



MEDIA AND FOOD SAFETY

**FRIGHTENED  
BY MELAMINE**



HALLOWEEN INFANTILISM

**INTERVIEWS  
WITH GHOULS  
AND VAMPIRES**

# PJR REPORTS

Published by the Center for Media Freedom & Res

NOVEMBER 2008

# So?

## QUESTIONS OF CONTEXT HOUND COVERAGE OF U.S. FINANCIAL CRISIS



# EDITOR'S NOTE

**PJRREPORTS**

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## Endorsing Candidates

**T**HE U.S. electorate was preparing to go to the polls as this issue of *PJR Reports* was going to press. The 2008 U.S. presidential elections have been hailed as “historic” in that they might result (and by the time this issue is released, are likely to have resulted) in the election of that country’s first black president.

Although racism is pretty much alive in the United States, Barack Obama’s election to the U.S. presidency would suggest that its most virulent forms have receded, although it remains a major factor in U.S. politics. Were it not for his race, Obama would win (or would have won) overwhelmingly over any rival from the Republican Party, given the disaster the Bush administration has inflicted over the last eight years on both the US and the world.

If Obama has won the U.S. presidency, the media would have played a major part in it. His campaign strategy included TV infomercials and ads meant to depict him as a reasonable, balanced, conciliatory, and open individual concerned with both country and people. Obama knew that he had to overcome the racist bias that, beyond the more virulent forms still resident in neo-Nazi and other fringe U.S. groups, still lives in subtler forms in the consciousness of many whites in the US who fear and despise blacks.

However, any assessment of the impact of Obama’s ads and infomercials on the outcome of the U.S. presidential elections can be credibly made only by research. The same is true of the newspaper endorsements of Obama’s candidacy, which, a week before the Nov. 4 elections, were running at two to one in his favor, with 231 endorsing him and 102 endorsing John McCain.

The U.S. journal *Editor and Publisher*, which covers the publishing industry, said the combined circulation of the newspapers that had so far endorsed Obama was 21 million readers, compared to seven million for the newspapers that had expressed support for McCain.

*Editor and Publisher* noted that the Obama lead in endorsements contrasted sharply with that of Democratic Party presidential candidate John Kerry in the 2004 U.S. presidential elections. Kerry then led re-electionist George W. Bush in newspaper endorsements by a slim 213 to 205. *E and P*

also said that 46 of the newspapers that endorsed Obama this year supported Bush in 2004.

While newspaper endorsements are normal during U.S. elections, their absence has characterized Philippine polls since 1992, when the first presidential elections were held after the overthrow of the Marcos dictatorship and its replacement by the Aquino government.

While many media practitioners as well as ordinary citizens don’t seem to favor it, a newspaper’s or a broadcast station’s endorsing candidates seems only natural of organizations engaged in the dissemination and discussion of public issues. That it’s not happening today in the Philippine media is mostly due to the latter’s belief that they have to nurture the myth that they’re “objective” and neutral, while some practitioners also feel that it would affect their credibility. And yet a media endorsement forewarns the public what to expect from the coverage if made at the start of the campaign, or puts the coverage in perspective if made on the eve of an election. Endorsements also endow the public with a perspective from which to evaluate the media organization’s coverage not only of the elections, but of other issues.

The Philippine media shouldn’t restore the practice just because the U.S. media are doing it, or even because the Philippine media used to do it before the declaration of martial law in 1972. Rather should they do it for the sake of transparency. Like the U.S. media, the Philippine media are controlled by various political and business interests, and an endorsement could give the public a sense of how those interests help shape their coverage.

Filipinos will go to the polls in 2010 to elect a president, among others. Some honesty on the part of the media to admit (although perhaps only to themselves) that they do have preferences because of their individual and/or owners’ interests should lead to their restoring the practice of endorsing candidates during elections. It would be an opportunity to help voters decide who could best lead this country—and would certainly be more honest.

Luis V. Teodoro

Adapted from a column in *BusinessWorld*, Oct. 31, 2008.

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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 financial crisis needs explaining, but the media don't seem to know how to do it.**

Cover photos by LITO OCAMPO

### On the right of reply bill

"FROM WHERE we stand, this bill throws out of the window the provision in the Bill of Rights of the Constitution that clearly says no law shall be passed abridging the freedom of the press.

"It also constitutes prior restraint on freedom of the press that the Supreme Court would certainly frown upon.

"And it is likely to have a chilling effect on journalists who will have to think twice before writing exposés on corruption and wrongdoing in and out of government.

"Responsible journalism emphasizes fair and balanced reporting. It allows both sides of the story to be heard, without need of a law....

"The 'right to reply' bill will be another albatross around the neck of journalists who want to uphold good governance and demand transparency and accountability from those in public office. Like the libel law, which has been used by the powerful and the influential to harass crusading journalists, it will allow the corrupt, the incompetent and the stupid to emasculate Philippine media."

*BusinessMirror*, on the approval of the right of reply bill at the Senate, Oct. 6

"(The right of reply bill) would dictate to journalists and editors what story to publish. It would not respect press freedom. The idea behind it is weird."

Jose Torres Jr., National Union of Journalists of the Philippines chair, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, Oct. 2

"It is the policy and standard practice in newspapers—at least in the legitimate ones—to balance all stories by always giving both sides.... This is drummed into the heads of journalism students. Editors keep reminding their reporters of this at every opportunity. And reporters who fail to do this get a tongue-lashing and ordered to get the other side. If the other side is not available or there is no more time, they are told to get it the next day or as soon as possible. If the subject calls to give his side while the press is already running, the press is usually stopped and his reply inserted even if that means delaying the print run and incurring additional costs....

"What will happen is that certain publicity-hungry persons will use the law to force news organizations to publish their statements, no matter how trivial the original stories are. And you know how some people become windy when talking about themselves or defending them-

selves. What will happen is that the pages of newspapers will be full of long-winded replies (the bills mandate that the replies be printed word for word), thus elbowing out more important stories and the advertisements without which no newspaper can survive. Besides, these replies will probably be full of lies and half-truths, so the reading public gets neither the truth nor a balanced view of the story. Not only that, the first side will most likely demand to make its own reply to the reply of the other side, which will then reply again and so on, thus making the exchange of replies almost endless.

"Those are the practical considerations that our lawmakers failed to take into account because their railroad was running too fast. The more important consideration is that it is unconstitutional, being against freedom of the press. It is prior restraint."

Neal Cruz, explaining why a right of reply law is unnecessary, *Inquirer*, Oct. 6

### When government exerts control

"THE PALACE demand clearly smacks of rigging the agenda of the exchange and allowing the President to control discussion of issues. It reduces the exchange into a presidential monologue, in which she dominates the choice of issues to be highlighted and excluded.

"Focap (Foreign Correspondents Association of the Philippines) did not take long to realize that the exchange would be no more than a farce, in which the journalists would be manipulated to promote Ms Arroyo's self-serving agenda....

"It becomes a Goebbels-like propaganda format for Nazism. Focap could have fallen into a propaganda trap that would legitimize the priorities of the administration. The public is better served without having a counterfeit dialogue between Focap and the administration.

"The exclusion of the political issues from the exchange and the sole focus on the economy present the distorted scope of public issues and propagates the false notion that economic and political issues are separate and mutually exclusive. Economic and political issues shade into each other. Any exchange that separates these disciplines project a false and misleading reality."

Amando Doronilla, in his *Inquirer* column, on the stalled press conference between President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and the Focap, Oct. 6. Focap withdrew from the press conference after Malacañang asked them to pass the questions for vetting

# MONITOR



CHEERS



JEERS



Arroyo

LITO OCAMPO

## Non-news

**JEERS TO the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*** for a non-news item about the President's travel itinerary after her recent U.S. trip. "President Macapagal-Arroyo plunged right back to work upon returning Saturday from a six-day working visit to the United States," began the Sept. 28 report "No respite for GMA on return from US trip" (p. A6). The *Inquirer* report had nothing substantial to tell readers other than enumerating Arroyo's activities and brief information about them. Come on guys, you know what that is called.



LITO OCAMPO

## Reporting what's at stake

**CHEERS TO the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*** for a three-part special on how development efforts in Mindanao (with the help of local and international donor organizations) have been threatened with the collapse of peace talks between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. The reports were published on the front page from Oct. 6 to 8 (*Peace*

*Talks Impasse*: "Multidonor effort to rebuild threatened"; "It's easy to destroy, it takes time to rebuild"; and "Doc says Moro war is about injustice").

## A ray of hope

**CHEERS TO the *Manila Bulletin*** for its increasing use of infographics in its coverage—a marked and laudable change from its previous coverage that mainly relied on text and photos.

For example, *Bulletin* ran an infographic last Sept. 28 about Manila traffic accidents together with a report, "More pedestrians than drivers die" ("Metro Manila Bulletin" section, p. 1). The infographic categorized the number according to section and illustrated the number of accidents based on the type of vehicle.

The paper also published infographics on news about recent typhoons, as in its Sept. 27 issue ("Typhoon Ofel", p. 6). On Sept. 24, it had an infographic on how various countries in Southeast Asia were handling the melamine contamination in

China-made milk and dairy products (See "Media and Food Safety: Frightened by Melamine", p. 10-11).

## More, more!

**CHEERS TO the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*** for discussing the positive economic and environmental effects of processing small-scale mining wastes.

"(M)ore gold could be extracted from mine wastes if only small-scale miners and mining companies could develop technology to process these wastes," the *Inquirer* reported last Sept. 11, citing the claim of Dr. Peter Appel, a Danish geologist who recently visited the small-scale mining towns in Benguet. Moreover, according to Appel, the processing of mine wastes to extract more minerals "is one of the ways to stop the further contamination of rivers and seas, where traces of harmful chemicals used in extracting minerals eventually end up." According to Appel, around 145 tons of mercury are released to various bodies of water in the country every year. "The chemical goes to the sea and then affects the food chain," he told *Inquirer*.

Appel, the *Inquirer* reported, is a geologist and senior research scientist of the Geological Survey of Denmark and Greenland. A small-scale mining advo-

cate, Appel has been conducting research on the small-scale mining industry for the past 10 years in various countries ("Danish geologist says there's gold in wastes", p. A14).

The paper also published the reactions of a local mining official and of members of the Benguet Mining Alert Action Network to Appel's views.

Given the importance of the issue, the *Inquirer* however should have placed the story more prominently instead of lumping it with other items in its regional news section. More importantly, the *Inquirer* and the rest of the press would be doing the public a service by reporting and following up socio-economic and developmental issues that affect communities.



Makati Business District

LITO OCAMPO

## Covering a crisis

**CHEERS TO The *Philippine Star*** for a four-part series that analyzed and provided background on the U.S. crisis as well as its impact to the Philippine economy.

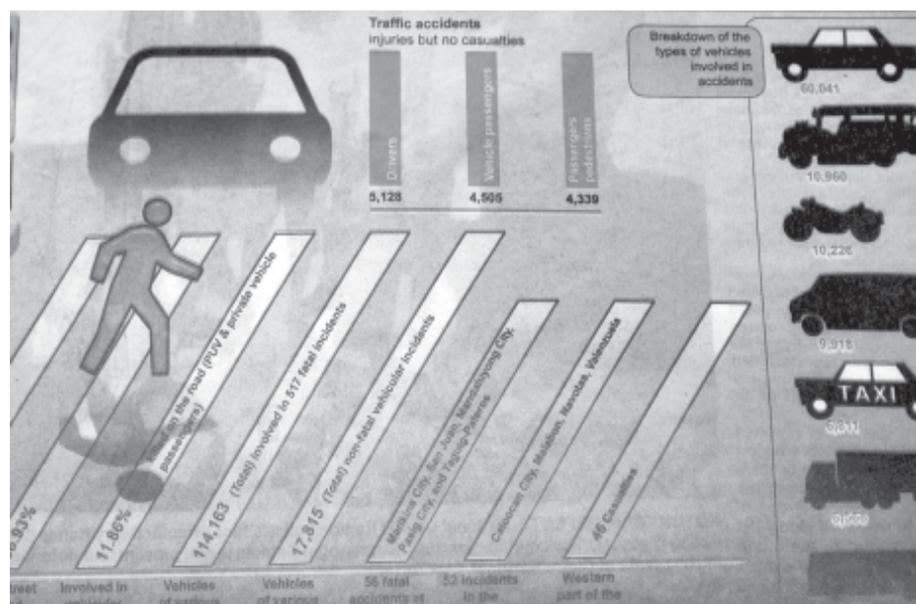
The *Star* explained the interplay of loans, credits, mortgages, and payment schemes in the market which created the U.S. subprime crisis. The four-part report discussed the importance of investor sentiment and market confidence in running the economic machinery. It also explained how the U.S. rescue package and the cutting of interest rates could address the crisis. The series discussed as well the effects of the crisis and of slow economic growth to the ordinary consumer.

The conclusion examined the effect of the crisis on the Philippine economy, particularly its impact on trade and labor. The *Star* underscored the role of the 1997 Asian crisis and why the banking sector in the country is "quite sturdy" amid the ongoing crisis ("U.S. subprime crisis: Why we should worry"; "How to survive a meltdown"; "The rescue: Is it working?"; "RP inoculated by 1997 crisis").

The series, published from Oct. 11 to 14, fell outside the period *PJR Reports* monitored for its story on the local coverage of the financial crisis (See "So?: Questions of context hound coverage of U.S. financial crisis", pp. 12-15). ■



Antamok open pit [HTTP://WWW.CPAPHILS.ORG](http://www.cpaphils.org)



MANILA BULLETIN




CHEERS



JEERS



LITO OCAMPO

## Why peace eludes Mindanao

**CHEERS TO** *The Evening News* for its two-part series on the issues and problems related to peace in Mindanao (Sept. 18 and 19). "Front Lines ni Ed Lingao (Front Lines of Ed Lingao)" looked into why the government is having difficulty signing a peace agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

"Front Lines" tackled the past and current social, economic, and political situation in Mindanao, provided a brief background on the peace agreement between the government and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in 1996, and interviewed key personalities and experts.

"Front Lines" cited government policies on Mindanao, particularly the flawed implementation of agreements on ancestral domain, as reasons why the MNLF peace pact is failing and the future forging of another agreement with MILF bleak.

## Through the victims' eyes, darkly

**CHEERS TO** ABS-CBN News Channel (ANC) for tackling the plight of civilian evacuees in Mindanao amid the ongoing war between government forces and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). In its Oct. 4 special *Faces of War*, ANC looked into the daily lives of the evacuees and the troubles the war has brought them. It also reviewed the events that led to the escalation of hostilities between the MILF and the Philippine government.

## Rabid bias

**JEERS TO** *Teledyaryo* for its unashamed bias. *Teledyaryo* dedicated last Sept. 15 several segments to five government officials who all belied the statements of national broadband network (NBN) project whistleblower Rodolfo Noel "Jun" Lozada Jr. on his alleged kid-

napping prior his appearance at the NBN deal Senate investigation.

