeals granted last March 25 the prayer for a 60-day temporary restraining order (TRO) by Montañer and Sabay.

The Appellate Court said the Cebu RTC has no jurisdiction over the murder case filed against the two accused since it happened in Tacurong City, Sultan Kudarat. It cited the OSG's comment filed last April 3 that the Supreme Court Nov. 23, 2005 order transferring the venue of Criminal Case No. 2568 from Tacurong RTC to Cebu City RTC does not apply to the present case against Montañer and Sabay.

"Criminal Case No. 2568 against petitioners as accused in [Criminal] Case No. CBU-

82237...had already become final and can no longer be disturbed by the courts. The filing therefore of the Information against petitioners cannot be said to be a continuation of Criminal Case No. 2568," the OSG explains.

Criminal Case No. 2568 pertains to the case against Randy Grecia, Gerry Cabayag, and Estanislao Bismanos. The three were convicted and sentenced to reclusion perpetua by Cebu City RTC Judge Eric Menchavez on Oct. 6, 2006 through the help of the testimony of suspect-turned-state witness Rowie Barua. Criminal Case No. CBU-82237 meanwhile refers to the ongoing case against Sabay and Montañer.

When the Supreme Court issued the resolution granting the transfer of venue, Tacurong City RTC Judge Francis Palmones had already dismissed the case against Montañer and Sabay. Palmones dismissed the case even before the prosecution's presentation of evidence.

The OSG suggested that it would only be possible to hear the case in Cebu if the prosecution withdraws the charges filed before the Cebu RTC, files it before the Tacurong RTC, and asks the Supreme Court to again transfer the venue of the case from Tacurong to Cebu.

The Freedom Fund for Filipino Journalists (FFFJ) filed on July 4, 2005 the petition to transfer the case to Cebu in response to security concerns of the witnesses and considering the clout of the accused which could unduly influence the case if heard in Tacurong. FFFJ is a coalition of six media organizations working to promote and protect press freedom. The Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility is a founding member of FFFJ and serves as its secretariat.

The prosecution has 20 days to reply. Montañer and Sabay, on the other hand, were asked to pay P50,000 each as injunction bond.

Nena Santos, private counsel for the prosecution, said she only received the copy of Montañer and Sabay's May 7 petition for a writ of preliminary injunction the same day that the Court of Appeals granted the petition.

"There has not even been a hearing yet a decision has already been reached," Santos said.

State prosecutor Llena Ipong-Avila said that the prosecution will file a motion to overturn the Court of Appeals injunction within the 20-day deadline, and would bring the case to the Supreme Court if the Cebu Court of Appeals dismisses it.

Seventy-one journalists have

been killed in the line of duty since 1986. Not one mastermind has been successfully prosecuted, while only two out of the 34 cases since 2001 have convictions. The Damalerio case, with one conviction for the gunman, and the Esperat case, with three convictions for the gunmen, are the only cases since 2001 in which the killers have been convicted.

Hearing on murder of journalist begins

The trial of the suspect in the killing of a radio journalist in 2001 began last May 9 in Cebu City, Cebu with the journalist's widow stating under direct examination by the prosecution that her husband had received death threats in relation to his job as a journalist before he was killed.

"He told me prior to his death that he was nervous because of the death threats he had received (in relation to his media work)," said Emely Ureta, wife of Rolando Ureta who was slain on Jan. 3, 2001 in Kalibo, Aklan. The trial of suspect Amador Raz is ongoing at the sala of Cebu Regional Trial Court Judge Sylvia Paderanga. Senior State Prosecutor Peter Medalle conducted the direct examination, during which Emely stated that her husband was an outspoken critic of lawless violence in their town. Raz was present during the hearing. Co-accused Jessie Tigar died in a provincial hospital in Aklan on May 2, 2008. The prosecution has already moved for the removal of Tigar in the case.

The case was transferred, along with the case of slain radio journalist Herson Hinolan who was killed on Nov. 15, 2004 also in Aklan, to Cebu by the Supreme Court upon the petition of the Freedom Fund for Filipino Journalists (FFFJ), of which the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility is the secretariat, and the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP).