The program presented only the views of government officials against Lozada, who said that Lozada was not telling the truth, he was not a credible witness, and he had not been abducted. It did not get Lozada's side, and neither did it provide background information on the issue.

## Missed opportunity

**CHEERS/JEERS TO** GMA-7 for its efforts to provide an overview of the Philippine presidency by briefly reviewing the performances of the last five presidents. The Sept. 28 special (*Newsmakers*) interviewed Imelda Marcos (on behalf of Ferdinand Marcos), Corazon Aquino, Fidel Ramos, Joseph Estrada, and Gloria Macapagal Arroyo.

Sorely missing, however, was an analysis of the presidency as a center of government power, and how the political elite has failed in its promise to address poverty and inequality in the country. The presidency has become the most powerful institution in government, among other reasons because one president after another has tightened his or her control over the budget, including the

pork barrel, despite Congress' supposed control over the pursestrings.



LITO OCAMPO

## Revisiting cold cases

**CHEERS TO** GMA-7's newest public affairs program, *Case Unclosed*, for re-examining forgotten cases of public interest and reminding viewers of lessons from the past.

*Case Unclosed's* Oct. 2 pilot episode recalled the March 1996 Ozone Disco fire that killed more than a hundred people. *Case Unclosed* revisited details of the tragedy, including how the victims were trapped inside the burning disco house, and the importance of fire safety regulations. Kara David, the program host, also interviewed survivors, families of the victims, and investigators. The program revealed that

the families of the victims did not receive the full amount of reparations for their loss the court ordered and that the convicted owners (Hermilo Ocampo and Ramon Ng) were never imprisoned because they applied for probation.

Subsequent episodes of *Case Unclosed* were on the Yamashita treasures and the Chiong sisters murder case.

## Slow news day

**JEERS TO** 24 *Oras* for unnecessarily including the messenger in the message.

The program reported last Sept. 24 continued efforts to refloat the sunken M/V Princess of the Stars, which capsized off central Sibuyan Island in Romblon at the height of a typhoon last June 21. It had at least 600 passengers and 200 crew members.

The report should have ended with the main point of the report, which was on the survey dives in preparation for the refloating of the vessel. Instead, the reporter went on to report that the boat he and other journalists were aboard almost capsized on their way back to shore. That part of the report took all of half a minute—and proved irrelevant to the main point. ■



## Resistant to U.S. subprime mess

**CHEERS TO** *abs-cbnNEWS.com/Newsbreak* for looking into the state of the government's National Home Mortgage Finance Corporation (NHMFC) in light of the collapse of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, two similar major government mortgage institutions in the US.

In a Sept. 13 report ("RP won't follow US subprime mess"), it reported that the NHMFC underwent a similar subprime debacle in 1990s that forced the housing agency to restructure itself, making it more resistant to the effects of the U.S. subprime mess.

The report also explained the workings of the secondary mortgage market, where the NHMFC has been active. The secondary mortgage market involves the repackaging of mortgage loans so they could be bought by the NHMFC from banks. They are in turn sold as financial currency to willing investors. (See "So?: Questions of context hound coverage of U.S. financial crisis", pp. 12-15)

## Monitoring mining

**CHEERS TO** *abs-cbnNEWS.com/Newsbreak* for an article on how the government is so understaffed it can not

monitor the mining industry nationwide.

The Sept. 26 article "As RP mining booms, gov't losing experts to private firms" explained how the government's Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB), tasked to supervise the administration of the country's mineral resources, cannot compete with private mining companies who pirate its staff by offering them higher salaries.

*Abs-cbnNEWS.com/Newsbreak* found that the agency's shortage of experts makes it almost impossible to keep track of and to monitor the operations of the mining firms that have proliferated since 2004.

Last October, *Newsbreak* also published an assessment of the state of the mining industry since the Supreme Court upheld the mining act in 2004. Mining has become a contentious environmental and social issue since then.

## Unsubstantiated claim

**JEERS TO** *Sun.Star Davao* for one-sided reporting.

Last Sept. 22, the article "Rody considers Marcos brightest president ever" quoted Davao City Mayor Rodrigo Duterte as saying that the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos had valid reasons to declare martial law in 1972. But the ar-

ticle did not elaborate on what these were.

The article also failed to include the corruption, rampant human rights violations, the suppression of press freedom, and other repressive and corrupt practices during the Marcos dictatorship. Instead it focused on Duterte's positive evaluation of Marcos' rule.

## Chronicling ASEAN affairs

**CHEERS TO** *Bulatlat* for a three-part article that discussed the state of the media in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and how journalists should report issues that affect the region. Danilo Arao, *Bulatlat* editorial board member and *PJR Reports* contributor, explained the media situation in the 10 ASEAN members and the role journalists can play in deepening mutual understanding among the countries of the region.

Arao based his article on a paper he presented at an international conference of journalists in Indonesia. *Bulatlat* published it last Sept. 14 and 20 (<http://bulatlat.com/2008/09/reporting-asean-repression-asean-media-continues>; <http://bulatlat.com/2008/09/reporting-asean-no-qualitative-change-asean-media-repression>; <http://bulatlat.com/2008/09/reporting-asean-asean-news-topic>). ■

## THAT "DOUBLE INSERTION"

**T**HE CONTROVERSY over the project erupted after Sen. Panfilo Lacson claimed last Sept. 8 that he had discovered that the P200-million appropriation for a road extension project in the 2008 national budget appears twice in that document.

Lacson claimed that P200 million had been allocated in the General Appropriations Act of 2008 for the President Carlos P. Garcia Avenue Extension and another P200 million for the C-5 Road extension, both of which reportedly cover the same 2.1-km stretch of road from the Southern Luzon Expressway to Sucat Road. Lacson revealed the alleged wrongdoing during the first Development Budget Coordinating Council hearing on the national budget for 2009. It was later reported that a member of Congress was responsible for the "double insertion".

The "road to nowhere" project resulted in a bitter row among senators. Eight senators, including possible presidential contenders for 2010, signed a Senate resolution directing the committee of the whole to investigate the alleged wrongdoing. Among those who signed were the seven members of the minority bloc: Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr., Senators Lacson, Ma. Ana Consuelo "Jambay" Madrigal, Manuel Roxas II, Loren Legarda, Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III, and Rodolfo Biazon, and Sen. Richard Gordon of the majority bloc.

Although his colleagues did not directly name him, Senate President Manuel Villar Jr. felt alluded to and quickly denied responsibility for the insertion. He said the money would go directly to the Department of Public Works and Highways and that he did not own any property along the proposed project. Real estate magnate Villar admitted, however, that he had lobbied for the completion of the project.

"The project," Villar said, "is certainly not a road to nowhere as this links the Coastal Road to the SLEX. This will greatly benefit the people in the south of Metro Manila, especially the residents of Cavite."

Villar, who earlier confirmed that he will be running for the presidency in 2010, accused his prospective presidential rivals of "below-the-belt" moves. "I have made known my intention to run for president in 2010 and I anticipate that this will open the floodgates to attacks," Villar said in a press statement.

Lacson told the press that even if he had pointed out that a billboard at the project site mentioned Villar as the project sponsor, he did



Villar

not accuse the Senate President of being behind the insertion. Lacson also claimed that he had found other "seemingly anomalous" insertions in the national budget amounting to P4 billion.

The controversy led to attempts to unseat Villar as Senate president. Villar's senator-allies, such as Alan Peter Cayetano, Joker Arroyo, Francis Pangilinan, and Jose "Jinggoy" Estrada, defended Villar from accusations that he benefited from the project. The four were part of the majority bloc behind Villar. Cayetano is also Villar's party-mate in the Nacionalista Party, while Pangilinan and Arroyo are allied with Villar in the so-called Wednesday Group.

In an initial hearing on the controversy last Sept. 29, Sen. Juan Ponce Enrile, chair of the Senate finance committee, confirmed that Villar had asked him to insert P200 million for the project but said the committee had found no irregularity in the double entry of the P200-million budget. Dissatisfied with Enrile's claim, Senator Madrigal filed a complaint before the Senate committee on ethics and privileges last Oct. 8, just before Congress adjourned for a month-long break. ■



The site of the controversial project  
Photos by LITO OCAMPO



# THE PRESS' OWN 'ROAD TO NOWHERE'

■ By Hector Bryant L. Macale

**T**HE "ROAD to nowhere" controversy, which was about the alleged double insertion for a road extension project in the 2008 national budget, was a front-page story in September. Sen. Panfilo Lacson's Sept. 8 exposé resulted in an acrimonious exchange among senators as well as calls for transparency in budget deliberations and congressional insertions. The press quickly reported and followed up Lacson's allegations as well as the reactions of other senators.

In general, the press relied on he-said, she-said accounts of the personalities involved with or

linked to the controversy. The reports were mostly on the accusations and/or counter-accusations of politicians and government officials, barely offering adequate background information and context. The more crucial questions regarding the national budget and the deliberation process were sorely missing in the coverage, except in very few instances.

How the press will cover the issue in November—if at all it will continue to do so—when Congress reconvenes after a month-long break remains uncertain. The controversy was a golden opportunity for the press to educate the public on the budget process. But it chose the well-traveled road of recording the

political sound and fury Lacson's tirade provoked.

### Scope of monitor

The coverage of the alleged anomalous insertion waned in the last weeks of September and in October, as bigger issues engaged press attention. These issues included the U.S. financial crisis and the global economic meltdown, the food scare caused by melamine-tainted products from China, the reproductive health bill pending in Congress, and the U.S. elections.

PJR Reports monitored the coverage of the controversy from Sept. 8, when Lacson first disclosed the alleged anomalous insertion, up to Oct. 10, two days after Congress adjourned. Three major broadsheets were monitored—the *Manila Bulletin*, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, and *The Philippine Star*. The coverage by two major television news programs—*TV Patrol World* (ABS-CBN 2) and *24 Oras* (GMA-7) was also analyzed, as well as that of *Teledyaryo* (NBN-4). PJR Reports also looked at the coverage by major online news organizations such as *abs-cbnNEWS.com*, *GMAnews.TV*, *Inquirer.net*, *Newsbreak*, *The Daily PCIJ* of the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, and *Vera Files*.



The Senate (left) and Villar: not me

**Ping-pong coverage**

The reports mostly centered on the conflicting claims and reactions of senators and other officials, and were focused on the Senate's being sharply divided over the issue. On one side were Lacson and other senators who were pushing for an investigation of the alleged anomalous insertion; and on the other, Senate President Manuel Villar Jr. who quickly denied participation in the alleged double insertion, and his senator-allies. Some reports, however, focused on the reaction of Malacañang officials.

When Lacson claimed there was an anomaly in the allocation of P200 million for the President Carlos P. Garcia Avenue Extension project and another P200 million for the C-5 Road extension (which reportedly cover the same 2.1-km stretch of road from Southern Luzon Expressway to Sucat Road), the press quickly published and aired his views. Follow-up reports focused on the reaction of other senators, including Villar as well as those that either defended him or supported Lacson. The political aspect of the controversy – the contest among possible candidates Lacson and Villar in the presidential elections in 2010 – was a prominent feature in the reportage.

But the coverage did not go beyond the usual verbal jousts among the pols. There was no pro-active effort on the part of the media organizations monitored to look more closely into the claims and counterclaims being made, and very little context was evident. A sidebar on how public funds are allotted and the process of congressional insertions in the budget would have helped the public put things in context.

A few accounts did report various calls by senators and other political actors for increased transparency in the national budget-making process. But these were few and far between.

In his Sept. 15 privilege speech, Lacson identified other multibillion-peso lump sum allocations by Malacañang and insertions by lawmakers in the national budget. Instead of independently checking the veracity of his claims, the press merely reported and enumerated the projects Lacson identified.

Neither did the press check the veracity of the claim by administration ally Sen. Miriam Santiago that congressional insertions amounted to at least P11 billion in the 2008 budget and that these could be used to finance the administration's election campaign in 2010.

**Helpful**

Some reports and opinion-editorial pieces were helpful but were more the exceptions rather than the rule.

A Sept. 15 report by *Newsbreak/abs-cbnNEWS.com* explained the process of congressional insertions in the budget process.

"Under the Constitution, Congress cannot increase the budget ceiling as proposed by the president. But it can redefine the priorities of the executive by cutting funding for certain items of the budget and channeling the funds to other purposes," the report said ("Budget insertions lack transparency", <http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/nation/09/15/08/budget-insertions-lack-transparency>).

"Anybody who is familiar

with the budget process will tell you that there is nothing inherently wrong about this. In fact, one can say a Congress that passes the executive's budget as is, with not a single amendment, is probably not doing its job."

"What makes the process controversial is the fact that it lacks transparency," it added. The report, which was also published in the *Star* last Sept. 17, discussed details of the controversial road project and explained why there was speculation that "the double entry was intentionally included in the budget."

The *Inquirer's* editorials last Sept. 26 ("Insert here") and 27 ("Plugging the leak") informed readers how the budget and the budget process have become politicized under the Gloria Macapagal Arroyo administration.

"Under the President's fa-



Cayetano and Arroyo

**Some reports and opinion-editorial pieces were helpful but were more the exceptions rather than the rule**

.....  
 mous eye for the smallest details, the budget and the budget process have become what they were during Ferdinand Marcos' time: politicized sources of funds," the Sept. 26 *Inquirer* editorial ran. The transformation of the bicameral conference committee into the so-called third chamber of Congress is complete complete, it added.

In its editorial the next day, the *Inquirer* continued its analysis of Arroyo's control of the budget process and how the political class – and not just Arroyo alone – has found and exploited loopholes in the process.

When the *Inquirer* reported

that a company owned by religious entrepreneur Mariano "Mike" Velarde allegedly "obtained a windfall" from the same controversial C-5 road extension project ("Manna for Velarde, Villar realty firms: *But Bro. Mike says his realty firm has not been paid yet*", Sept. 12), the paper immediately published an "In the Know" sidebar that provided readers background information on a legal suit for Velarde's firms' involvement in an earlier road project. The suit included Velarde and former president Joseph Estrada. Velarde, who had supported Estrada in his short-lived presidency, is the leader of the influential El Shaddai Catholic charismatic group.

*Bulletin* columnist Romeo Pefianco discussed last Sept. 23 a similar case of budget insertion in the early 1950s. The piece reminded readers that the lack of transparency regarding congressional insertions has been a persistent problem, depriving the public the right to know where their tax money is being spent ("Exposé about roads, etc.", p. 10). ■



Lacson and Madrigal

■ By Kathryn Roja G. Raymundo

**T**HE LIVELY debates at the House of Representatives and the harsh exchanges between supporters and detractors of House Bill (HB) 5043, or the “Reproductive Health, Responsible Parenthood, and Population Development Act of 2008”, renewed the news media’s flagging interest in September. The press consistently covered the bill’s progress and provided analyses on the issue, until coverage petered off as other issues and problems developed, except for some occasional news updates and he-said-she-said stories.



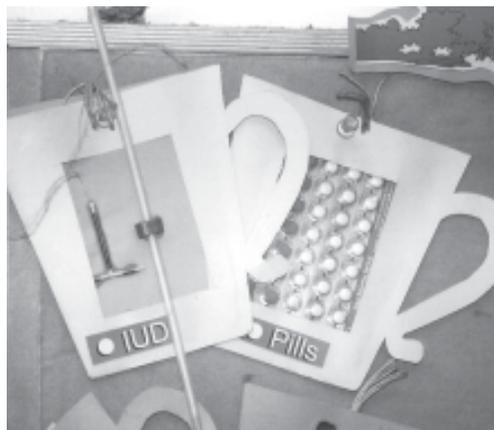
**The information from and the claims by each side should have been verified in the news reports**

.....  
policy on reproductive health, responsible parenthood, and population development, and for other purposes. Its short title is the “Reproductive Health and Population Development Act of 2008”.

The House committees on Population and Family Relations, Health, and Appropriations submitted their committee report on the bill last Sept. 3. The main objectives of the bill are:

- To uphold and promote respect for life, informed choice, birth spacing, and responsible parenthood in conformity with internationally recognized human rights standards; and
- To guarantee universal access to medically safe, legal, and quality reproductive health care services and relevant information even as it prioritizes the needs of women and children.

# A HEALTHY DEBATE BUT...



Photos by LITO OCAMPO

Although the media discussion on reproductive health continues, *PJR Reports* monitored news and commentaries on HB 5043 from Sept. 11 to Sept. 30 only, which was the same period when the House held plenary hearings on the bill. The monitor of *PJR Reports* covered newspapers (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, *The Philippine Star*, and *Manila Bulletin*), TV programs (*TV Patrol World*, *24 Oras*, and *Teledyaryo*), and online sites (*GMANews.TV* and *abschnNEWS.com*).

## The bill

All the reports provided basic information on the bill such as its salient features, background, and status at the House.

Sponsored by Albay Rep. Edcel C. Lagman, HB 5043 is an act that provides for a national



## Taking sides

News reports and commentaries presented the statements and arguments by both supporters and detractors. However, most of the reports and analyses focused on the opinion of the Catholic Church and the ongoing debate on the bill at the House of Representatives. The information from and the claims by each side should have been verified in the news reports.

But most of the in-depth discussions and analyses were in editorials and columns. Among the latter was Raul C. Pangalangan’s “Passion for Reason” column in the *Inquirer* which noted the importance of keeping Church and State separate in

**The reproductive health bill: saving lives or taking them?**

discussing the issue of reproductive health ("The clergy's all out war on contraceptives," Sept. 26, p. A14). The column also warned that people, most especially the clergy, should not look at abortion and contraception as one and the same thing.

The *Bulletin* in "RH bill will save lives, widen choices - author," a column by Hern P. Zenarosa, described the bill as national in scope, comprehensive, rights-based, and as providing adequate funding for a national population program (Sept. 16, p. 11). It added that the bill promotes sustainable human development, information on and access to both natural and modern family planning methods.

The *Bulletin* published Sept. 24 Elinando B. Cinco's "A reader's view of HB 5043" that enumerated the "moral and family" reasons why the House should not pass the bill (p. 11). The *Star's* Jose C. Sison discussed the supposedly harmful and unconstitutional provisions of the bill in his column "A Law Each Day, Keeps Trouble Away" ("Harmful and illegal bill," Sept. 29, p. 15). The column of Bernardo M. Villegas in *Bulletin* cited studies that discussed the side effects and illnesses acquired from using contraceptives ("Contraceptives harmful to women's health," Sept. 26).

Some news reports did address the Catholic Church fear that the bill is pro-abortion. For example, the *Star* published "Reproductive Health Bill will fight abortion" on Sept. 24, which explained that the bill was not endorsing abortion, and noted a study by University of the Philippines (UP) economics professors on the impact and consequences of having a policy on reproductive health.

Some reports also discussed the bill's relevance to stakeholders like women and children. *GMANews.TV* reported that a network of more than 50 non-governmental organizations, *Welga ng Kababaihan* (Women's Rally), was supporting the bill for its recognition of the women's right to reproductive self-determination ("Women's groups push passage of RH bill," Sept. 22). *24 Oras* interviewed a teenage-mother and her mother to tackle the issue of unwanted and teenage pregnancies as well as the possible advantages of sex education (Sept. 18). The report cited "Young Adult Fertility Survey 3", a study by the UP Population Institute on the issue.

**Numbers game**

The reports quoted individuals and organizations claiming



support for or against the bill, and used the results of various surveys. Several advertisements also appeared in the newspapers, indicating how much the bill has provoked intense reactions. The Couples for Christ Foundation, Inc., which describes itself as a pro-God, pro-family, pro-poor, and pro-life Christian organization, published a test that would supposedly help a person decide if he or she should support HB 5043 or not ("Should you support Reproductive Health Bill No. 5043?" Sept. 23, *Inquirer*; "Ask your congressman to kill House Bill 5043 before it kills the Filipino Family," Sept. 24, *Inquirer*; "Renewing the Family and Defending Life," Sept. 30, *Star*).

The Reproductive Health Advocacy Network (RHAN), the Philippine Legislators' Committee on Population and Develop-

ment Foundation, Inc. (PLCPD), and the Philippine Center for Population and Development released their own ad called "Paano na ang pamilya ko (How about my family)?" which argued in favor



**Minimizing the he-said-she-said stories limited to reporting the various parties' views could give way to analyses of these individuals' and organizations' claims**

of passing the RH bill (*Inquirer*, Sept. 30).

**Were the media fair?**

It is important to note the choice of words used to describe and explain the bill as this tends

to show the biases in reporting. Although the press was generally fair in the coverage, some reports were not balanced, with one side taking up most of the space or time.

*ANC's Media in Focus* discussed last Oct. 16 how fair the media have been in covering the reproductive health bill. The guests included representatives from the media, Church, and groups supporting the bill.

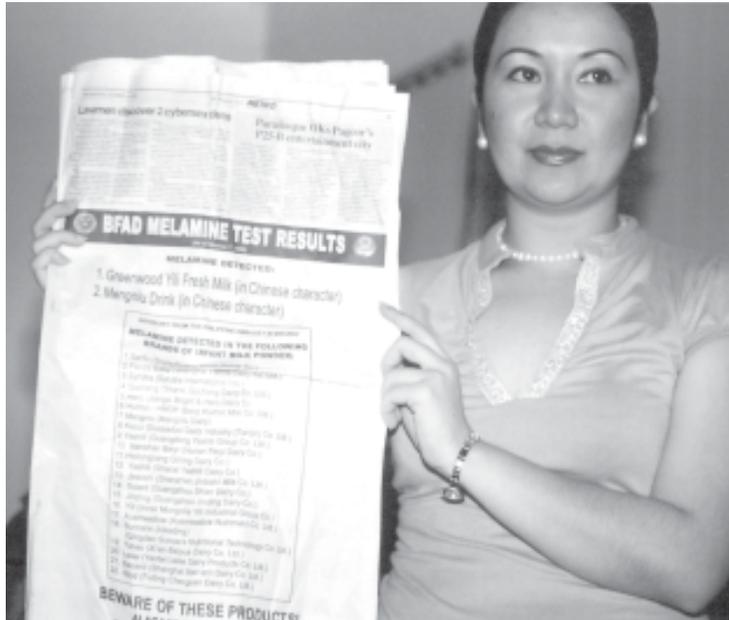
The guests claimed the media have been generally fair, since "all sides" had supposedly been given the opportunity to print or air their views. The guests noted the improvement in the coverage, which did not only focus on the controversies. Ramon San Pascual, PLCPD executive director and a guest in the episode, said he noticed the media's contribution to bringing awareness and information on the value of reproductive health, the consequences of having access to and receiving sex education, and the correlation between Philippine population and development, among others. But another guest, Elizabeth Angsioco, RHAN secretary-general, challenged the media to look beyond the usual sources and provide more substantive information.

As noted by reproductive health advocates themselves, the coverage did tend towards the views, explanations, and studies by individuals and organizations supportive of the bill. This was a departure from media coverage that in the past was predominantly focused on the Church's views.

**Areas for improvement**

Minimizing the he-said-she-said stories limited to reporting the various parties' views could give way to analyses of these individuals' and organizations' claims. Few reports were on government policy on reproductive health, despite the central role government has in population management and economic development.

The coverage could have been better had the media been a platform from where the issues could be debated, researched, and discussed more thoroughly. These issues include the medical (state of health and availability of technology and resources), social (role of the Church in policymaking and the state's implementation of programs), and political (impact of policies and access to funds) imperatives that drive reproductive health and population policy. ■



■ By Melanie Y. Pinlac

**A**FTER THE extravagant 2008 Beijing Olympics, China again caught the eye of the international media when more than 50,000 children were diagnosed with kidney stones in September as a result of drinking Chinese baby milk formulas. The milk formulas were tainted with melamine, an industrial chemical used in fertilizers and in the manufacture of plastic ware.

By the third week of September, news on the melamine-tainted milk and dairy products had found its way in the international news sections and segments of Philippine newspapers and television programs. The reports, usually provided by wire agencies, gave updates on how the Chinese government was handling the problem and the statements of multinational dairy companies.

News on the issue grabbed local headlines when the Bureau of Food and Drugs (BFAD) confirmed that several China-made milk and dairy products were being imported and sold in the Philippine market. Last Sept. 22, BFAD issued an advisory warning the public to avoid buying and selling "made in China" milk and dairy products.

*PJR Reports* reviewed how the Philippine press covered the issue by monitoring three major broadsheets (the *Manila Bulletin*, the *Philippine Star*, and the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*); the primetime news programs of ABS-CBN 2 and GMA-7; and various online news sites from Sept. 22 (the date of the BFAD advisory) until Oct. 5, two days after the Department of Health (DoH) and BFAD came out with the first partial result of their tests.

Overall, the press did a satisfactory job in informing the public about the melamine contami-

# MEDIA AND FOOD SAFETY FRIGHTENED BY MELAMINE



The press immediately identified which milk formulas are melamine-tainted and which are not.

**Overall, the press did a satisfactory job in informing the public about the melamine contamination in milk and dairy products**

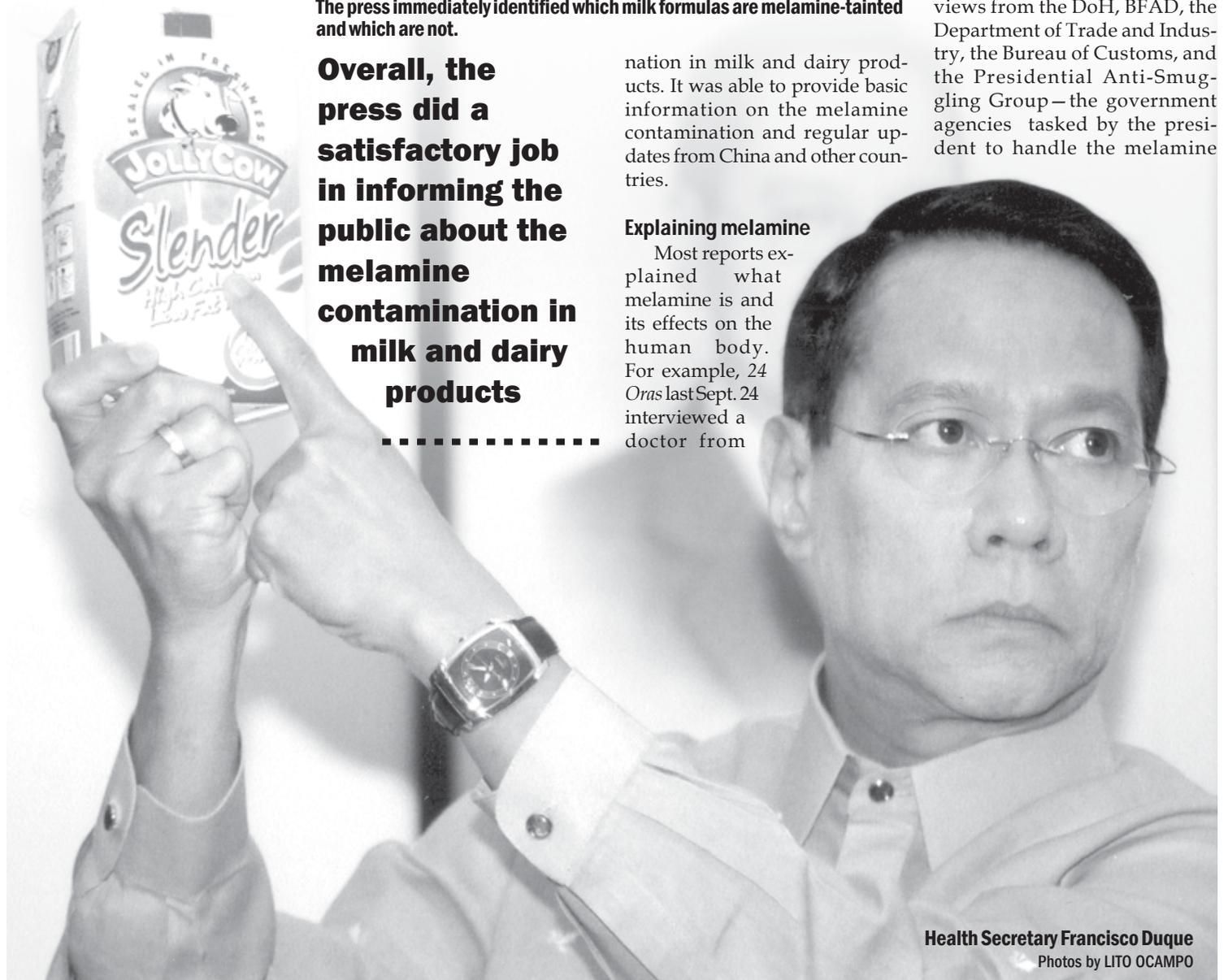
nation in milk and dairy products. It was able to provide basic information on the melamine contamination and regular updates from China and other countries.

## Explaining melamine

Most reports explained what melamine is and its effects on the human body. For example, 24 Oras last Sept. 24 interviewed a doctor from

the department of Urology at the National Kidney and Transplant Institute on how renal stones are formed. It also discussed other possible reasons why humans acquire kidney stones. The doctor also said that at the moment there is no reported case of melamine-induced kidney stones among the Institute's patients.

The news reports also focused on how the Philippine government was having difficulties in handling the melamine contamination, getting information and interviews from the DoH, BFAD, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Bureau of Customs, and the Presidential Anti-Smuggling Group—the government agencies tasked by the president to handle the melamine



Health Secretary Francisco Duque  
Photos by LITO OCAMPO



**Food and Drug Administration Director Leticia Gutierrez**

problem. The lack of capacity of these agencies to handle the issue was reported as well.