Both the FFFJ and the NUJP asked for the transfer of the cases to Cebu, citing the influence of the accused in Aklan. The Supreme Court granted the petition, filed on Feb. 8 2008, on March 18, 2008.

During the direct examination, Emely's voice trembled and tears rolled down her cheeks as Medalle asked her if Rolando's death still affects her even if seven years have already passed.

"It hurts. It hurts me so much remembering him," Emely said.

Two celebrated cases of media killings have resulted in convictions after being tried in Cebu.

One is the May 13, 2002 killing of print, radio, and television journalist Edgar Damalerio, which yielded a life sentence for gunman and former police officer Guillermo Wapile on Nov. 29 2005, while the other is the March 24, 2005 killing of print and radio journalist Marlene Esperat, in which accused Estanislao Bismanos, Gerry Cabayag and Randy Grecia—the gunman, lookout, and co-conspirator—were all sentenced to life imprisonment on Oct. 6, 2006.

The prosecution team believes that the case's age, which is already seven years, will have no effect in the outcome of the case.

"Witnesses don't forget what they have seen and if given the chance, they will reveal everything in court," Senior State Prosecutor Theodore Villanueva said.

There have been 71 journalists/media practitioners killed in the line of duty since 1986. Of the 34 cases since 2001, there have been only two convictions.

Official threatens correspondents

TWO PROVINCIAL correspondents of a national broadsheet said they were indirectly threatened with harm by a local government official in Alfonso Lista, Ifugao last May 10.

Reporter Maria Elena Catajan and photographer Redjie Cawis, both correspondents of the national broadsheet *Malaya* said vice mayor Clarence Polig, did not utter any explicit threat. But they felt threatened because, while he kept saying while they were interviewing him that what they were doing was illegal and they were trespassing, his armed companions were cocking their guns.

Catajan and Cawis had gone to Alfonso Lista, Ifugao upon the recommendation of the Department of Tourism and local officials to cover a local fiesta.

A police blotter report said that Polig, who was described as "intoxicated," started the "heated argument" with Catajan and Cawis at his house in Alfonso Lista between 6 and 9 p.m. last May 10.

"Polig deemed their coverage was illegal and accused them of trespassing. [Polig said the] media group has no 'work order'..." the blotter report said.

Polig, according to the blotter entry, told Catajan and her companions that "all dealings with the [Alfonso Lista] municipality had to pass through his approval."

Catajan told the Center for

Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) that Polig also shouted expletives at her and Cawis when they tried to explain that the town's mayor had invited them to cover the event. Polig and his three companions were armed, Catajan said.

"At that point, they were alarmed to notice him (Polig) and his three companions bringing out their guns. They offered to leave the municipality but were stopped by Polig's companions and an unidentified man wearing a (ski mask) and heavy sweater appeared," the blotter entry said.

Catajan said she and Cawis rushed out of the vice mayor's house and boarded their van, but that the unidentified man in the ski mask took a motorcycle and trailed their vehicle for some time.

Catajan and Cawis reported the incident to the police in the capital town of Lagawe on May 11.

Catajan told CMFR that she and Cawis now fear for their security and are considering filing a complaint. - with reports from Inquirer Northern Luzon Bureau

Provincial publisher killed

AN INDIVIDUAL onboard a motorcycle gunned down a newspaper publisher at around 10:15 p.m. last April 7 in Pasig City.

Benefredo Acabal, 34, the publisher and a columnist of the Cavite-based paper *Pilipino Newsmen*, was shot by a gunman onboard a motorcycle along Amang Rodriguez Avenue corner Greenpark Village, Manggahan, Pasig City.

A certain Army Staff Sergeant Antonio Ramos Raynilo reportedly brought Acabal to the Rizal Medical Center for treatment. Acabal however was dead on arrival due to multiple gunshot wounds.

Raynilo did not give any statement.