Last Sept. 25, a *24 Oras* report reiterated how lack of manpower affects BFAD's performance. According to the report, BFAD has only 431 employees nationwide to deal with 48,686 licensed companies and 59,042 licensed products. Despite the lack of manpower and requests for additional employees, a BFAD employee told *24 Oras* that the national government has placed the Bureau under its Rationalization Program.

The Rationalization Program, under executive order 366, is "an early retirement program for all government employees. Those whose functions have been declared redundant will be given the option to avail of retirement/

separation benefits with applicable incentives, if they choose not to remain in government service and be placed in other agencies" ("P4-B for employees affected by rationalization plan", <http://www.gov.ph/news/default.asp?i=10781>).

*24 Oras* also discussed the year-long delay in implementing the multi-million integrated information system project of BFAD.

The press also monitored the ban on China-made milk and dairy products, and checked if they were still being sold in supermarkets and dry markets. Earlier, when news on the milk contamination broke out, the Philippine media immediately checked the presence of China-made milk products in the local market. It found out that



**Palawan 2<sup>nd</sup> District Rep. Abraham Kahliil Mitra, House of Representatives agriculture/food committee head**



BFAD had given some local companies licenses to import and distribute milk produced by some of the Chinese companies believed to have also used melamine.

#### Worldwide crisis

Since the melamine scare has spread throughout the world, the local media included in their reports what was happening in China and other countries that

had ordered the recall of China-made milk and dairy products. The *Bulletin*, for example, used information from *Reuters* to create an infographic that helpfully showed readers how several countries were dealing with the melamine contamination ("Contaminated candy, milk, desserts pulled across Asia", Sept. 24, p. B5).

There were also reports and commentaries explaining the late action by the Chinese government in addressing the melamine contamination despite allegedly receiving complaints about the tainted milk since December 2007.

#### Effects on local industries

Other reports looked into what the local dairy industry offered as alternatives to the Chinese product. *GMANews.TV* for example reported the calls for the development of the local milk industry, specifically the use of goat milk as an alternative to breast milk ("Development of goat milk amid melamine scare", Oct. 1).

*24 Oras* also visited a local dairy cooperative and checked how it has been affected by the melamine scare. Some local dairy cooperatives said they were expecting a boost in local milk production because of the melamine scare. *TV Patrol* on the other hand interviewed the owner of a store selling *pastillas*, a local sweet that uses milk as its main ingredient. The owner said that its sale was not directly affected as the milk the store used was from a local farm.

Some reports also looked at how the melamine contamination has affected other local industries, as well as the Philippines' dependence on milk importation.

#### Other incidents

The press also reviewed past issues involving China-made products. An *Inquirer* sidebar for instance reviewed previous controversies, such as the melamine contamination of China-made pet food in the United States, the presence of toxic lead in China-made toys, and formaldehyde in White Rabbit brand candies ("What went before: China's tainted products", Sept. 24, p. A3).

#### Some gaps

The press, however, failed to look at how the country's food safety agencies responded to previous contamination incidents, and if there were improvements as a result. Also missing in the reports was an in-depth look at food safety regulations in the Philippines. ■



# SO?



Central Bank Governor Amado Tetangco Jr.

## Questions of context hound coverage of U.S. financial crisis

■ By JB Santos with reports from Edsel Van DT. Dura

**L**OCAL COVERAGE of the U.S. financial crisis has largely been hamstrung by insufficient context, anemic analysis, and limited perspectives. The complex issues surrounding the financial crisis, peppered as it is with arcane language and dense jargon, should have been a goldmine for the press in producing explanatory reports. But while there have been laudable reports on the issue, as revealed by *PJR Reports'* two-week monitor, the coverage has mostly been so lacking in context it tends to give readers a patchy picture of the situation.

### Background

The crisis received substantial international media coverage in early 2007 when the U.S. subprime mortgage market, which deals with house loans

given to high-risk borrowers, crumbled under the weight of increasing real estate foreclosures.

The subprime collapse, typified by the Aug. 6 bankruptcy filing of the American Home Mortgage Investment Corporation, dragged down housing prices as the number of repossessed houses led to a supply glut. A global contagion then spread as the portfolios of banks and investment funds outside the US revealed subprime exposure, stoking market anxieties, and clogging credit flows. With plunging global stock markets and crippled financial institutions in the West in its wake, the subprime crisis subsequently continued to occupy the international news agenda.

Local coverage only became pronounced after Sept. 15,

when Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy protection, the U.S. Federal Reserve's multibillion-dollar bailout of the American International Group (AIG), and Bank of America's purchase of top global investment bank Merrill Lynch for a firesale tag of \$50 million (approximately P2.3 billion), or \$29 per share (approximately P1,390).

The financial restructuring



## The reports should have also given more space to the prognosis of non-industry players not directly involved in the issue

of Wall Street, the U.S. financial center, that followed these economic events sent panic waves across markets around the world.

*PJR Reports* monitored the Sept. 15 to 28 coverage of the three major broadsheets—the *Manila Bulletin*, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, and *The Philippine Star*—and Manila's business broadsheets, *BusinessWorld* and *BusinessMirror*, and the news programs *24 Oras* and *TV Patrol* on the U.S. financial crisis and its immediate and secondary effects on the domestic economy. As the epicenter of the unfolding crisis is in the U.S., the newspapers made much use of wire reports. *PJR Reports* however focused on reports by local reporters.

### Initial coverage

Initial coverage of the issue was primarily on the falling local stock market caused by the Wall Street financial meltdown. Shell-shocked stock traders, in various states of distress, also became a fixture of front-page newspaper photos.

In the Philippines, the reports

# Lessons from the financial crisis

## ASKING THE DUMB QUESTIONS

■ By JB Santos

**M**OST U.S. government officials and players in the financial market have been scratching their heads, wondering why they did not see the crisis coming. U.S. journalists have been asking the same question.

Was the U.S. press too pre-occupied with spot reports on the booming economy before the market crash? Were journalists too enamored with the exalted geniuses of the boom's architects such as former U.S. Federal Reserve Governor Alan Greenspan to write critically of the U.S. financial system? Were they, like many others on Wall Street, blinded by the "rollickin' good times"?

The media's obligation to critically probe the engines of the financial markets is more demanding considering that analysts, traders, bankers, and other such have been reported to be vulnerable to herd mentality, an instinct widely blamed for a bubble buildup. As everyone in Wall Street rode the boom, the press should have raised a red flag on market irregularities, but did not. Post-mortems of the pre-crash coverage of Wall Street by U.S. journalists reveal as much.

"While (the crisis was) conveyed in incremental stories—and a few whistle-blowing columns—the business press never conveyed a real sense of alarm until institutions began to collapse," the *Washington Post's* Howard Kurtz wrote in a column last Oct. 6.

"We all failed," Charlie Gasparino, editor of the cable news channel CNBC, said in the Kurtz column. "What we didn't understand was that this was building up. We all bear responsibility to a certain extent."

Former BBC economics editor Evan Davis was also quoted in *guardian.co.uk*, the online news site of the British newspaper *The Guardian*, as admitting that there was a coverage lapse by the media. "We did warn them but didn't warn them sufficiently, loudly or clearly, and (we) might have warned a little too early," he said.

Paul Lashmar, a freelance investigative journalist in Britain, likewise wrote on his blog (<http://www.paullashmar.com>), "Sub prime—a crisis in journalism?", that "reporting has been largely reactive."

"What is clear is that the public received very little prior warning that there was a problem...or that the subprime mortgage would have to

burst. Nor was it revealed how many of the UK's most respectable financial institutions were up to their necks in dubious derivatives," Lashmar wrote.

The complexities of the financial markets, and that the fact that subprime lending was a relatively new field may have also contributed to the media's shortsighted coverage. Former *Fortune* magazine editor Allan Sloan and *Fortune* managing editor Andrew Serwer wrote in *Time* magazine's cover story last Sept. 29 that the present situation is "terra incognita, a place no one expected to visit." *Columbia Journalism Review's* (CJR) Dean Starkman meanwhile said that "what is happening on Wall Street is new, unusual, historic, unfamiliar, unknown."

"The nation's business press must be feeling a bit like the London fire department during the Blitz, scrambling from one financial emergency to the next—a Wall Street pillar collapses here, a bank seized there—each calamity more complex and dangerous than the one before, day after day, week after week," Starkman wrote in "Boiler Room" in CJR's Sept./Oct. issue.

But Starkman also acknowledged the efforts of the U.S. media in dealing with the crisis, describing the coverage as "heroic in a lot of ways" in the Sept. 19 "On the Media" program of National Public Radio (NPR) in the US. "This is a full-scale emergency and they're acting like it," he said.

Starkman, CJR's resident business press critic, also wrote on the CJR website (<http://www.cjr.org>) last Sept. 14 that "the business press is doing an able job—*The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*, particularly—as it scrambles to both keep up with a howling blizzard of events and to convey the enormity, sweep, and scope of what is happening."

The fragility of the situation also caused further complications as journalists tiptoed between covering and fear-mongering.

"(R)umor, speculation and fear can cripple a bank with shocking

speed. That has reporters and editors, so often accused of hyperbole and sowing alarm, parsing their words with unusual care," Richard Pérez-Peña wrote in the *New York Times* last Sept. 21, "Amid Market Turmoil, Some Journalists Try to Tone Down Emotion."

"How do you say 'There's panic out there but don't panic?' And is it even our responsibility to say, 'Don't panic'?" Serwer, as quoted in the *Times* article, said.

Jon Friedman of the online news site *Market Watch* said on Sept. 26, "Media shouldn't shy away from explosive language," U.S. media's caution in reporting on the financial crisis was "political correctness gone amok."

"Journalists should use powerful language to describe the red ink flowing.... A story of this magnitude deserves the media's best work," Friedman wrote on *Market Watch*.

Although released six years ago, a 29-page quantitative research paper by two economists proved helpful in explaining why media are institutionally wired to be less critical of companies during stock market booms.

"(T)he problem is not just lack of appropriate disclosure or legislation, but a more fundamental one: deficient incentives for the media to expose poor governance practices...corporate reporters have strong incentives to enter into a quid pro quo relationship with their sources, where they receive private information in exchange for a positive spin on companies' news. Since the value of this relationship is higher during booms, so, too, will the pro-company bias," said "The Bubble and the Media", a paper by Alexander Dyck of the Harvard Business School and Luigi Zingales of the University of Chicago.

Released on Nov. 15, 2002, the paper noted statistics showing that companies had been more willing to release information during periods with strong market returns, with media being vulnerable to complicity in the dissemination of disinformation.

"Companies' incentives to spin news positively and to aggressively challenge bad news are greatest during a bubble. Unfortunately, during a period of high valuation journalists are also particularly willing to buy into that positive spin."

The paper also said that the risks associated with uncovering corporate abuses are higher for journal-

ists during boom times, as the dangers of antagonizing sources and being sued or harassed by powerful companies exist.

"The pressure exerted by the media is an important component of a good corporate governance system. When such pressure weakens, abuses are inevitable."

### Intimidated

There is also the daunting difficulty of journalists challenging statements made by people who have intimidating academic credentials.

"It is not easy for journalists to take on the masters of the financial universe, especially when the market is going up and everyone is happy," Kurtz wrote.

"(W)e journalists have had a long history with accepting what the smart people hand down to us, especially on complicated stuff.... When I would cover these very issues about problems with regulation, problems with 'is this a disaster waiting to happen?' people would say: 'Well, young man, you don't have an MBA like I do. Trust us. We went to business school'," David Brancaccio, a journalist from the Public Broadcasting System, said in the Kurtz article.

But depending on the statements of the "masters of the financial universe" also poses a significant risk, as it tends to draw the story into the minutiae of financial arcana and away from the much bigger picture, which in the subprime mess have primarily been corruption.

And to get at the heart of the issue, journalists need not acquire business degrees or MBAs. Sometimes a simple, seemingly stupid question will do.

"Why are they lending money to people who can't afford to pay it back?" has been the guiding question of Alex Blumberg, an NPR producer, in examining the issue. The question led him into producing, along with NPR business reporter Adam Davidson, the radio story "The Giant Pool of Money," which has been one of the most widely syndicated primers on the financial crisis.

"Sometimes, if you want the real answer, you have to ask a dumb question," David Carr, writing about "The Giant Pool of Money" in the *New York Times* last Sept. 29, said.

Basic journalistic traits such as relentless curiosity and undaunted skepticism, more than any other exclusive source or academic credential, may be the bottom line after all. ■



The Philippine Stock Exchange: decline and fall



Filipino applying for work abroad

centered on the exposures of some of the Philippines' biggest banks. The *Inquirer* reported that seven local banks, which include Banco de Oro Unibank (BDO), Development Bank of the Philippines, Metropolitan Bank and Trust Co. (Metrobank), Rizal Commercial Banking Corp. (RCBC), United Coconut Planters Bank (UCPB), Standard Chartered Bank's Manila branch, and the Bank of Commerce, have exposure to Lehman. *Inquirer* reported that the total sum of the seven banks' exposure was \$386 million (approximately P18.5 billion). The Government Service and Insurance System was also reported to have been exposed to the crisis through investments in Lehman.

The stability of Philippine American Life and General Insurance Co. (Philamlife), the country's largest insurer, was also questioned after its parent company AIG was forced to reposition itself when it suffered a liquidity crisis before being bailed out by the U.S. Federal Reserve.

Suspensions over the health of the said local financial institu-

tions were played down by assurances from the banks themselves as well as the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP). The local banks' exposure has been described as minimal relative to their total capital base, while Philamlife stated that it has separate independent investments and capital apart from its parent company AIG.

BDO, Metrobank, and RCBC were also reported to have set aside funds to cover potential losses for their Lehman Brothers exposure. BSP Governor Amando Tetangco Jr. has also been quoted in many reports as saying that the local banks are adequately capitalized and that the BSP is ready to help by providing cash to banks that may need help in the aftermath of the Lehman Brothers collapse.

#### Unpopular information

*BusinessMirror* and *BusinessWorld*, ran laudable reports that provided insights on the issue, including perspectives and insights into the local banking sector. Some reports from other papers also proved helpful.

*BusinessWorld* reported that the provisional funds set aside by the banks to cover their potential losses could affect lending. "These (funds set aside) would freeze money that could be used to support lending in an economy under threat of a slowdown, according to analysts, but regulators said they were not worried," *BusinessWorld* reported on Sept. 17 ("RP banks prepare for fallout").

*BusinessMirror* meanwhile reported on Sept. 23 that the loan policies of banks will be stricter despite their limited exposure to the subprime crisis. *BusinessWorld* published "Bank at Every Stop" and "Insights on the Industry" on Sept. 22, which both tackled current trends in the banking industry. On the same day, *BusinessMirror* also published "Trend Watching; Ten new things banks are doing," which similarly reported on recent banking developments.