"Reluctant *magsalita* iyong staff sergeant. *Basta hinatid niya lang iyong biktima at ayaw magbigay ng address* (The staff sergeant was reluctant to speak and refused to give his address. He just rushed the victim to the hospital)," Police Officer Lardy Ignacio told the online news site *GMANews.TV*.

Police later recovered five empty 9mm shells from the crime scene.

The marketing supervisor of *Pilipino Newsmen*, who refused identification, said the publication started only this year, and has had only four issues. He said prior to Acabal's work for *Pilipino Newsmen*, the latter worked as a

columnist for the national tabloid *Bomba* (Bomb) where he wrote political commentaries.

Police have not established the motive behind Acabal's killing, said Major Henry Libay, a member of the secretariat of the Philippine National Police's Task Force Usig. Libay also said that the police are reluctant to classify Acabal as a journalist since the latter's wife did not identify the slain publisher as a journalist. Task Force Usig is tasked to investigate cases of extrajudicial and journalists' killings.

The police, however, have not ruled out the possibility that the killing was related to Acabal's work as a journalist.

The Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility has listed 71 journalists and media practitioners killed in the line of duty since 1986. Thirty-four of these 71 were killed during the present administration of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo.

Journalist gets death threat over mining story

A PALAWAN-based journalist was threatened with death last April 3 after he wrote that a mining company was blocking plans to declare a forest in Brooke's Point, Palawan as a protected area.

Redempto Anda, a *Philippine Daily Inquirer* correspondent and an editor for the local newspaper *Palawan Star*, received the threat through his mobile phone. The text message said that the person after him was protecting the interest of a certain "Kapitan" (Captain).

"Watch your back you have been tempting the gods! Don't even think they will take it kindly that you are on a personal crusade against the KAPITAN," the text message he received read.

Anda later received another message saying, "Be kind to an animal? Yes we will, through mercy killing! Good luck."

The messages were sent through the mobile number 09267869353, which is now turned off.

Anda said in a phone interview that the threat came after his story on the plans of the mining company MacroAsia was published in the April 1, 2008 issue of the *Inquirer*.

Anda's story said that MacroAsia, the flagship company of business tycoon Lucio Tan, was planning to launch a large-scale nickel mining project at Mt. Mantalingahan in Brooke's Point, Palawan despite government plans of declaring it a protected area.

Anda quoted the Palawan NGO Network (PNNI) as saying that MacroAsia was "manipulating" some tribal leaders, who are members of and Brooke's Point Federation of Tribal Councils, to stop the declaration of the mountain as a protected area.

Anda said the threat affected him in "a big way." "*Hindi muna ako susulat ng istorya sa mining* (I won't be writing stories on mining for the meantime)," he said.

After receiving the message, Anda immediately reported it to the local police as well as to the management of the *Inquirer*. The *Inquirer*, he said, has decided that he should "lie low for the meantime" on mining stories.

Anda also approached the MacroAsia management regarding the threat he received. But MacroAsia denied any involvement, according to him.

INTERNATIONAL

Journalists injured, media outlets shut down as political conflict in Beirut continues

AT LEAST five journalists have been injured in Beirut while covering the fierce clashes between pro- and anti-government factions there, while several media outlets have been forced to shut down, say international press freedom organizations.

According to the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), four reporters and photographers for the daily opposition newspaper *Sada al Balad* were injured while covering the conflict last week.

One of the photographers, Wadi Shlink, was taking pictures of young men setting tires on fire in the Beshara al-Khoury area last May 7. "Suddenly, 20 of them attacked me. I ran looking for the security forces to protect me. Some soldiers tried to save me—in vain, because they were outnumbered by the rioters. They didn't calm down until they had taken my camera," Shlink told the free expression website *Menassat.com*.

Menassat said army troopers did not intervene in the street fighting in the Beirut area of Corniche Mazraa, a traditional flashpoint of confrontation between Sunni and Shiite rioters, and instead went after journalists, forbidding them from taking pictures. Said Beyrouiti, a reporter for Hezbollah's *Al-Manar* television, was beaten in the head and had to be hospitalized, *Menassat* reported.