On the Sept. 19 report "Proposed shift to other export markets easier said than done", *BusinessWorld* also quoted a statement from an economist that while "alternative markets exist" for our exports, many of these are still linked to the US.

*Bulletin* similarly reported on Sept. 21, that the "RP economy [is] vulnerable to external factors—Ibon". The report cited

### A wider range of sources could have given more depth to the complex issues surrounding the financial crisis

IBON Foundation findings stating that although only 20 % of our export goes to US, "a large part of exports to Japan, China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan and Malaysia representing another 50 percent of exports are actually components for products whose final destination is also the US." *BusinessWorld* also reported last Sept. 20 ("Outsourcing targets up for review") the vulnerability of the local business process outsourcing companies to the situation.

In the same Sept. 17 report, *BusinessWorld* also said that "existing regulations do not mandate domestic banks to fully disclose exposures to such sophisticated instruments." *BusinessWorld*, however, could have done more by reporting what exactly these regulations are.

*BusinessMirror* also ran a report last Sept. 22 "Wanted: Sil-

ver Bullet; As banks get mired in a new global financial crisis, have they learned anything from the 1997 Asian contagion?" The article, however, failed to live up to its title and did little to explain the 1997 Asian financial crisis, and how it affected the country. Many reports actually stated that the effects of the 1997 Asian financial crisis helped the Philippines and its neighboring countries in minimizing the fallout from the U.S. financial crisis, without actually discussing what the 1997 Asian financial crisis was and in what way it changed the country for the better.

Practical tips regarding the situation were provided by the *Inquirer* ("Are my Philam investments safe?", Sept. 26) and *BusinessWorld* ("Financial management for the home", Sept. 22). The *Inquirer* also ran a special segment "Coping and hoping" which featured stories containing practical to enable ordinary people to cope with the crisis.

#### Jeers

One notable shortcoming of the coverage was its over-reliance on the perspectives of bankers, stock traders, and government officials. While it is undeniable that bankers and traders are among those immediately affected by the fallout of the U.S. financial crisis, and that statements from the administration have the weight of government policy, more effort could have been exerted to report what independent analysts and think tanks thought. A wider range of sources could have given more depth to the complex issues surrounding the financial crisis.

The unequivocal assurances of bankers, stock traders, and government officials to some extent also invite suspicion since they would immediately bear the brunt of the fallout. But they are also the immediate beneficiaries of a positive market outlook. The reports should have also given more space to the prognosis of non-industry players not directly involved in the issue.

"Media as a whole has been covering institutions and personalities with a self-interest not to tell the truth, and if not just to not tell the truth, with a self-interest to cover up the problem. The weakness of the coverage has been the lack of space given to alternative views," Sonny Africa, research head of the socio-economic think-tank group Ibon, told *PJR Reports* last Oct. 10.

Cayetano Paderanga of the University of the Philippines (UP)



School of Economics also told *PJR Reports* in an interview last Sept. 26 that "what we don't have are analytical reports that would look at the nuts and bolts about how these things happen."

Former Budget secretary Benjamin Diokno, in an Oct. 15 e-mail interview with *PJR Reports*, said that "talking exclusively to the same people in government and analysts with vested interests could bias reporting." Diokno proposed that "more interaction with academics and experts through forum, in-depth discussion and workshop may help."

"There's too much focus on the stock market and forex," Diokno, also a professor at the UP School of Economics, added.

The press could also pay more attention to government efforts to ride on the situation. National Economic and Development Authority Secretary Ralph Recto, in a Sept. 24 report by the *Bulletin*, "stressed the need for the immediate approval of the 2009 budget" in light of the global financial crunch. Recto said he was "confident that their (Congress') patriotism will prevail" by approving the budget on time, even though some lawmakers have stated the need to downscale the 2009 budget to adjust to the effects of the US financial crisis.

Problems also arise in overdependence on the statements of government officials. The complexity and nuances of the issue do not lend themselves well to the canned lines and rehearsed speeches government is wont to churn out. The soundbite-tailored statements of government officials too often do not help in explaining the issue and sometimes even create confusion.

#### OFW perspective

A grave lapse in the coverage was the media's utilitarian per-

spective toward overseas Filipino workers (OFWs). Most of the reports were more concerned about the safety of the OFW remittances than the actual safety or job security of OFWs themselves, who work in countries severely affected by the economic crisis. The myopic view towards OFWs was mostly the result of depending on the perspectives of bankers, traders, and other industry players and government officials.

Two exceptions, however, stand out. The *Inquirer* article ("Financial crisis threatens work of RP women abroad," Sept. 26) and the *BusinessMirror* editorial ("Goose in peril," Sept. 23) called attention to the escalating risks faced by OFWs, especially the country's seafarers. *BusinessMirror* stated that the government should work to ensure the safety of OFWs if the former wants to continue to rely on their remittances to fuel the economy.

As there seems yet to be a letup to the bloodletting of the U.S. economy, much could still be written by the local press about the situation, and the effects it would have on the Philippine economy as well as on migrant workers. The two-week monitor was intended only to take a peek at the preparedness of the local press to take on a complex issue. As it stands, there have been excellent efforts but much could still be improved. The TV reports have been mostly constricted by the inherent limitations of a medium that is time-constrained and soundbite-driven. Print, meanwhile, has not made much use of its inherent advantages of space by providing explanatory or investigative pieces regarding the issue. The local media could still do much in reporting the issue, lest it suffer a similar crisis of confidence from the public. ■

## ONLINE ECONOMIC INFORMATION

■ By JB Santos

HERE ARE a few online resources (not ranked in any particular order) that could help journalists as well as students of journalism in digesting economic information. As always, however, information from the Internet, especially those relating to matters of fact, should be treated with a healthy dose of skepticism.

1. *BusinessWorld* research (<http://www.bworldonline.com/Research/index.php>) - Provides explanatory reports on and analyses of economic issues. The two most prominent features of the site are "Popular Economics", which provides a lengthy discussion of economic issues, and "Economic Indicators", which presents and discusses the facts and figures of certain economic indices.
2. Money Smarts (<http://blogs.inquirer.net/moneysmarts>) - A blog ran by *Inquirer.net* business editor Salve Duplito on personal finance, business, financial independence, and the economy.
3. Ecumenical Institute for Labor Education and Research (<http://www.eilerinc.org>) - Eiler is a non-government organization (NGO) dealing with labor and economic issues from an alternative viewpoint.
4. Investopedia (<http://investopedia.com>) - An alternative to the popular Wikipedia that offers short, easily understandable definitions of economic and business related terms. Definitions are short and offered from two perspectives. Usually one paragraph each, one definition is the textbook definition, and the other a simplified one. The site also offers articles and a dictionary on economics as well as tutorials on the basics of investing.
5. About business and finance (<http://www.about.com/money>) - Explains terms related to business and finance from an investment perspective.
6. Economy professor (<http://www.economyprofessor.com>) - Aside from a dictionary on economics, this site also lists the basic economic theories and theorists as well as information related to them. It also has a list of books and essays related to

economics.

7. *Columbia Journalism Review's* The Audit ([http://www.cjr.org/the\\_audit](http://www.cjr.org/the_audit)) - Features reports and commentaries about media coverage on economics and business related events in the US.
8. Donald W. Reynolds National Center for Business Journalism, Arizona State University (<http://www.businessjournalism.org>) - Offers a wide array of resources ranging from research papers on business journalism, tips and advice for new business reporters, personal stories of business journalists, as well as podcasts and videos on business journalism. See also <http://www.businessjournalism.org/coveringcrisis>.
9. Beat the press ([http://www.prospect.org/csnc/blogs/beat\\_the\\_press](http://www.prospect.org/csnc/blogs/beat_the_press)) - A blog ran by U.S. economist Dean Baker, co-director of the Washington, DC-based Center for Economic and Policy Research, that, quite literally, tries to beat the press. Gadget Baker rakes the U.S. press over the coals by calling attention to its errors in reporting economics and business issues.
10. IBON Foundation, Inc. (<http://info.ibon.org>) - A research institution dealing with socio-economic issues.



■ By Hector Bryant L. Macale

**T**HEY'RE CHEAP and—at least to some people—they're entertaining, but can the tabloids be relied on when it comes to providing information on and analysis of elections?

Well yes and no. Yes, when the tabloids are financially stable and are aware of their responsibility to educate voters about candidates and issues during elections. No, when they are not financially secure and end up cultivating political and personal relations to survive.

# TABLOIDS THEY'RE CHEAP— BUT USEFUL?

These are the main findings of a recent study by the Institute of Philippine Culture (IPC) and the Department of Communication of the Ateneo de Manila University which sought to establish whether tabloids, with their high

circulations and massive potential to influence voters, can be regarded as instruments of democracy during elections. The study looked at the coverage of three top-selling tabloids in the 2007 elections.

Rosario Hofileña with Joson Lorenzana and Estelle Marie Ladrido, authors of "Tabloids, Elections and Democracy: Tabloid Coverage of a National Election" presented their findings last Aug. 27 at the Ateneo de Manila University. The study is part of the 2008 IPC Merit Research Awards Lecture Series. Founded in 1960, IPC is a social science research organization of the Ateneo de Manila University. Hofileña, Lorenzana, and Ladrido teach communication and journalism courses at Ateneo.

"We sought to establish whether this medium, with its wide reach and potential to influence voters, provided information and framed election issues in such a way that voters

were equipped to vote wisely in the 2007 elections," Hofileña said.

The findings showed that tabloids can be good sources of in-



Photos by LITO OCAMPO

formation about candidates and issues about elections provided they are financially independent, and more importantly, if they are aware of their responsibility of providing citizens information especially during elections.

"Tabloids cannot be stereotyped as scandal-driven papers that peddle only sex, crime, and entertainment," Hofileña said. "In reporting election-related events, tabloid editors and reporters alike regard their audience as voters who deserve and need information to make choices."

## Lowly tabloids

Philippine tabloids are frequently associated with racy photos of scantily clad women, gruesome crime photos and stories, and sensationalized reporting.

## The study

The study looked at how the three major tabloids provided information and framed election issues, identified factors that influenced their coverage, and determined if tabloids measure up to the informational function of journalism.

The study focused on *Bulgar*, regarded as a non-partisan tabloid; *Abante*, which ranks second to *Bulgar* circulation-wise and has been tagged as an opposition paper; and *People's Tonight*, which has been regarded as an administration-friendly paper and was the only English tabloid included in the study.

The study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. Using content analysis to determine major frames in each tabloid, the researchers randomly selected 156 editions of the tabloids that yielded 160 election-related stories for *Abante*, 251 for *People's Tonight*, and 84 for *Bulgar*. The researchers also interviewed 12 journalists—two reporters and one editor or publisher per tabloid, and one former publisher—to discover the factors that influenced the coverage.

The research study focused on how the frames were constructed and "not on how frames influence audiences," Hofileña said. "We looked at organizational pressure, ideology, attitude, etc and the resulting frames that emerged. We acknowledged the links between the inputs and the frames but it was beyond the scope of this study to determine the process of how inputs influence the choice of frames."

Framing, Hofileña explained, "provides the news media with the ability to direct how audiences should think about issues."

The study found that *Abante's* headlines used mostly the "straight news" frame (straight news stories), followed by the "wrongdoing exposed" frame (news about injustice or wrongdoing uncovered), and the "cockfight" frame (such as news about conflict among candidates). The tabloid's stories used mostly "finger-pointing", followed by "horse-race", and the "wrongdoing exposed" frames.

*People's Tonight's* headlines used the "issues" (positions, platforms, and campaign issues) frame, followed by the "horse race" and "strategy" (how actors will win as well as ensuring clean elections) frames. Its stories used mostly the "horse-race" frame followed by the "issues" and "strategy" frames.

*Bulgar's* headlines used the "cockfight" frame along with the



FRAMES THAT EMERGED IN THE STORIES

Issues	Positions, platforms, campaign issues
Human interest	Personal characteristics of actor
Strategy	How actors will win, ensure clean elections
Horse-race	Who's leading, winning, losing
Cockfight	Conflict among players, in the situation
Wrongdoing exposed	Injustice, wrongdoing uncovered
Reaction	Response to a previously published story
Economic	Economic implications of an act
Finger-pointing	Blame
Straight news	who, what, where, when, why, how

“horse-race” and “straight news” frames applied equally, and the “finger-pointing” frame. Its stories used mostly the “straight-news” frames followed by the “finger-pointing”, “reaction”, and the “cockfight” frames.

Above is a table that contains the story-frames and the definitions researchers provided:

Besides analyzing the headlines and stories, the researchers also looked at the coverage of the candidates and the frames used in the tabloid headlines.

From their interviews, the researchers discovered eight factors that influence how headlines and stories are framed during elections. These are:

- the political position or orientation of the tabloid;
- journalistic practices;
- journalistic values;
- news values;
- institutional values;
- ownership and the personal ties of journalists;
- economics; and
- individual biases or personal values.

In *Abante's* case, “the political position, journalistic practices, journalistic values, and personal values influenced its coverage of elections,” Lorenzana said. *Abante*, he noted, is an opposition paper. The most covered political actor in *Abante* was the opposition. “It also assumed an advocacy role by supporting opposition candidates like Sen. Panfilo Lacson and Antonio Trillanes IV,” Lorenzana explained.

On the other hand, *People's Tonight* was influenced by its ownership, journalistic values, and individual biases of journalists. “The years of sequestration depleted the tabloid’s coffers so that it had limited funds for out-of-town coverage,” Ladrido said. She also said that during the years of sequestration, the tabloid “tended to toe the administration line.”

*People's Tonight* attempted to

provide balanced election coverage by providing a special page to all candidates regardless of political affiliation. The tabloid also sent reporters to cover both the administration and opposition candidates last year. “In practice,” Ladrido said, “the special election page became a venue for candidates to air their disagreements and opposing views.” Press releases were also heavily used to accommodate personal friends, she said about the *People's Tonight's* coverage.

Among the three tabloids analyzed, *Bulgar* was the most neutral, “favoring neither the administration nor the opposition,” Hofileña said. “As the nation’s top selling tabloid, *Bulgar* hit upon a successful formula: non-partisan coverage plus a strong element of showbiz and entertainment.”

“It is *Bulgar's* commercial success that actually allowed it to maintain its non-partisan stance in its election coverage,” Hofileña stressed. “*Bulgar* prides itself for being a tabloid whose news room is clean, having turned away politicians and candidates who offered bribes in exchange for coverage.”

Three major factors affected how the tabloid framed its sto-

ries: its institutional values, economics, and its political orientation.

Implications and recommendations

Four implications of their findings were noted by the researchers. One is the lack of independence of newspapers and tabloids hobbled by political, economic, and personal interests. Second is the ability of tabloids to “hook” their audience and their enormous potential in the discussion and analysis of crucial issues through in-depth reports and commentary. The third implication is the importance of upholding journalistic values and having a good business sense. The fourth is that, with the help of the Internet, the tabloids can be a good medium for initiating public discourse.