Other journalists have been detained by the police, had their equipment broken, or their homes ransacked. On May 12, two cameramen working for Al Jazeera were slightly injured when gunmen fired on their vehicle, said the London-based free expression monitor Article 19.

Meanwhile, Hezbollah supporters also forced the closure of pro-government satellite TV channels Future TV and Future News, the daily newspaper *Al-Mustaqbal* and Radio Orient on May 9, said the Paris-based press freedom watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF). The four media companies are all owned by the family of Saad Hariri, the head of the Future movement, the anti-Syrian majority party in the Lebanese parliament.

Rockets were fired early on May 9 at the headquarters of *Al-Mustaqbal*, starting a fire on one of its floors, RSF said. Soon afterwards, gunmen surrounded the offices of the radio and television stations, and threatened to fire if they did not stop broadcasting.

Future employees and other journalists have been holding a daily sit-in in front of the Future News building in Qantari to protest the closure.

The daily newspaper *Liwaa* has been unable to publish—its printing house is located in the midst of the conflict zone, The Maharat Foundation, a press freedom advocacy group in Lebanon, reports. And on May 10, the headquarters of the Armenian-speaking Radio Sevan was burned down in west Beirut, reported Article 19.

Maharat and others say the real problem is the politicization of the Lebanese media, which have become the mouthpieces of various political groups. The threats faced by reporters now are not the result of working in a war zone, but due to the "division of the Lebanese media between pro-government, opposition and independent media" said Maharat. It is calling on the media to "remain objective and not to enter the circle of violence."

Clashes between the Hezbollah-led opposition and government supporters started on May 7 in several west Beirut neighborhoods on the back of a general strike demanding wage hikes amid rising prices. In one of the decisions that triggered the violence, government officials closed down a private telephone network operated by Hezbollah in south Lebanon and the southern parts of Beirut. Hezbollah says the communications system was critical to its success in its 34-day war against Israel in 2006.

The protests raised tensions in a country mired in a 17-month-old political crisis between the Hezbollah-led opposition supported by Iran and Syria and the government of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, who is backed by the West and Saudi Arabia. The standoff has left the country without a president since Nov. 2007.

Fighting has moved outside the Lebanese capital, fuelling fears that the violence could spiral into an outright civil war. According to news reports, at least 81 people have been killed and more than 250 have been wounded since May 7 in what observers are calling the worst political crisis since the Lebanese civil war of the 1980s. — IFEX

Politkovskaya's killer identified, charged, sought on an international warrant

THE INVESTIGATIVE Committee of Russia's Prosecutor-General's Office announced on May 12 that it has charged 34-year-old ethnic Chechen Rustam Makhmudov in absentia with the murder of *Novaya Gazeta* journalist Anna Politkovskaya, local news reports said. The Investigative Committee has also issued an international warrant for Makhmudov's arrest.

Investigative Committee spokesman Vladimir Markin told journalists that seven suspects allegedly involved in Politkovskaya's murder remain in custody as of today. Makhmudov is the alleged triggerman.

To this day, authorities have released no information as to the status of the investigation into who the mastermind is in Politkovskaya's killing. Journalists at *Novaya Gazeta*, who are conducting their own investigation into their colleague's murder, say they believe the mastermind is in Russia, not overseas.

Russia is the third deadliest country in the world for journalists, according to research by the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). Since 2000 alone, 14 journalists have been murdered for their work and in only one of these killings—that of *Novaya Gazeta*'s Igor Domnikov—have the killers been convicted; the masterminds are at large.

The May 12 announcement was the first to officially identify Politkovskaya's alleged killer after his name was first leaked to the press in late March. According to *Novaya Gazeta* Editor-in-Chief Dmitry Muratov, the leak significantly hampered the inves-

tigation and facilitated the killer's efforts to avoid arrest.

"As a whole, we are satisfied with the investigation of the triggerman and the organizers of the crime," Muratov told CPJ. "But it is unclear what (authorities) are doing to find and prosecute the masterminds."