The researchers recommended seven measures for the future expansion of their research.

- Closer examination of the frame-building process by studying how inputs influence frames;
- A further study of the audience looking at the consumption and reception of tabloids, focusing on how they interpret news and information during elections;
- A semiotic study of tabloids focusing on photographs and lay-out;
- Beyond elections, an examination of tabloid coverage of political crises;
- A study of alternative ownership and business models for newspapers and tabloids;
- A further study of the use of language mirroring rapport with the audience and tracking changes in the tabloid market such as a shift to online media; and
- Expand study to include local elections. ■



# FOCUS ON THE TABLOIDS

THE CENTER for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) monitored four major tabloids (*Abante*, *Bulgar*, *People's Journal*, and *Tempo*) from April 16 to 27 last year to get a sense of how the Manila tabloids—said to be the preferred reading material among those of limited means who read for both information and entertainment—were covering the 2007 Senate and party-list elections. The study, which appeared in CMFR’s *Monitor of News Media Coverage of the 2007 National Elections*, was part of CMFR’s monitoring project on the news media coverage of the 2007 national and party-list elections.

CMFR found that 85.35 percent of the tabloid reports focused on the senatorial race, with 233 stories altogether. Only 52 of the 2,142 articles in the news hole were on party-list groups.

Of the four tabloids, *People's Journal* published the most number of articles on the midterm elections, with 103 stories taking up 15.73 percent of its total news hole. *Tempo*, for its part, produced 70 reports, but these comprised only 10.9 percent of its coverage.

On the other hand, only 64 stories on the Senate and party-list candidates were published in *Abante*, but these accounted for 14.58 percent of its reportage during the two-week period. *Bulgar* yielded the least number of election reports (36 stories), allotting only 8.87 percent of its space for news.

*Abante* provided the most extensive coverage on party-list candidates as 29.69 percent of its election reports gave prominence to groups such as the Trade Unions Congress of the Philippines, the National Confederation of Cooperatives, and the Alliance of Neo-Conservatives.

Fourteen reports figured on the front pages of the monitored tabloids, save for *Bulgar* which published all of its election stories in the inside pages. *Abante* published the most number of front page reports.

Three of the four tabloids covered administration candidates the most. Only *Abante* covered Ang Kapatiran (The Alliance for the Common Good) party, allotting an entire page of news features for the party’s candidates and platforms. This, however, amounted to a meager 1.49 percent of Kapatiran candidates’ exposure as news subjects during the entire monitor period. Neither Kilusang Bagong Lipunan nor the Philippine Green Republican Party, both of which received limited coverage among the Manila broadsheets, was covered by the four tabloids.



*Bulgar* lacked news articles on party-list groups the most. *People's Journal*, however, had reports on most of the party-list groups.

The “Others Category” (i.e. political controversies, elections-related matters, etc.) ranked highest among the themes covered, with 122 reports published. Political controversies as a sub-category were the dominant theme.

Development policies, however, were the second most dominant theme found in the four tabloids. The most covered development issue in the two-week period was economic reform, with a total of 19 reports. A call for good governance was mentioned 12 times. Education (10 reports), health (six), human rights (five reports), labor (five) and the Mindanao conflict (five) were included in the coverage, but no explanation on these current issues was provided.

Personality-oriented stories, on the other hand, appeared 23 times in *Bulgar* alone. Stories on politicians with celebrity spouses permeated the entertainment section. The usual campaign stories were reported 33 times.

Slanted reports outweighed neutral reports. Only 66 stories were neutral, while 209 failed to report all possible sides to an issue equally and without the use of editorializing.

Positive reports, which stressed only the ‘good’ side of a candidate or ally without presenting other views, amounted to 75.60 percent of all stories. This was evident in 158 reports. In contrast, there were 51 negatively-slanted reports. ■



Journalism students at a Cebu forum

Photos by JB SANTOS

■ By JB Santos

**"I** WOULD like to begin by saying that the Cebu Citizens Press Council is alive," *Sun.Star Cebu* editor Cherry Ann Lim declared at the meeting of community press councils organized by the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) in Makati last Oct. 26. The statement was both a statement of fact and an article of faith.

The Cebu Citizens Press Council (CCPC) belongs to that rare breed: a community press council that not only works; it also works effectively.

Organized in 2002 with CMFR's help, the CCPC was largely inactive from 2002 to 2005. It was revitalized in 2005

**The "capacity to set aside differences arising from competition" enables Cebu media to successfully celebrate press freedom week**



Lim

LITO OCAMPO

through the initiative of *Sun.Star Cebu* and with CMFR assistance. Since then, the CCPC, to use an understatement, has been "alive."

Similar to the other citizens press councils CMFR helped organize in Baguio, Palawan, and, only last August, in Central Luzon, the idea behind the CCPC is that what are most needed in the Philippine press are self-regulatory mechanisms that will help check professional and ethical lapses. To discourage members of the public who may feel wronged by a certain report from filing libel cases or even resorting to physical violence, citizens press councils also provide a venue for the public to air its grievances and find redress.

One of the main projects of the CCPC has been the yearly

**Franzina Yulo of the Department of Foreign Affairs speaks on 'etiquette for journalists' during Cebu Press Freedom Week**

# The Cebu Press Council ALIVE AND WELL

Cebu Press Freedom Week held from Sept. 21 to 27, in commemoration of Ferdinand Marcos' declaration of martial law, which among other atrocities curtailed press freedom and free expression. Together with the CCPC, Cebu's three major newspapers—*Sun.Star*, *Cebu Daily News*, and *The Freeman*—take turns in organizing Press Freedom Week.

Press Freedom Week has provided each year an opportunity for the discussion of current media issues as well as a forum for students of journalism to engage journalism practitioners and to have a sense of the responsibilities and tasks of the profession. Cebu Press Freedom Week this year offered a mixed bag of activities ranging from a forum for students of journalism, "Reaching Out to Future Journalists", to a conference aimed at promoting better relations with news sources ("Reaching Out to News Sources"). There was also a talk on the basics of media eti-



quette, "Effective Self-Presentation & Communication". The celebration also includes selecting a "Miss Press Freedom", and an award for "the most admirable news source," which, according to the organizers, is meant to "educate sources on how to deal with the media."

**Upholding standards**

Cebu Press Freedom Week provides an insight into how Cebu media people view their profession. While the forums on media issues are strong indications of their commitment to upholding and upgrading journalism's professional standards, the less serious parts of the celebration speak volumes about the camaraderie that animates the Cebu press, which has been cited as one of the key ingredient for the CCPC's success.

"Our capacity to set aside differences arising from competition," *Sun.Star Cebu* editor in chief Pachico Seares said, enables the Cebu media to successfully celebrate press freedom week. This is in marked contrast to the situation in other communities where competition has been a corrosive factor that prevents the media from pulling together even when its members are threatened with libel suits and other harassments, or even killed.

Aside from the CCPC, Cebu also has a host of other active media organizations working closely with each other. These are the Cebu News Workers Foundation, Cebu News Workers Multipurpose Cooperative, Cebu Media Medical Aid Fund, Cebu Media Legal Aid, and the Cebu Federation of Beat Journalists. The Cebu journalists also have the Marcelo B. Fernan Press Center where they usually conduct seminars and forums.

Seares, who is also a lawyer as well as the 2008 University of the Philippines Gawad Plaridel awardee, points out that the achievements of the Cebu media were not accomplished overnight.

"It has taken us almost two decades already to achieve all this, and we keep improving," Seares told *PJR Reports* on Sept. 23.

Cebu media, like any other press community, also has its own set of problems.

"Corruption also runs deep here," Seares said.

**Media harassment**

The annual celebration of Press Freedom Week was provoked by two cases of media ha-



**A photo exhibit at the Marcelo B. Fernan Cebu Press Center**

rassment in Cebu, according to Noel Pangilinan, former editor-in-chief of *The Freeman*.

The first happened on Nov. 19, 1990 when radio commentator Bobby Nalzar of dyMF was mauled and held at gunpoint following his report about excesses in the fare collection of barges plying the Mandaue City-Mactan Island route.

Then on Nov. 5, 1991, Maj. Esa Han, chief of the Narcotics command in Central Visayas, along with three of his men barged into the offices of *Sun.Star* to confront columnist Wilfredo Velasco. Angered by Velasco's columns critical of the anti-drug campaign of the Narcotics command, Han allegedly threatened to kill Velasco



**Cebu journalists gather for their annual celebration of press freedom.**

and his family. After various Cebu media groups condemned the event, the idea of a Cebu Press Freedom Week was proposed and implemented by several media groups, Pangilinan wrote

**The competition has actually resulted in a better sense of community among the press - Seares**



**Sun.Star's Seares**

in the November 2001 issue of the *Philippine Journalism Review*.

The first Cebu Press Freedom Week was held on Sept. 18 to 24, 1994 "to remind the public and the press itself that the precious freedom it now enjoys must be protected from any and all threats," says the Cebu Journalism & Journalists (CJJ) publication.

CJJ, which has had four editions since 2004, is a publication usually released during Cebu Press Freedom Week. It contains the profiles of Cebu journalists as well as stories on Cebu media issues.

The celebration of Cebu Press Freedom Week was cancelled in 1996 when the organizers were "stung by criticism about legitimacy and motives." The celebration was revived the following year.

Since then, the CCPC, has been helping the the Cebu media improve journalistic practice by, among others, boosting the public's media literacy and encouraging community engagement with the media.

Seares said that competition has actually resulted in a better sense of community among the press because the competition is based on who can best serve the public.

"In thus competing with each other, at the same time we also compete for the trust of the public. This brings us together instead of driving us apart," Seares told *PJR Reports*. ■



**The Marcelo B. Fernan Cebu Press Center**

# INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING A CULTURE OF DISCLOSURE

■ By Edsel Van DT. Dura

**T**HE INVESTIGATIVE approach is central to all good journalism, given the need to provide the public information on why and how things happen as much as what happened and to whom it happened.

And yet, said Malou Mangahas, executive director of the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ), in a forum last Sept. 24, so much attention is paid to the what and who aspects of a story in 24/7 news coverage that there is less focus on explaining the “why” and “how” of an issue.

Mangahas said all good writing should answer these questions as much as they answer the “who” and the “what”. There should be no distinction between writing ordinary reports as “fast-food” journalism and investigative reports as “fine dining” since every report must provide background and context to an issue.

“It should be at the heart of what we should be doing if we are to catch a big fish,” Mangahas reminded journalism students in the forum “How to Catch a Big Fish: Investigative Journalism in the Philippines” held at the College of Mass Communication auditorium in the University of the Philippines Diliman.

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**A “pro-active commitment” to investigative methods is crucial to the watchdog function of the press**



PCIJ's Mangahas

The forum was organized by the Union of Journalists of the Philippines-UP (UJP-UP), the student arm of the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines, as part of its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration.

Bobby Tuazon, executive editor of the online news magazine



Newsbreak's Rimando

*Bulatlat.com*, and Lala Rimando of *Newsbreak* were also speakers in the forum. Both shared their experiences in the practice of investigative journalism. All speakers agreed that investigative journalism is crucial to transparency in governance as well as public awareness.



Bulatlat's Tuazon

#### Need for coverage

Beyond providing relentless coverage of issues, the pressing need for a “pro-active commitment” to investigating and analyzing political and governance issues is crucial to the watchdog function of the free press, *PJR Reports* said in its January 2008 story

“Despite another year of scandals: a lean harvest of investigative reports”.

*PJR Reports* noted that the decrease in the number of investigative reports “that can help provide the public with complete, relevant, and comprehensive understanding of the issues weakened the coverage of political and governance issues in 2007.”

“The immediate consequence is to get erring officials off the hook, but the long term damage consists of the political class’ growing brazenness as a result of the impunity with which it has been clothed.”

#### ‘Culture of disclosure’

Meanwhile, in another forum, former PCIJ executive director Shiela Coronel said the role of critical investigative reporting is “particularly important during democratic transitions, when the media are still asserting their autonomy from government and helping construct the new rules of engagement with officials”.

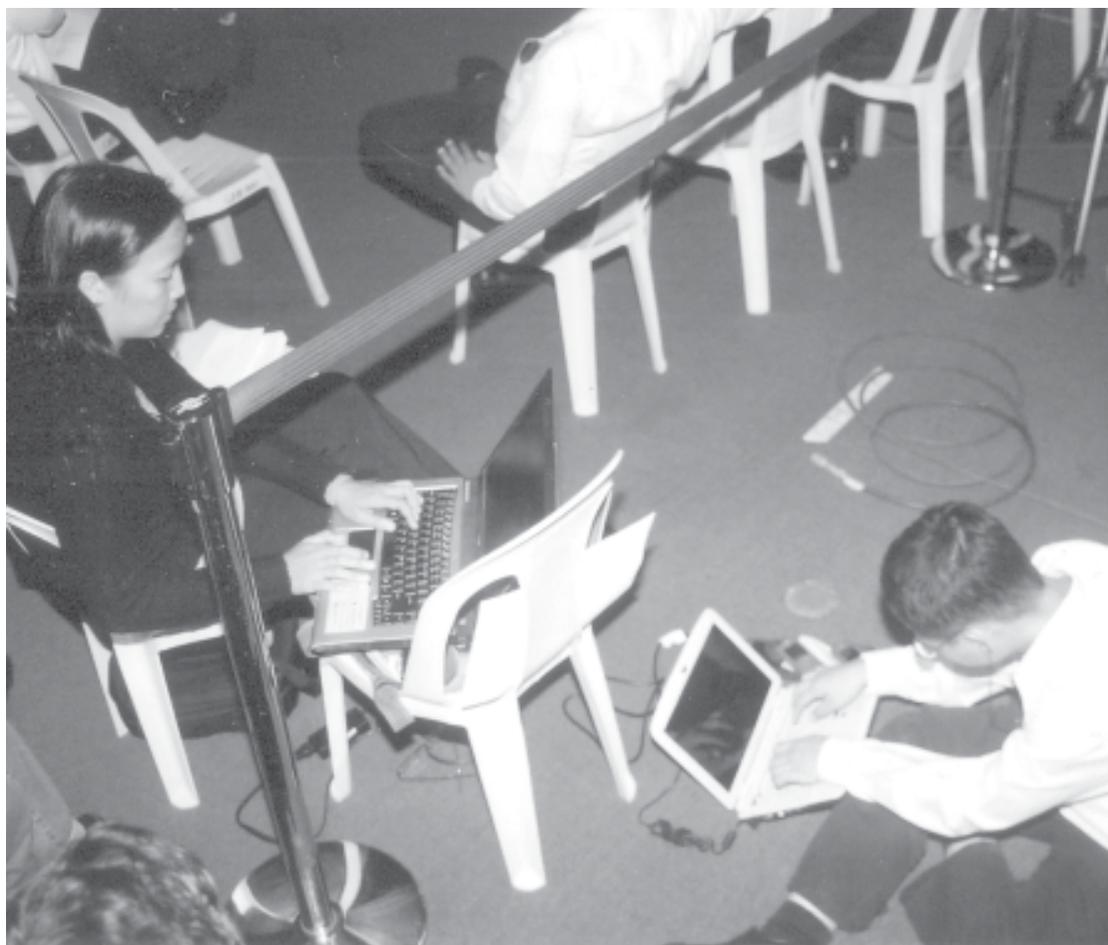
In her presentation “The Media as Watchdog” during the Harvard-World Bank Workshop last May 29 to 31, Coronel said more recent studies indicate that aggressive reporting may not necessarily translate into a “withdrawal of support for democracy” or to “scandal fatigue”.

“Citizens may in fact see critical reporting as an indication that the checks and balances of democracy are at work,” Coronel said. “In their study of the media in new democracies in Europe, Schmitt-Beck and Voltner (2007) found that despite the rise of adversarial and sensational news reporting in post-authoritarian media, on the whole, media exposure is conducive to democratic consolidation and helps build support for democracy.”

In addition, she said investigative reporting also strengthens journalistic freedom.

“By constantly digging for information, by forcing the government and the private sector to release documents, and by subjecting powerful officials and other powerful individuals to rigorous questioning, investigative journalists expand the boundaries of what is possible to print or air. At the same time, they accustom officials to an inquisitive press,” said Coronel, who is currently director of the Tony Stabile Center for Investigative Journalism of New York’s Columbia University.

“In the long term, the constant give and take between journalists and officials helps develop a culture — and a tradition — of disclosure.” ■



Photos by LITO OCAMPO

## NATIONAL

## Journalists' suit will proceed

THE COURT of Appeals denied last Sept. 22 a motion by the husband of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo to quash the class suit filed against him by journalists in response to his numerous libel suits. The Court of Appeals also lifted a writ of preliminary injunction and directed the trial court to continue with the hearing.

"(T)he petition is denied for lack of merit. Accordingly, the writ of preliminary injunction is lifted and the case remanded to the trial court which is ordered to conduct further proceedings with dispatch," the 23-page Court of Appeals decision, penned by Associate Justice Fernanda Lampas Peralta, stated.

Thirty-six journalists, together with the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR), the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism and the newspaper *The Daily Tribune*, filed the P12.5-million class suit against presidential spouse Jose Miguel "Mike" Arroyo, on Dec. 28, 2006. The journalists argued that the 11 libel suits Mr. Arroyo had filed against 46 members of the press were an abuse of his right to litigate and was an attack on press freedom.

After surviving a high-risk heart operation, Mr. Arroyo announced through the presidential spokesman on May 3, 2007 that he would withdraw all the libel cases he had filed against journalists. The media practitioners who sued Mr. Arroyo however continued with the case, so that a decision on its merits could define the legal parameters for suing journalists for libel.

Mr. Arroyo's legal counsel Ruy Rondain told *abs-cbnNEWS.com/Newsbreak* that he will appeal the decision.

"I'm disappointed. I thought my arguments were clear. Of course, I don't agree with the decision. I have 15 days to file a motion for reconsideration," Rondain told *abs-cbnNEWS.com/Newsbreak*.

Mr. Arroyo filed a petition for certiorari before the Court of Appeals arguing that Makati City RTC Judge Zenaida Laguilles committed "grave abuse of discretion in admitting the amended complaint" of the journalists as the allegedly insufficient docket fees paid by the latter did not give Laguilles jurisdiction over the case.

A certiorari is a writ which could be issued by a superior



Photos by LITO OCAMPO

court to a lower court to annul or modify ongoing proceedings if the latter judge acted on a case outside his jurisdiction.

In the original complaint filed by the journalists, the word "each" was written in the section asking for damages amounting to P12.5 million. Mr. Arroyo noted that the word "each" meant each petitioner is asking for P12.5 million in damages, with a docket fee totaling P9 million.

The journalists filed an amended complaint to Laguilles to then delete the word "each" and replace it with "aggregate" in the section pertaining to damages sought, as well as to include the names of additional journalists.

The appellate court did not pass judgment on the issue of docket fees, as it only ruled on the issue of "jurisdiction and grave abuse of discretion," about which allegation the Court of Appeals ruled was "wanting in this case."

Libel is a criminal offense in the Philippines, and many media organizations including CMFR have been campaigning for its decriminalization for years.

### Broadcasters receive death threats

TWO DAVAO City-based radio broadcasters received death threats after reporting alleged extortion activities involving some local government officials.

Erin Lumosbog of RPN-9's Davao radio station dxKT-*Radyo Ronda* (Roving Radio) and James Pala of dxAM-*Radyo Rapido* (Rapid Radio) said they received the threats on their mobile phones telling them to stop discussing alleged extortion activities by some councilors of the municipality of Sta. Cruz in



Presidential spouse Jose Miguel Arroyo

Davao del Sur, an Oct. 7 *Inquirer.net* report said.

In a phone interview with the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility last Oct. 8, Lumosbog said the threats came after he discussed in his radio program allegations by a local businessman that some municipal council members had asked him for P1.2 million in exchange for their approval of his request to quarry.

The businessman was able to give only P480,000, Lumosbog said. His request was later denied. When the councilors allegedly refused to return his P480,000, the businessman asked for help from the media.

*Inquirer.net* quoted one of the messages as saying "If you will not stop doing commentaries on the Sta. Cruz issue, bullets might force you to stop." Lumosbog tried calling the numbers used to send him the threats but all had been deactivated.

Lumosbog continues to discuss the issue in his radio program but said he is taking precautionary measures. "If we let the threats affect us, our radio

program will be ruined," he said in Filipino. He explained that he has lessened his field activities and is staying in a "safe house."

"We have been asking the councilors to explain their side," Lumosbog said in Filipino. But he said the councilors seem to be avoiding the media. "When we went to see the councilors allegedly involved, they suddenly disappeared from the session hall," he said.

There is an ongoing investigation on the alleged extortion activities. Sta. Cruz municipal mayor Joel Ray Lopez told *Inquirer.net* that several businessmen did "(decide) to withdraw their investments (in Sta. Cruz) because some councilors were asking money from them in exchange for some favors."

### Businessman threatens P100-million suit

THE CHIEF executive officer of a local mining company has threatened to file a P100-million libel suit against a Davao-based newspaper.

Said Sayre of the Dabawenyo Minerals Corporation (DMC), *Sun.Star Davao* reported last Oct. 3, is planning to file a P100-million libel suit against the *Mindanao Daily Mirror* after it published accusations by three former DMC officials saying that Sayre used falsified public documents "to collect substantial amount from the entities he entered into contract without authority and resolution from the DMC Board." Run on shoe string budgets, community newspapers are likely to fold up if convicted of libel and fined huge amounts.

The Oct. 1, 2008 *Mindanao Daily Mirror* story, according to an Oct. 3 report from *Sun.Star Davao*, also mentioned former DMC corporate secretary Rex Angelo Gabrido's allegation that Sayre wanted him dead after he refused Sayre's offer of P500,000 for his 129,287.50 shares in the company.

Sayre said the report was a "concocted and malicious rumor." He said the article was meant "to discredit him and his firm" and that Gabrido's wife works for the newspaper.

But *Mindanao Daily Mirror* editor in chief Marietta Siongco explained that the story was based on the complaint filed by Gabrido and two other DMC former officials. She added that the *Mirror* is willing to "publish the side of Sayre anytime he wishes," *Sun.Star Davao* reported.

Gabrido, Habib Mahalail Hassan, former vice president for operations, and Hadji Nouh Daiman, former director for operations, filed a complaint against Sayre before the Davao City Regional Trial Court Branch 10 asking it to stop Sayre from "entering into any contract or agreement with any investors."

According to the *Sun.Star Davao* report, Siongco also confirmed that Gabrido's wife was working in the advertising department of the paper "but added that no employee could influence her to come out with the story."

### Journalists shot at in Maguindanao

THREE MINDANAO correspondents were reportedly shot at during a supposed clash between the Philippine Army and alleged members of the separatist group Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) last Oct. 1 in Maguindanao. However, the MILF said it had no troops in the area at the time, and accused the Army of shooting at the photographers so they would stop taking pictures.

Agence France Press photogra-

pher Mark Navales, *Philippine Daily Inquirer* correspondent Jeffrey Maitem, and GMA-7 correspondent Ferdinand Cabrera were taking photographs and footage of burning houses along the national highway in Pagatin village when the incident happened, the *Inquirer* reported last Oct. 2.

"We ducked for cover inside our van. Our driver hurriedly left the area. Some sniper bullets were going our direction," Navales told the *Inquirer*. GMA-7 TV also caught the incident on camera (watch the video at <http://www.gmanews.tv/video/29450/2-GMA-News-correspondents-fired-at-in-Maguindanao>).

The fighting started around 9 a.m. after soldiers allegedly spotted members of MILF Commander Ameril Umbra Kato's group along the national highway, the *Inquirer* reported. The government troops are hunting Kato and another MILF commander (Abdurahman Macapaar, also known as Commander Bravo) for allegedly attacking several towns in Mindanao last August during which several civilians were killed.

"That's the same area where the rebels who ambushed a military convoy on Monday positioned themselves. The houses burned there was due to the fighting and we have nothing to do with it," Lt. Col. Julieta Ando, spokesperson of the Army's 6th Division, told the *Inquirer*.

In an interview with GMA-7, Maj. Armand Rico said that "a lawless MILF group" was firing at the correspondents. "We can't prevent some of our friends from the media's being subjects of the lawless MILF group's attack," Rico said in Filipino.

But the MILF has denied that it was even in the area. MILF spokesman Eid Kabalu told the *Inquirer* that "We have no troop movement today. The bursts of fire that happened only came from the government side."

"I think it's only part of their move so reporters would not be able to take pictures of houses still on fire," Kabalu said.

Firefights between the MILF and Philippine government forces resumed in August after the signing of the memorandum of agreement on ancestral domain (MOA-AD) was stalled.

If signed, the MOA-AD would have given way to the creation of a Bangsamoro Juridical Entity and the drafting of a final peace agreement.

Peace negotiations between the MILF and the Government of the Republic of the Philippines started in 1997. ■



The TOM-skype website



Skype President Josh Silverman [HTTP://ABOUT.SKYPE.COM/EXECUTIVETEAM/](http://about.skype.com/executiveteam/)

**INTERNATIONAL**  
**Chinese Skype spies on users**

A CHINESE version of the eBay-owned communications software Skype filters and records text chats containing politically-charged words, says a prominent University of Toronto research group said.

Citizen Lab, an interdisciplinary laboratory focused on politics and the Internet, revealed in its report "Breaching Trust: An analysis of surveillance and security practices on China's TOM-Skype platform" that the Chinese software TOM-Skype scans text chats for sensitive keywords and blocks those messages from reaching their destination—which Skype had admitted earlier. TOM-Skype also stores the messages along with personal user records on computers easily accessible to anybody.

TOM-Skype is a joint venture between eBay and TOM Online, the Chinese online subsidiary of Hong Kong-based TOM Group.

Nart Villeneuve, the author of the report, said he was able to access and download the stored messages which contained user's identification, ranging from business transactions to political correspondence.

Last Oct. 2, Skype's president Josh Silverman defended TOM on Skype blog (<http://www.share.skype.com/sites>). Just like any other communications company in China, Silverman wrote, "TOM has established procedures to meet local laws and regulations. These regulations include the requirement to monitor and block instant messages containing certain words deemed 'offensive' by the Chinese authorities."

He also wrote that "Skype publicly disclosed (in April 2006) that TOM operated a text filter that blocked certain words in chat messages, and it also said that if the message is found unsuitable for displaying, it is simply discarded and not displayed or transmitted anywhere."

But Silverman admitted that his company did not know that TOM stores the chat messages. "It was our understanding that it was not TOM's protocol to upload and store chat messages with certain keywords, and we are now inquiring with TOM to find out why the protocol changed."

The Citizen Lab report said that not only TOM-Skype users but also Skype users who have communicated with TOM-Skype users are affected. It also said that other factors like individual usernames could have been used in cataloging data.

"This is a wake up call to everyone who has ever put their (blind) faith in the assurances offered up by network intermediaries like Skype. Declarations and privacy policies are no substitute for the type of due diligence that the research put forth here represents," says the report.

But, Silverman reiterated in his blog that "Skype-to-Skype communications are, and always have been, completely secure and private."

The discovery draws more attention to the Chinese government's Internet monitoring and filtering efforts, which created controversy this summer during the Beijing Olympics. According to *The New York Times*, researchers in China have estimated that 30,000 or more "Internet police" monitor online traffic, websites and blogs for political and other offending content.

The Chinese government is not alone in its Internet surveillance efforts.

Other U.S. companies have been caught up in controversy after cooperating with Chinese officials. *Yahoo!* has been widely criticized for helping the Chinese authorities identify Shi Tao, a reporter accused of leaking state secrets. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison in 2005. The company said it was only following Chinese law. — IFEX

**Mexican journalist killed**

A MEXICAN journalist was found dead last Oct. 10 more than seven hours after he was kidnapped.

Miguel Ángel Villagómez Valle, publisher and editor of the daily newspaper *La Noticia de Michoacán*, was found dead in La Unión municipality, state of Guerrero after he went missing the night of Oct. 9 in the port city of Lázaro Cárdenas, Centro Nacional de Comunicación Social AC (CENCOS) and ARTICLE 19 reported. Villagómez reportedly

sustained six gunshot wounds in the back and a single shot in the head.

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reported that Villagómez went missing last Oct. 9 at around 10:30 p.m. He was supposed to return to their his office after dropping off two colleagues at their homes.

Villagómez's body was found the next day at approximately 6 a.m. in a garbage dump near a coastal highway in the state of Guerrero, about 50 kms from Lázaro Cárdenas where he lived.

Villagómez's relatives and colleagues told CPJ that they were uncertain about the motive of the killing. However, they added that about one month before his killing, Villagómez mentioned receiving a threatening call on his mobile phone. He told them the caller belonged to the Zetas, former soldiers who worked for the powerful Gulf drug cartel. Villagómez warned his family to be alert, his wife told CPJ.

Villagómez is survived by his wife and three young children.

State police have yet to announce any murder suspects or investigative leads.

"We mourn the death of our colleague Miguel Angel Villagómez and urge state and federal authorities to investigate this crime and bring all those responsible to justice," said Carlos Lauría, CPJ's Senior Program Coordinator for the Americas. "We call on the government of President Felipe Calderón and congressional leaders to promptly address this murder as part of a wave of unprecedented violence against the Mexican media by developing legislation that federalizes crimes against free expression and freedom of the press."

ARTICLE 19 and CENCOS also called on the Mexican government to "effectively investigate and prosecute the authors of the crime."