Markin told journalists today that seven of the nine people charged with involvement in Politkovskaya's Oct. 7, 2006 assassination remain in custody. Two have been released but are banned from leaving the country, Markin said.

Makhmudov's brothers—ethnic Chechens Ibragim, Dzhabrail, and Tamerlan Makhmudov—remain as suspects in prison.

Also in custody are Shamil Burayev, the former head of the Achkhoy-Martan administrative district of Chechnya, who allegedly organized the murder; Pavel Ryaguzov, a former Federal Security Service (FSB) lieutenant colonel, and Sergei Khadzhi-kurbanov, a former police officer with the Moscow Directorate for Combating Organized Crime, who were allegedly responsible for the surveillance of the journalist and for "technical support" in the crime, local press reported.

Suspects Magomed Demelkhanov and Dmitry Grachyov have been released after signing an agreement not to leave the country, according to local news reports. The official investigation said the two played only a secondary role in Politkovskaya's killing.

The announcement by the Investigative Committee broke a months-long official silence in the official Politkovskaya murder probe. In late August 2007, Russian authorities announced the arrest of 11 suspects in the journalist's contract-style killing. (Three were subsequently released from custody.) Prosecutor-General Yuri Chaika said at the time that Politkovskaya was killed on the order of overseas enemies aiming to destabilize Russia.

Politkovskaya, a special correspondent for the independent Moscow newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*, was well known for her investigative reports on corruption, torture, and human rights abuses committed by local and federal officials in Chechnya and the volatile North Caucasus. In seven years of covering the second Chechen war, Politkovskaya's reporting repeatedly drew the wrath of Russian authorities. She was threatened, jailed, forced into exile, and poisoned during her career, CPJ research shows. ■ — IFEX



LITO OCAMPO

Newsbreak launches latest book on pol ads

AS A sequel to its book on political ads, *Newsbreak* launched *Selling Candidates: Political Ads in the 2007 Senatorial Elections* last May 13, 2008 at the Hyatt Casino and Hotel in Manila.

A follow-up to *Spin and Tell*, which discussed the political ads and the 2004 elections, *Selling Candidates* takes a look at the 2007 senatorial elections by analyzing the roles of political ads in the victory or defeat of the candidates. Written by Pulse Asia executive director Ana Maria Tabunda, *Newsbreak* writers and Jaime V. Ongpin Awards for Excellence in Journalism winners Carmela Fonbuena and Aries Rufo, the book also discusses how the media covered the campaign and election periods.

A panel discussion that included members of the media, politics, and advertising sectors was held after the book launch. The panelists discussed the relationship between political ads and electoral results. - *Marrion P.R. Ching*

Call for Entries

THE WORLD Association of Newspapers (WAN) is accepting nominations for the 2008 World Young Reader Prizes annually given to recognize excellence in newspaper activities that develop young readership.

The prizes are open to newspapers that have developed innovative projects for people aged 25 and below. Entries will be judged on the basis of their contribution to newspaper business in terms of revenue generation, circulation, readership growth, or brand awareness as well as benefits for its audience. The deadline for entries is on July 31. Projects submitted should have

been done in the past 24 months.

The four core categories include: Editorial strategy, which honors a break-through newspaper content strategy with and/or for young people; Newspapers in Education, which recognizes activities that use the newspaper as a teaching tool; Public service, for effective public service projects that promote press freedom and youth civic involvement among others; and Brand building, for other projects that improve a newspaper brand's relationship with the young.

For this year, WAN has added the special category Newspapers and Literacy which will acknowledge an effective project that supports the basic ability of people to read and write.

WAN is a non-profit, non-government organization for the newspaper industry that represents more than 18,000 publications worldwide. Norway-based Norse Skog, the leading producer of newsprint and magazine paper worldwide, is the sponsor of the awards.

Fil-am reporter bags 2008 Pulitzer

FILIPINO-AMERICAN Jose Antonio Vargas of the *Washington Post* was awarded the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for two articles he wrote about the April 2007 Virginia Tech massacre. *The Washington Post* put together the two stories along with seven others as their entry in the breaking news reporting category.

'Pop, Pop, Pop': Students Down, Doors Barred, Leaps to Safety" narrated how witnesses recounted what happened during the shooting rampage while "Students Make Connections at a Time of Total Disconnect" talked about how students of Virginia Tech used the Internet to communicate with and console each other after the incident.

The Washington Post received a total of six Pulitzer Prizes, the most among all US newspapers, this year. Its other awards were for public service, national reporting, international reporting, feature writing, and commentary.

Mexican reporter receives UNESCO award

MEXICAN INVESTIGATIVE journalist Lydia Cacho Ribeiro, who has been the target of threats and attacks for her work about prostitution and child pornography, is this year's Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize awardee. Ribeiro received the award given by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) during the World Press Freedom Day ceremonies last May 3 in Maputo, Mozambican.

Published in 2004, her book *Los Demonios del Eden: el poder detras de la pornografia infantil* (The Demons of Eden: the power behind child pornography) exposed the involvement of businessmen, politicians, and drug traffickers in prostitution and child pornography.

The publication of her book placed her life at risk but despite the death threats, imprisonment, police harassment, and legal barriers thrown at her, Cacho steadfastly persisted in her expose of political corruption and organized crime. Her response to the endless threats was a countersuit for corruption and for violation of her human rights. This made Cacho, also a contributor to the daily newspaper *La Voz del Caribe* (The Voice of the Caribbean) the first woman in Mexico to file a federal suit against a governor, a district attorney, and a judge for corruption and attempted rape while she was in prison. ■ - *Karen Nicolas*

OBIT

GREENE, 78

ROBERT GREENE, an award-winning investigative journalist who worked for the daily New York-based newspaper *Newsday* for 37 years, died last April 10. He was 78.

Greene started working for *Newsday* in 1955, first as a reporter, then as an editor. Throughout his journalism career, Greene showed keen interest in covering corruption and organized crime cases. He co-founded in 1975 the Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE), a national journalism teaching organization that focuses on investigative journalism. Greene also initiated the Arizona Project instigated by the murder of fellow IRE founder Dan Bolles. Arizona Project came up with a 23-part series report that compiled Bolles's works.

Greene won his first Pulitzer Prize award in 1970 when he exposed land scandals in Long Island town in New York. His second Pulitzer Prize was in 1974 when he, along with other reporters, wrote a series of reports that traced heroin growing from Turkey to Long Island.

Greene taught Journalism in Hofstra University where he was voted Teacher of the Year in 2000 and in Stony Brook University, both in Long Island.

PRAN, 65

PHOTOJOURNALIST DITH Pran, who for four years became a captive and slave of the Khmer Rouge forces in Cambodia, succumbed to pancreatic cancer at the age of 65. He died last March 30 in New Jersey.

Pran worked as an interpreter for *New York Times* reporter Sydney Schanberg in 1972. While covering the fall of Phnom Penh in 1975 to the Khmer Rouge, Pran was captured and had to endure four years of torture and starvation.

Pran finally escaped on Oct. 3, 1979 when he made it to a Thai refugee camp. Upon his transfer to New York in 1980, Pran worked for the *Times* as a photographer. He was specially regarded for his pictures that were taken with creativity and great imagination.

Appointed in 1985 as Goodwill Ambassador by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, Pran was also a member of the Asian-American Journalists Association. Pran continued to help Cambodians who suffered under the Khmer Rouge by establishing in 1994, the Dith Pran Holocaust Awareness Project, Inc. that aims to educate people on the Cambodian genocide and how such a crime could be prevented from recurring. He also published in 1997 the book *Children of Cambodia's Killing Fields: Memoirs by Survivors*, which contains his interviews with surviving victims.

His story of survival from the Khmer Rouge inspired the Academy Award-winning film "The Killing Fields."

BRODIE, 72

IAN BRODIE, a British correspondent who worked for the papers *Daily Express*, *The Daily Telegraph*, and *The Times*, died of a stroke last May 8. He was 72.