Powerful drug cartels and es-



Mexican President Felipe Calderon (right) [HTTP://WWW.AZGOVERNOR.GOV](http://www.azgovernor.gov)

calating violence associated with criminal groups have made Mexico one of the world's most dangerous places for journalists. Twenty-three – including Villagómez – journalists have been killed since 2000, at least seven for their work. Seven journalists have disappeared since 2005. – IFEX/CPJ

## Burmese censors suspend two newspapers

BURMA'S PRESS Scrutiny Board suspended the publishing licenses of two Rangoon-based weekly newspapers for alleged violation of the censorship board's regulations, *Mizzima* reported.

The censor board suspended the license of *True News* after it published on its front page a photograph of a child working in a construction site with the cap-



U Win Tin

[HTTP://WWW.CIJMALAYSIA.ORG](http://www.cijmalaysia.org)

tion "A child working in a construction site near Phuket seaside resort, Thailand".

"The censor board had permitted publication of this photograph at the time because it had no caption when it was submitted. The caption was later inserted. As a result, the censor board banned the publication on account of 'inadequate page layout design,'" an

editor told *Mizzima*.

Meanwhile, *The Action Times* received a month-long suspension for publishing a slightly modified version of a news story on the release of journalist U Win Tin, the longest political prisoner in Burma. The published version referred to U Win Tin as "Sayagyi" ("Great Master") which was not in the approved version, an editor of *The Action Times* told *Mizzima*.

After 19 years, U Win Tin, former editor of the newspaper *Hanthawathi* and vice-president of the Burma Writers Association, was released last Sept. 23 under the junta's amnesty program. He was imprisoned on July 4, 1989 for several charges including anti-government propaganda, RSF earlier reported.

An official of the Press Scrutiny Board refused to give details of the suspension when asked by *Mizzima*. – SEAPA/*Mizzima* ■

## Press freedom watchdog fetes journalists, press lawyer

THE COMMITTEE to Protect Journalists (CPJ) will honor five journalists and a press and human rights lawyer for defending press freedom and reporting the news despite threats of imprisonment and other harassments.

CPJ announced the winners of its 2008 International Press Freedom Awards. These were: Bilal Hussein (*Associated Press* photographer, Iraq); Danish Karokhel and Farida Nekzad (*Pajhwok Afghan News* director and managing editor, Afghanistan); Andrew Mwenda (*The Independent* managing editor, Uganda); and Hector Maseda Gutiérrez (imprisoned reporter, Cuba)

Meanwhile, media lawyer Beatrice Mtetwa of Zimbabwe, a 2005 recipient of the CPJ International Press Freedom Award, will be receiving the Burton Benjamin Memorial Award for lifetime achievement. The award is named in honor of the late CBS News senior producer and former CPJ chair who died in 1988. She will be the first to receive both awards.

Mtetwa defended the rights of journalists in Zimbabwe as well as foreign correspondents and has won acquittals for many journalists arrested in that country, "where the law is used as a weapon against independent journalists", CPJ said.

Hussein, who risked his life covering the Ramadi district and Fallujah city in the volatile Anbar province in western Iraq, was detained by U.S. troops for two years, from April 2006 to 2008. He was released like other detained Iraqi journalists for lack of substantive charges against them. CPJ said Hussein's case "illustrates the U.S. military's alarming tactic of open-ended detentions of Iraqi journalists".

*Pajhwok Afghan News* executives Karokhel and Nekzad are media rights activists committed to advancing press freedom in a country which ranks seventh after the Philippines in the CPJ Impunity Index released last May 1. The CPJ Impunity Index lists countries with the worst number of unsolved journalist murders.

Mwenda is a print, radio, and television journalist hosting the political talk show "Tonight with Andrew Mwenda" and the radio show *Andrew Mwenda Live*. He is also founder and managing editor of the news magazine *The Independent*. He remains a steadfast press freedom fighter despite facing many defamation lawsuits and constant intimidation from the Ugandan government, police, and army.

Gutiérrez, 65, is the oldest of 22 journalists detained in Cuba today. According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and CPJ, both international press freedom watchdogs, Cuba is the second biggest prisoner in the world for journalists, next to China. Gutiérrez had published long investigative reports on the brutality and human right violations in Cuban prisons published shortly before he was sentenced to 20 years in prison in April 2003. According to CPJ research, Gutiérrez wrote about the social, economic, environmental, and historical issues ignored by the official Cuban press.

The awardees will be honored in a ceremony on Nov. 25 at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City.

## Call for Nieman journalism fellows

FILIPINO JOURNALISTS are encouraged to apply for the Nieman International Fellowship for Journalism at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Deadline is on Dec. 15, 2008.

Full-time journalists including freelancers who have been working for at least five years in any medium (print, radio, television, and online) are qualified to apply. Photojournalists, editorial cartoonists, columnists and broadcast producers are also eligible.

Past Nieman fellows from the Philippines include: Malou Mangahas (executive director, Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism); Marites Dañguilan Vitug (editor in chief, *Newsbreak*); Rigoberto Tiglao (Philippine ambassador to Greece); Benjamin Defensor (dean, The Manila Times College); Crispulo J. Icbán Jr. (editor in chief, *Manila Bulletin*); and Rodolfo T. Reyes (former Malacañang press secretary).

The Nieman Foundation selects at least 12 fellows who are citizens of nations other than the United States – even those working in the US or working for U.S. media companies. The candidates must find financial support from sources outside the Nieman Foundation since its funds are restricted to U.S. citizens. The Foundation though will help successful applicants find financial support.

The fellowship gives journalists the opportunity to interact with other international journalists where they will study for an academic year at Harvard and participate in journalism-oriented seminars, workshops and conferences. ■

## OBIT

### ELLIOT, 83

*Newsweek* editor Osborn Elliot, 83, died of complications from cancer of the larynx last Sept. 28.

Elliot, whose journalism career started at the *Journal of Commerce* and *Time* magazine, joined *Newsweek* in 1955 as senior editor in charge of business news. He was managing editor in 1959 and editor in chief in 1969. Dubbed as the "architect of the modern *Newsweek*," he led the magazine for 16 years, doubled its circulation, and transformed it to rival *Time* with enterprising journalism. He left *Newsweek* after 21 years.

In Jan. 1978, he served as dean of the Columbia University School of Journalism. He stepped down in 1986 and remained as a journalism professor. He emphasized the need for journalism ethics and specialization in science or foreign affairs during his eight-year tenure at the school.

The Asia Society awarded him a journalism prize for civic journalism putting significance on the role of the craft in pushing for salient public policies. He helped found the Citizens Committee for New York City, which offers grants and trainings to community volunteer groups, in 1976.

### MAYNARD, 61

Pioneering African American journalist Nancy Hicks Maynard died of multiple organ failure last Sept. 21. She was 61.

Maynard started as a copy girl at the *New York Post* and later became a reporter in 1966. She studied journalism at Long Island University and received her law degree from Stanford University.

In Sept. 1968, Maynard joined the *New York Times* where she served as the youngest and the first African American reporter in that paper. She covered science, health, education, and other

domestic policy issues in New York and Washington until 1977.

When she and her husband Robert C. Maynard resigned from their newspaper positions in 1977, they founded the nonprofit organization Institute for Journalism Education, now the Robert C. Maynard Institute for Journalism Education. In an effort to diversify the newsrooms, the institute trains minority reporters at a summer program in Berkeley. The training later now included editors and newsroom managers.

In 1983, Maynard and her husband became the owners and publishers of the *Oakland Tribune*. She served as senior vice president and deputy publisher of the paper. They sold the paper in 1992 due to financial problems.

Maynard wrote "Mega Media: How Market Forces Are Transforming the News" (2000). She served as a board member or director of the Tribune Company, correspondent for Public Broadcasting Service, and the New York Stock Exchange. She also served as chair of the Freedom Forum Media Studies Center at Columbia University.

In 1998, the National Association of Black Journalists presented her with its annual Lifetime Achievement Award.

### CRAIG, 60

Broadcaster and sports analyst Olayinka Craig died of leukemia blood cancer last Sept. 23. He was 60.

Craig worked as a studio operator at the Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation in 1967. He became known as a sports commentator and analyst in the 1980s on the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA). He also created and produced several magazine programs on television. Examples were the morning show *AM Express* on the NTA and the program *Newsline* which reports news and issues in a lighter manner. He retired in 1990 and served as program consultant.

He founded the Yinka Craig Associates, a marketing communication outfit.

### DIAS, 56

Veteran Jamaican journalist Monica Dias died from cancer last Sept. 14. She was 56.

She worked as a journalist for more than 35 years. She began her career at *The Gleaner* and served the Press Association of Jamaica (PAJ) in several capacities, which started in the late 1970s. PAJ awarded her special honor earlier this year.

Dias later became an advocate for child's rights and joined the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) where she remained until her passing. She spent 18 years at UNICEF working as a communications officer.

### DONAHUE, 88

Veteran journalist John C. Donahue Jr. succumbed to cancer last Oct. 4. He was 88.

Donahue worked as sports editor and later managing editor for the now defunct *Burlington Daily News*. He served as editor of the *Bostonian* and *The Boston Transcript* magazines. He also worked as sports editor of the *Burlington Daily News*, managing editor of *Vermont Sunday News*, and copy editor of the *Quincy Journal*. He served *The Washington Post* for six years as national editor.

Donahue also worked for *United Press International* covering events in several western European countries.

Donahue wrote "A Beginner's Guide to Journalism". He was active even in his retirement. He founded *The Northfield Transcript* in 1999 and bought *The Northfield News* in January 2007. Donahue merged the papers creating *Northfield News and Transcript* and sold it due to health issues in July 2007. ■

# Halloween infantilism

# INTERVIEWS

# WITH GHOULS

# AND VAMPIRES

■ By Lito B. Zulueta

**O**CTOBER IS the spookiest month for the Philippine media. In the run-up to Nov. 1 and 2, All Saints Day and All Souls Day, television shows outdo one another in coming up with the scariest ghost story. Considering that TV entertainment programming has become more and more a freakfest, it's no big deal really: the odder the better (a beautiful woman with fins and scales, another woman whose DNA hails from wolves, a girl who looks like a platypus at day and a Mona Lisa at night, men in metallic tights doing their job as intergalactic cops in what amounts to a Filipino's futuristic wishful thinking—in their interstellar flights do they carry a fabulous stash of euros for pocket money and incidental official expenses like that brazen PNP bunch in Moscow?). October and November merely reaffirm the carnival that's Philippine TV—no more, no less.

But when even TV news and public affairs try to get into the game as enthusiastically as the bizarre side of broadcast programming—substituting ghosts for news sources, exchanging séances for interviews—then the news media should rightly worry. At stake is not only the credibility of journalism, but also the future of man and woman as rational animals. For how does one justify relaxing one's rationality in the quest to outscare the competition? News is information, not superstition. Journalism is advocacy of the truth, not ghost-whispering.

A former student of mine who now works in the current affairs show of a major network asked me recently for story ideas for their "Halloween edition". I asked her: "So who will be your talking heads? Ghosts?"

I was joking of course, but she replied, "We could hold a

**When the news media mesh with show business, the newsroom becomes a carnival house of horrors**

séance to draw them out."

If she was dead-serious, it was because of the ratings game. The rival show was a top-rating dramatic series which had been rescheduled to compete directly with her public affairs program and bring it down. Although her program was ahead in the ratings, she said the network bosses couldn't afford to run an honest to goodness report and risk being clobbered by the

drama program.

"Anyway, we're very sure they're going to run a ghost story for their Halloween special," she said. "We should prove equal to the challenge."

Ok, but is there such a thing as "Halloween journalism"? With apologies to Anne Rice, can journalists really interview a vampire? Can a newsman make a body count of zombies? How does one address *Dracula*—"Your Lordship" or "Your Fanged Excellency"?

As more and more news and public affairs programs take the netherworld as the subject of their broadcast, journalism becomes more and more melded with entertainment, institutionalizing the troublesome drift toward "infotainment". When the news media mesh with show business, the newsroom becomes a carnival house of horrors.

To some extent, this has also become true of the print media as newspapers try to keep up with broadcast by publishing ghost stories on their front pages. If the only reason for print's continuation is that news will always be sanctified in print, then the fact that some newspapers have transformed themselves into a Halloween Gazette shows that news can be exhumed in print.

Halloween journalism is market-driven. For the past several years, Halloween, a holiday practice totally alien to the Philippines' Hispanic Catholic culture, has made inroads in the Filipino's popular consciousness. Exclusive villages and rich enclaves have institutionalized the American trick-or-treat, in which little boys and girls roam the



MANIX ABRERA

neighborhood dressed in costumes of ghouls and other "creatures of the dark", knocking on doors to ask for sweets and giveaways; it's really a gift-giving ritual with a bizarre spirit.

It helps that the pervasive influence of the Hollywood horror film and the other popular genres of the Hollywood dream machine have filled Halloween with stock characters readily identifiable by Hollywood-crazy Filipinos. In fact, in a recent trick-or-treat at Serendra in Bonifacio Global City in Taguig, Rizal, rich kids went around garbed in the costumes of characters from horror and Walt Disney movies. The revelry has become a national passion with an intergenerational connection.

Never mind that Halloween has practically no connection to Philippine religious culture or for that matter, to the Roman Catholic credo about the communion of saints (All Saints Day) and the need for prayers for the souls in Purgatory (All Souls Day), particularly the souls of loved ones, so as to hasten their passage to

heaven where they can finally join the other saints in the bliss of the beatific vision. For Filipino kids, being pushed into wearing Halloween costumes by their doting parents is another instance of cultural miseducation, like being made to read or watch *Snow White* and other western fairy tales appropriated in tinsel fashion by Walt Disney.

If anything, Halloween has become a boon for retail, which has come up with marketing gimmicks to fuel sales in the last quarter of the year. Not to be left behind, the Philippine media compete for retail advertising in order to cash in on the revelry. Too engrossed in their rivalry, TV networks try to outcrass one another; substance and fact are sacrificed for phantoms and fallacies.

Perhaps what's really shocking about Halloween journalism is its apparent rejection of the secular and liberal roots of the news media. These same roots have made any religious belief, practice, institution or church anathema for accurate and objective reporting. Complex theological tenets are abridged by the reductionist news media into easy sound bites that are neither here nor there. In the end, religion is made to look inane, backward, and foolish.

But it appears that the positivist, liberal press has a "spiritual dimension." It may not believe in the hoary and unscientific orthodoxies of the 2,000-year-old Catholic Church, but it believes in vampires, ghouls, and zombies. It may ridicule death, evil and the Christian resurrection, but it canonizes poltergeists, *Dracula*, and *Casper the Friendly Ghost*.

The Marxist critic and lapsed Catholic Terry Eagleton scoffs at postmodernism's belated grappling with evil and death: "They learn it from watching horror movies." The liberal and critical press is in the same state of infantilism. It throws all caution to the winds when confronted with the cosmology and commerce of the Hollywood Halloween. ■

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