Brodie made it to the *Daily Express* in 1961 where he was assigned to cover a number of momentous events. These included the fall of Nikita Khrushchev, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union's First Secretary, in 1964; and a meeting of the Ku Klux Klan. He also covered the Vietnam War and reported on then President Richard Nixon's 1972 visit to China during his stint as the paper's Far East Correspondent. Brodie became editor of the *Daily Express* in 1972 but was severely challenged by union disputes.

In 1975, he moved to the *Daily Telegraph* where he reported, among others, the trial of American newspaper heiress Patty Hearst and Roman Polanski's flight to France after his conviction of rape. Brodie also interviewed Svetlana Stalin, Joseph Stalin's daughter. Brodie was appointed the paper's Washington Bureau chief in 1986.

He also worked for the Washington Bureau of *The Times* in 1993 and became the publisher of a local paper, *Topanga Messenger*, until his death. ■



BUSINESS NEWS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS

■ By Felipe Salvosa II

BUSINESS NEWS can be boring stuff for most people. Straight out of university, even with an economics degree tucked under my belt, I found myself lost in a highly specialized field of journalism when I entered *BusinessWorld*, the country's pre-eminent business paper. I could understand GDP, inflation, interest rates, and other basic economic data, but many words I encountered later sounded totally Greek to me: EBITDA, special drawing rights, put options, call options, return-on-rate base, consolidated public sector deficit. I had to study all over again.

Hobnobbing with captains of industry, crossing swords with policymakers, picking the brains of analysts and economists, business reporters often consider themselves a cut above the rest. There is some truth to that. They know what makes the economy tick, who is selling to whom, what moves the market, or where money is to be made. But knowing the concepts, understanding the theories, and being familiar with the technical mumbo-jumbo is just the first hurdle. The challenge is telling the readers why this business story matters and why they should care about the numbers.

After beginning to sound like an analyst myself, it took me a couple of years to realize that business reporters are supposed to help make people earn a living, tell shareholders whether their investments are worth it, and inform taxpayers where their hard-earned pesos are going instead of sounding intelligent or trying to impress. My hard-nosed bosses would ask: "So what? Who cares? What's in it for them?"

The challenge is telling the readers why a business story matters and why they should care about the numbers

After all, business journalism is still journalism—you ask questions, double-check the facts, get all sides of the story, follow the paper trail. You are not supposed to swallow press releases and alleged disclosures hook, line, and sinker. You have to confront technocrats if the numbers do not add up or don't make sense. You have to tell readers the news as it is: prices are going up, the economy is teetering, or this company is losing money. The economy is growing, but poverty is widespread. Wages are up, but companies are laying off workers.

There is so much obfuscation around that "bad" news becomes "good," ideology is peddled around as gospel truth, just any policy shift is

labeled as "reform" when there is hardly any of it, and things are supposed to be good when they are really not.

The strong peso is an example. Few realize that the government, which still has a significant chunk of dollar debts, seems to be the only main beneficiary of the weakening dollar, while exporters and overseas workers suffer. The prices of oil and rice are going up—but do people realize that the government has been raking in more taxes than it had expected precisely because of inflation?

Indeed, the Philippines is a country whose economy is about to take off, but is held back by a huge debt burden and corruption. Debt payments eat up a third of the government's annual budget; tax revenues are alarmingly low. There is little money left to spend even on vital services such as health and education. The country needs more resources to improve infrastructure, enhance the business climate, and hopefully win over more investments to create new jobs and raise incomes. Business journalists can have something to say about all this.

An emerging battleground is trade. Filipinos do not know it, but a lot of things have been committed to international organizations that would eventually affect their daily lives. True, freer trade has helped uplift standards of living, but there are consequences like the demise of local industries and the entry of cheap but substandard products. The economy is being opened up supposedly with our best interests in mind. Is that really the case? Hardly anybody is watching.

Come to think of it, business is really everybody's business. ■

Felipe Salvosa II is a sub-editor for BusinessWorld.